

# THE PRAXEOLOGICAL LEVEL OF SUPPORTING THE CONTINUITY OF EDUCATION DURING THE CHILD'S TRANSITION TO SCHOOL

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## ABSTRACT

**Aim.** The presented paper is aimed at finding out and comparing the opinions of teachers of pre-primary education and primary education on selected activities to support the continuity of education during the child's transition to school. With this aim, pedagogical research was carried out with teachers in Slovakia.

**Methods.** The method used was a questionnaire in which scale questions were used. We statistically evaluated the research findings using descriptive statistics methods.

**Results.** The conduct of the research and the analysis of the results has confirmed that there are statistically significant differences in the teachers' opinions on the selected activities to support the continuity of education towards both teachers and parents. We found statistically significant differences to the following answers: "use of elements from kindergarten in work with beginning schoolchildren/ from elementary school in the preparation of future schoolchildren" and "informal contacts, alternative methods of communication between teachers". The results show the same teachers' perception of the activities: "use of elements from kindergarten in work with beginning schoolchildren/ from elementary school in the preparation of future schoolchildren" and "informal contacts, alternative methods of communication between teachers". The continuity of knowledge, experience and skills creates a basis for optimal child transition from kindergarten to primary school.

**Conclusion.** Our research activity investigated the attitudes of kindergarten and primary school teachers towards various support mechanisms designed to ensure a smooth transition for children entering primary education. The findings revealed a divergence

of opinion on this topic between the two groups—kindergarten teachers and primary school teachers.

**Keywords:** continuity, transition to school, kindergarten teacher, primary school teacher, support

## INTRODUCTION

The issue of the child's transition from kindergarten and family to primary school is the subject of the scientific research interest of experts from several perspectives. In the international context, the factors of a child's successful transition to primary school are investigated in the field (Besi & Sakellariou, 2019), but also the related barriers and problems (Broström, 2003; Brzezińska et al., 2012; Kinkead-Clark, 2015; Yeboah, 2002). The focus is on the timing of the transition period (Dockett & Perry, 2014; Lago, 2014), which begins when the child is enrolled in the 1st grade and ends with the perception of the well-being and the adaptation in the new environment. The debated issue is therefore the possibilities of effective support towards children (Binstadt, 2010; Dockett et al., 2011; Garcia-Urbina, 2020), parents (Giallo et al., 2010) and teachers (Fabian, 2012). The period of the child's transition to primary school also affects their surroundings in the family and school environment. In the literature, we see a lot of findings from teachers' perspectives (O'Kane & Hayes, 2006; Sollars & Mifsud, 2016), parents' opinions (Perry & Dockett, 2003; Samara & Ioannidi, 2018) as well as the perspective of future or beginning pupils (Pupala & Branická, 2002; Salmi & Kumpulainen, 2019).

The issue of educational transitions is gaining progressive importance at the pedagogical level. It is the child's experiences with the transition to a higher level of education that are the critical factors in the development of his/her personality and academic success. The negative perception of the given period can be conditioned by several difficulties and the pupil's results at school.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The continuity of every experience during the child's transition to primary school includes continuity between kindergarten and primary school, between family and school. Minimising the contrasts between the conditions in the given environments would enable a better assurance of continuity and an increase in the self-confidence of future, beginning pupils. It is also important to respect the individual characteristics of the child and the family, which conditions the provision of an inclusive approach with regard to cultural, social and personality differences (Millar, 2011; Sanagavarapu, 2010).

The continuity between the individual levels of education brings a logical sequence to the education process, enables predictability and connectivity. During the transition of the child to school, his needs and characteristics become more complex, the ways of behaving and carrying out activities acquired so far are introduced into new situations. At the same time, a new level of personality development occurs in the child from the point of view of the cognitive, psychomotor and social-emotional aspects. It is therefore particularly important to create a connection as a gradual bond between the preschool and school status of the pupil. From the point of view of work in kindergarten and primary school, continuity has a complex structure, since, according to Natalia Pavlovna Sazonova (2010), it concerns several components of education:

- continuity between goals and content;
- continuity between activities in preschool and school environments;
- continuity in the pedagogical requirements of the upbringing and education of future and beginning schoolchildren;
- continuity in the activities of teachers of pre-primary and primary education;
- continuity in the activities of experts (psychologists, special educators, speech therapists);
- continuity in work with parents of children, or pupils.

The concept of continuity is often part of research related to a child's transitions between individual levels of education. Applying a simple understanding as "something that continues" is not enough. This is because a continuing phenomenon can have a different meaning for children during the transition from one educational environment to another. Any new knowledge or experience is based on the previous state and modifies the future state. Therefore, teachers should have information about the passing characteristics and level of development of the child, so that they can further adequately shape his personality and adapt the learning process (Wilder & Lillvist, 2018).

The preschool education should build a solid academic foundation for children before entering the 1st year of primary school. It is important that the acquired knowledge and skills are maintained and developed even after starting school.

Sharing methods between kindergarten and primary school is crucial for children's smooth transition into the school environment and support for their academic success. The research results (Arnold et al., 2007) confirms the positive impact of mutual cooperation between teachers of different levels of education. Teachers exchange experiences with different methods and best practices, thus ensuring the continuity of the educational process.

According to Zoi Apostolou and Nektarios Stellakis (2020), communication and cooperation between kindergarten and primary school teachers is crucial for children's successful transition to school. The cooperation of both types

of schools enables a smooth follow-up to acquired knowledge and skills, which reduces children's stress and anxiety when starting school.

Many studies point to the importance of early intervention for children's successful transition to school. Implementation of transition facilitation programmes leads to better learning outcomes (Schulzing et al., 2005), and overall better behaviour (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008).

The period between the ages of 5 and 6 is particularly important, when children's attitudes towards school are formed. Therefore, it is appropriate that activities to facilitate the transition already take place at this age, at which kindergarten and primary school teachers and parents should work together (Packer et al., 2021).

Experts draw attention to the differences between the environment of kindergarten and primary school. Preschoolers learn in a stimulating environment that encourages active play, while the classroom environment is more formal (Rajiah, 2017). A Finnish study by Annarilla Ahtola et al. (2011) emphasises the need to coordinate the goals and content of education at both levels and to support mutual communication between teachers. This is crucial for a successful start to school.

When entering primary school, a child passes an important life milestone. This transitional period is characterised by the connection of the acquired experiences from pre-primary education with the new requirements and environment of the primary school. In other words, the child's learning during this period builds on what he has already experienced and knows from kindergarten. On this basis, he continues to develop and expand his knowledge and skills. The transition to school is thus characterised as a dynamic model of continuity on the one hand and changes on the other (Ballam et al., 2017). From a close-up point of view, we perceive the transition as the acquisition and expansion of the child's experiences in a mutual context and activity continuity. Therefore, the mutual continuity of content and activities in pre-primary and primary education is important. This allows children a smooth transition and makes it easier for them to adapt to a new environment.

In addition to theoretical approaches, in the issue of a child's transition to school, the possibilities of its application in pedagogical practice are emphasised. Stephen Kemmis et al. (2014) state the condition of the subsequent content of education and mutual understanding between the focus of individual levels of schools. Transitional procedures are also oriented towards physical-temporal-spatial conditions that enable continuity at the level of premises and educational environment. From the point of view of practice, the relations between the interested parties are especially clarified as a social aspect of the child's transition to school. Thinking about the last approach points to the practical concretisation of the subsequent content of the preparation of future pupils and the beginning of school education, the optimisation of educational conditions and continuous interaction between children, families and the environment.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

Summarised theoretical starting points of domestic and foreign provenance formed the basis for carrying out the research activity. We were interested in how pre-primary and primary education teachers perceive individual activities to support the continuity of education. Creating mutual understanding and a unified view of the continuity of education is one of the important aspects of a child's successful transition to primary school (Bowes et al., 2009).

The main goal of our research is to determine the relationship between the pre-school teachers' opinions and primary school teachers' opinions on selected aspects of the continuity of pre-primary and primary education.

We established a hypothesis for the research: *H1*: We assume a statistically significant difference in the opinions of teachers of kindergartens and the first level of primary schools on the implemented activities of support for the continuity of education towards teachers.

The research sample consisted of 165 kindergarten teachers and 182 primary school teachers. The research sample consisted only of women. Given the core set, the potential representation of men in the sample would not be comparable. The method used was a questionnaire in which scale questions were used.

The introductory part of the questionnaire included demographic items, the evaluation of which illustrates the research sample from the point of view of the investigated aspects: place of employment (Table 1), duration of teaching experience (Table 2), career level of the teacher (Table 3).

**Table 1**

*Distribution of the Research Sample According to the Place of Employment*

| The place of employment | Kindergarten teachers |        | Primary school teachers |        |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|--------|-------------------------|--------|
| West Slovakia           | 77                    | 46,46% | 72                      | 39,86% |
| Central Slovakia        | 56                    | 33,72% | 61                      | 33,5%  |
| East Slovakia           | 32                    | 19,27  | 49                      | 26,91% |
|                         | 165                   | 100%   | 182                     | 100%   |

Source. Own research.

**Table 2**

*Distribution of the Research Sample According to the Duration of Teaching Experience of Teachers*

| Duration of pedagogical practice | Kindergarten teachers |        | Primary school teachers |        |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|--------|-------------------------|--------|
| to 5 years                       | 37                    | 22,28% | 44                      | 24,17% |
| 5–10 years                       | 27                    | 16,26% | 36                      | 19,78% |
| 10–15 years                      | 30                    | 18,07% | 30                      | 16,48% |

| Duration of pedagogical practice | Kindergarten teachers |        | Primary school teachers |        |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|--------|-------------------------|--------|
| 15–20 years                      | 36                    | 21.68% | 32                      | 17.58% |
| more than 20 years               | 35                    | 21.21% | 40                      | 21%    |
|                                  | 165                   | 100%   | 182                     | 100%   |

*Source.* Own research.

In the demographic items of the questionnaire, we were also interested in the length of teaching experience of the teachers of both groups. The individual options represented the scope of practice length determined by us. The obtained data point to a comparable number of teachers in individual ranges with respect to the teacher subcategory. At the same time, we see a comparable representation of all ranges of length of teaching practice in individual subcategories separately.

**Table 3**

*Distribution of the Research Sample According to the Career Level*

| The career level                               | Kindergarten teachers |        | Primary school teachers |        |
|--|-----------------------|--------|-------------------------|--------|
| Beginning teaching staff                       | 23                    | 13.85% | 30                      | 16.48% |
| Independent teaching staff                     | 41                    | 24.69% | 43                      | 23.62% |
| Pedagogical employee with first certification  | 54                    | 32.53% | 49                      | 26.92% |
| Pedagogical employee with second certification | 47                    | 28.48% | 60                      | 32.96% |
|  | 165                   | 100%   | 182                     | 100%   |

*Source.* Own research.

Among the teachers in the research sample were teachers with different career stages within both teacher subcategories. In the sample of pre-primary teachers, there were the most pedagogical employees with the first certification, in the sample of primary school teachers, pedagogical employees with the second certification dominated.

In accordance with the established objectives of the research activity, we paid attention to finding out teachers' opinions on selected options for supporting the continuity of pre-primary and primary education: orientation meetings/visits for parents before the start of school attendance; written materials for parents with the necessary information (e.g. informational posters, brochures on the preparation of schoolchildren in the family, the period of transition to school and subsequent adaptation, school requirements, possibilities of cooperation with the school, etc.); involving parents in activities in kindergarten and primary school, or joint activities (e.g. creative workshops, open day); meetings of kindergarten and primary school teachers regarding the continuity of educational content (especially at the end of pre-primary education and at the beginning of primary education); using elements from kindergarten in working with beginning pupils/from elementary school in preparing future pupils; sharing the portfolio of future pupils with the teacher of the 1st year of elementary

school; informal contacts, alternative ways of communication between kindergarten and primary school teachers; mutual conversations between parents of future and starting pupils (parent clubs, group meetings).

In the analysis of the research data, we tested the statistical significance of the differences between the opinions of kindergarten teachers and primary school teachers. After identifying the differences, we were interested in specific features—questions in which there are statistically significant differences between both groups of teachers. We tested the statistical significance of the differences using selected statistical-mathematical methods (Markechová et al. 2011).

## DATA ANALYSIS

In our study, we focused on finding out and comparing teachers' attitudes towards different forms of support for the continuity of education during the transition of children from kindergarten to primary school. Specifically, we asked what differences of opinion exist between kindergarten and elementary school teachers in this area.

In our case, we used the Shapir-Wilk test (Markechová, et al. 2011) to test the hypothesis of a normal distribution of the base set. We will test the hypothesis: the random sample comes from a normal distribution against the alternative hypothesis: the random sample does not come from a normal distribution.

In the Table 4, we present the values of the test statistic W of the Shapiro-Wilk test and the value of the probability p within the observed characteristic in individual groups.

**Table 4**  
*The Results of Shapir-Wilk Test*

| Group                      | W    | p     |
|----------------------------|------|-------|
| preprimary school teachers | 0,95 | 0,00* |
| primary school teachers    | 0,96 | 0,00* |

*Note.* \*statistically significant value.

*Source.* Own research.

Given the detected probability values, we can test the hypothesis of a normal distribution of values to reject in all cases, i.e. j. none of the files tested had a normal distribution. to verify the validity of the research assumptions, they used non-parametric statistical methods, the Wilcoxon two-sample non-parametric test.

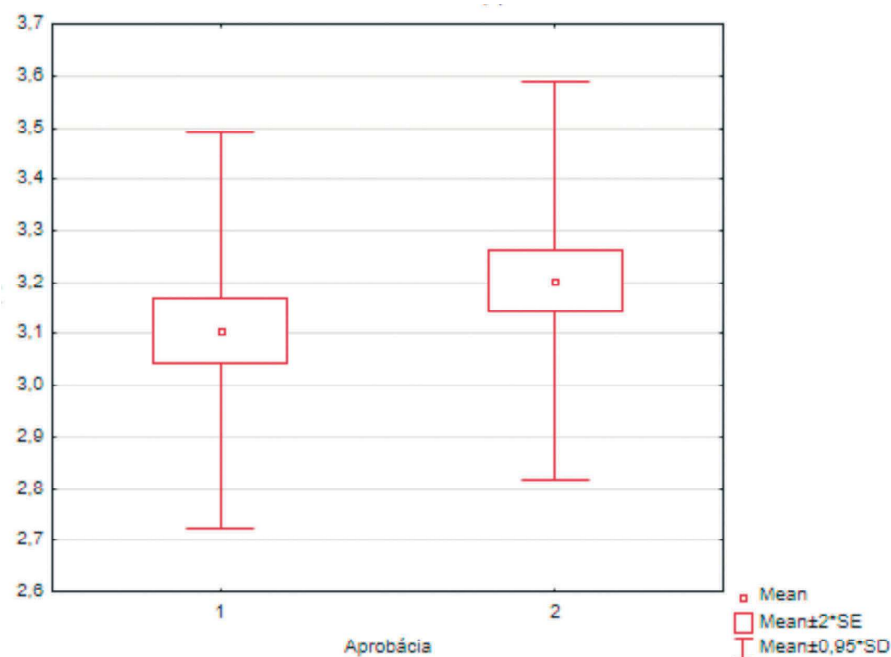
After entering the input data, we received the following results: the value of the test criterion Z of the Wilcoxon two-sample test ( $Z = -2.17$ ) and the probability value p ( $p = 0.03$ ). Due to the small number of the calculated p value ( $p = 0.05$ ), we can reject the tested hypothesis. The differences between groups of teachers in the answers



in the area of “activities to support the continuity of education towards teachers” are statistically significant. We show the comparison in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*The Average Values of the Answers to the Question “Activities towards Teachers to Support the Continuity of Education and Smooth Transition of the Child to School” in Both Groups of Teachers*



Source. Own research.

The graphically displayed results of the statistical analysis illustrate a statistically significant difference in the opinions of kindergarten teachers and primary school teachers in the selected aspect (observed characteristic). Our findings relate to the different opinions of teachers on actions towards teachers to support the continuity of education and the smooth transition of the child to school. The average value of kindergarten teachers' answers in the range of the set scale was 3.1, which defines the neutral choice “I don't know” (3). The teachers of this group expressed, on average, neutral opinions about the possibilities of supporting the continuity of education. The average value of the answers of the teachers of the first grade of elementary schools was at the level of 3.2.

According to the obtained results, we further determined the frequency of responses on the scale. Below we present the frequency table of the responses of the respondents of both groups (Table 5).



**Table 5**

*The Frequency of the Responses of the Kindergarten Teachers and Primary School Teachers*

| The level of responses to various | Kindergarten teachers | Primary school teachers |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 (certainly not)                 | 0                     | 0                       |
| 2 (not)                           | 3                     | 1                       |
| 3 (don't know)                    | 119                   | 116                     |
| 4 (yes)                           | 43                    | 65                      |
| 5 (certainly yes)                 | 0                     | 0                       |

*Source.* Own research.

On the basis of statistical analysis, we declare statistically significant differences in the opinions of kindergarten teachers and first-grade primary school teachers regarding activities directed at teachers to support the continuity of education and the child's smooth transition to school. So we were interested in which specific characteristic—specific question—the differences between both groups of teachers are statistically significant.

To ensure reliability, we performed Cronbach's alpha test, the results of which show that in the group of primary school teachers it is acceptable ( $\alpha=0.78$ ), or good consistency in the group of kindergarten teachers ( $\alpha=0.82$ ).

We calculated the value of the test statistic  $Z$  and the value of the probability  $p$  for the individual answers of the respondents of both groups in the area of "activities towards teachers to support the continuity of education and the smooth transition of the child to school". Analogously, we evaluated the data using the  $p$ -value, we consider selected observed differences to be statistically significant. The results of the statistical analysis are presented in Table 6. In the table, we also present the standard deviation within the effect size. Calculated values are based on responses of kindergarten teachers and primary school teachers.

**Table 6**

*The Results of Statistical Analysis — Continuity Support Activities towards the Teachers*

| The activities for the teachers to support the continuity of education and the child's smooth transition to school   | $Z=$ | $p=$  | $d=$ |
|--|------|-------|------|
| The meetings of kindergarten and primary school teachers on the continuity of the content of education (especially at the end of pre-primary education and at the beginning of primary education). | 1,70 | 0,09  | 0,09 |
| The using elements from kindergarten education in working with beginning pupils/from primary school in the preparation of future pupils.   | 7,90 | 0,00* | 0,42 |
| Sharing the portfolio of future pupils with the teacher of the 1st year of primary school.   | 1,23 | 0,22  | 0,06 |

| <b>The activities for the teachers to support the continuity of education and the child's smooth transition to school</b> | <b>Z=</b> | <b>p=</b> | <b>d=</b> |
|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| The informal contacts, some alternative ways of the communication between kindergarten and primary school teachers.       | -6,94     | 0,00*     | -0,37     |

*Note.* \*statistically significant value; d= Cohen 's D test.

*Source.* Own research.

In the table, we can see statistical differences in the concrete answers of the teachers of both groups who expressed their opinions on the implementation of selected activities to support the continuity and smooth transition of the child to school. We found a statistically significant difference in the answer “use of elements from kindergarten in work with beginning schoolchildren/ from elementary school in the preparation of future schoolchildren”, i.e. j. the opinions of kindergarten teachers and primary school teachers were statistically different in this option. We can interpret this finding as differences in the implementation of elements of continuity in preparing a child for school, or in initial teaching. Kindergarten teachers answered on average at the level of 4.5, which clearly confirms the implementation of the education of future pupils in the context of entering the 1st year of primary school. The teachers of the first grade of primary schools gave opinions with an average value of 3.7, which represents a dominant representation of neutral and agreeing opinions of teachers. Likewise, we found statistically significant differences in the responses of teachers of individual groups in the option “informal contacts, alternative methods of communication between kindergarten and primary school teachers”. The stated finding approximates the discrepancy in the opinions of the compared groups with regard to the subcategory of teachers. From the point of view of the scope of the established scale, kindergarten teachers answered with an average value of 3.5, which defines ambiguous opinions about the implementation of informal contacts between teachers. On the contrary, primary school teachers expressed opinions confirming the representation of informal contacts and alternative methods of communication in pedagogical practice (average value of answers = 4.2).

In the examination of the selected aspect of the continuity of education, we also identified specific possibilities of its support, on which the teachers of both groups expressed the same opinions. There were no statistically significant differences between kindergarten teachers and first-grade teachers in the answers “meetings of kindergarten and elementary school teachers on the continuity of educational content (especially at the end of pre-primary education and at the beginning of primary education)” and “sharing the portfolio of future schoolchildren with the teacher of the 1st year of elementary school” elementary schools. The results of the statistical analysis show that teachers have the same perception of the implementation of the given activities aimed at ensuring the continuity of education and the smooth transition of the child to school. The average values of the answers of both groups, in both options, indicate neutral opinions of the teachers. Teachers of pre-primary education answered on average at the level of 3.1 and teachers of primary education at the level of 2.9. We found lower average

values for the opinions about sharing the children's portfolio, which were on average at the level of 2.8 in the first group of teachers and 2.6 in the second group.

Based on the calculated values of Cohen's D test, we see that the effect size in the individual items is different. In the first and third items, we identified a very small effect. On the contrary, the value for the second item indicates a medium effect. A small effect, but in the opposite direction, follows from the calculated value for the fourth item.

## DISCUSSION

Based on the statistical processing of the differences in responses to the activities of supporting the continuity of education and the smooth transition of the child to school towards teachers, there were statistically significant differences between kindergarten teachers and primary school teachers. A partial evaluation of teachers' opinions on the implementation of selected activities points to differences and the same attitudes of teachers.

The teachers of both groups responded comparably within the individual levels of the scale, except for the highest level, to holding meetings of teachers of kindergartens and the first level of elementary schools. In the answers of the teachers, we also found negative answers, which indicate the current absence of practical experience with the mentioned possibility of activity to support the continuity of education during the child's transition to primary school. The teachers of both groups dominantly confirmed that they have experience of conducting mutual teacher meetings in kindergarten or elementary school. According to Tess Boyle et al. (2018) discourses on children's transition to school focus on partnerships and relationships between different stakeholders including children, families, communities, teachers, professionals. In addition, attention is also focused on practical activities connected with the support of the child's transition from kindergarten to primary school, which are planned and implemented in connection with each other.

We didn't find any statistically significant differences even regarding the possibility of sharing the portfolio of future pupils with the teacher of the 1st year of elementary school. In this case, the analysis of the answers shows dominantly neutral and negative opinions of the teachers of both compared groups. This finding indicates that the possibility of support is not specified in pedagogical practice and teachers don't have direct experience with it. However, in the research activity of Marina Besi and Maria Sakellariou (2019), teachers referred to the portfolio as a suitable option enabling continuity of experiences and the level of individual development of the child, its contribution during the enrolment of the child in school, in assessing school readiness and planning an individual approach in primary education.

In the analysis of the answers to the possibility of using elements from kindergarten in work with beginning pupils/ from elementary school in the preparation of future pupils, we found statistically significant differences between the opinions of teachers of individual groups. This finding clearly emphasises the preparation of future pupils in accordance with the characteristics of school education, which creates adequate prerequisites for managing the child's entry into the 1st year of elementary school. Peter Moss (2012) emphasises that the continuity of education includes several elements that must be considered in an effort to make it practical during the child's transition to school. The connection of both educational environments refers to the learning content, physical environment, social interactions, the characteristics of which should correspond to mutual connections.

The subject of the analysis were also teachers' responses to the establishment of informal contacts and alternative ways of cooperation as a way of supporting the continuity of education towards teachers. The results of the statistical evaluation showed statistically significant differences between the compared groups of teachers in the given option. Based on the above analysis, we can conclude that primary education teachers have experience with different methods of communication between teachers in favour of supporting the continuity of education and successfully managing the child's transition to primary school. At the same time, according to our findings, the mentioned method is not practically widespread among kindergarten teachers. Several authors (Alatalo et al., 2017; O'Kane, 2016) advise the lack of mutual cooperation between teachers of pre-primary and primary education to barriers to the continuity of education. The call is mainly aimed at finding and testing different communication options of educational institutions, which would create space for sharing experiences, mutual enrichment of teachers, professional development in favour of supporting the child's smooth transition to school.

## CONCLUSION

In the study, we examined teachers' attitudes towards various forms of support for the continuity of education when children enter primary school. We found that there are different opinions on this issue among kindergarten and primary school teachers. We found statistically significant differences in the opinions of kindergarten teachers and primary school to the following answers: "use of elements from kindergarten in work with beginning schoolchildren/ from elementary school in the preparation of future schoolchildren" and "informal contacts, alternative methods of communication between kindergarten and primary school teachers". The results of the statistical analysis show that teachers have the same perception of the implementation of the activities: "use of elements from kindergarten in work with beginning schoolchildren/ from elementary school

in the preparation of future schoolchildren” and “informal contacts, alternative methods of communication between kindergarten and primary school teachers”. At the same time, it is important to note that the joint efforts of children, parents, teachers, school and community are important in this period. If the child manages it successfully, it is easier for him to adapt to the school environment, he enjoys learning and builds healthy social relationships with peers and adults. Therefore, it is crucial to support the all-round development of the child already in preschool age, so that he is well prepared for school. Effective support will help the child integrate smoothly into teaching and thus reduce the risk of stress and school refusal.

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