

# Exploring the view of children, parents and professionals during the transition from preschool to primary school: tools used in the START project (Italian case study)

## Introduction

In the Italian context, the issues of educational continuity and transition between Early Childhood Education (ECE) and Compulsory School Education (CSE) started to be discussed, both at the institutional and pedagogical levels, in the 60s. Such discussion followed the push for democratization of the Italian public school system, that characterized the social and political context of those years. It was only at the beginning of the 1990s – when two laws were enacted, Law 148/1990 and Ministerial Decree 16-11-1992 – that such pedagogic and institutional debate was translated, through various experimentations at the school level. These laws not only acknowledged the equal status of the educational activities carried out in each type of school (pre-primary, primary and junior high), but also outlined the pedagogical practices to be carried out at institutional and inter-institutional level for the implementation of educational continuity (Calidoni & Calidoni, 1995). Within this framework, ECE and CSE institutions preserve their own specific pedagogical identity but, at the same time, they are connected by mutual obligations which revolve around the promotion of children's full development as persons and citizens.

Collegial meetings among ECE and CSE teachers play a crucial role in smoothing children's transition between different levels of the education system. In the framework of inter-institutional collaboration, projects aimed at promoting educational continuity should be jointly planned and carried out by ECE and CSE teachers. Specifically, such projects should focus on the exchange of documentation regarding children's experiences in ECE institutions, the exchange of information with children's parents, and the realization of joint initiatives aimed at introducing children to new school environments. Over the years, such projects have contributed innovative practices to improve children's transitions. An example is the "*memory suitcase*" (Canevaro et al., 1996). By conceiving transition as a journey, the "*memory suitcase*" collects pictures, drawings and other artefacts that recall children's most significant experiences within *scuola dell'infanzia*. We consider this form of documentation to be particularly interesting because it values the richness of children's learning experiences as a whole, to encompass many symbolic means through which learning could be described or recalled by each child.

Discussing documentation within collegial meetings involving both ECE and CSE teachers is not only limited to the exchange of information about the personal history of each child, it also extends to

confrontations on pedagogical approaches adopted within each setting. In this sense the discussion of documentation aims at promoting a common understanding of educational work between ECE and CSE teachers. It is on the basis of this common understanding that continuity initiatives should be jointly planned and carried out with the aim of facilitating children's transition.

These initiatives may comprise school visits in which newcomers are welcomed by older children, exchanging messages and other materials with primary school classes, working on common projects involving children in *scuola dell'infanzia* and *scuola primaria*. The involvement of children's parents is also considered to be essential in supporting the process of transition: for this reason, meetings with parents are specifically organized with the purpose of providing information on the new school environment but also to exchange information about each child. Finally, within these policy documents (Law 148/1990 and Ministerial Decree 16-11-1992), the elaboration of continuing professional development paths involving ECE and CSE teachers are also encouraged through collaboration with training and research agencies at local level.

Through the years, the experimentations that were consolidated in the 1990s progressively became routine practices adopted on an annual basis by most of the Italian schools. The practices that are most commonly implemented in transition projects carried out in Italian preschool and primary school are described in the sheets reported in Annex 4.

Such transformation from experimentation to routine practices has led however to the bureaucratization of educational continuity, where transition projects are carried out by pre- and primary school teachers every year in the same way. In this context, the aim of START research has been two-fold: first, we intended to re-conceptualize the educational continuity practices, starting from those carried out in each school involved in the study; second, to transform and experiment new practices that would better address teachers', children's and families' needs.

**In this toolkit we will present:**

- 1. the tools used to activate teachers' reflexivity, in order to re-conceptualize the pedagogical vision of educational continuity;**
- 2. the tools used to center the experimentation on the voice to children and families;**
- 3. information sheets describing briefly the most common activities developed in educational continuity projects in the Italian context.**

## 1. Tools to activate teachers' reflexivity

Facilitating teachers' reflection around educational continuity and transitions is essential to foster a pedagogical environment that responds to children's and families' needs, and to reframe consolidated practices that risk being implemented mechanically.

### 1.1 The questionnaire

The first tool that we have used to solicit teachers' thinking is a questionnaire, that has been distributed to both ECE and CSE teachers in the schools of Vignola, where the Italian research team has carried out the case study. The questionnaire was given to each teacher individually, following their informed written consent, and contained open ended questions to be answered in written form.

The question directed to ECE teachers is:

1. The transition from ECE to CSE is a time when children experience great changes, both on a relational level and in terms of learning. Based on your experience, what do you think are the competence acquired by children in the last year of kindergarten that could support them in facing this step in the best possible way?

The question directed to CSE teacher is:

2. In dealing with the transition from ECE to CSE, some children may have difficulty in settling in into the new educational context, to conform to the new rules and to new demands from teachers. Based on your experience, what do you think are the greatest difficulties that children encounter in this transition? And what do you think are the necessary pre-requisites so that children can face this step in the best possible way?

The questionnaire was administered to teachers of both levels of schools at the very beginning of the research and served to facilitate teachers' understanding of the general objectives of the study, and to prepare the ground for more in-depth considerations and thoughts on educational continuity.

## *1.2 Observations*

After administering the questionnaire, the research team has conducted classroom observations in ECE and CSE schools in Vignola. The research team has used an observation schedule that would let emerge teachers' actions, children's initiatives, space and time, and would also give the possibility to the researcher to note some reflection. A prototype of such observation schedule is reported below.

GRID TO BE USED AS A TOOL FOR EXCHANGING REFLECTIONS ON OBSERVED ACTIVITIES IN PRESCHOOL

Group/Class .....

Number of children..... (Children with special needs, if present:.....)

OBSERVED SITUATIONS	Organisation of space	Time-frame (max 1h)	Materials used by the children	What is the teacher doing? (verbal and non-verbal communication)	What are children doing? (interaction with peers, adults and the surrounding environment)	PERSONAL REFLECTIONS (to be completed straight afterward the observation took place) <i>What aspects did impress you the most?</i>
<i>1- Welcoming / Morning Snack-time</i>						
<i>2- Circle time</i>						
<i>3- Structured activity</i>						
<i>4- Free play or free-choice activities organised by children</i>						
<i>5- Routines (specify)</i>						
<i>6- Lunch</i>						

At the end of the observation, please exchange ideas with your colleague in order to clarify:

- What were the aims of the observed activities?
- What were the reasons laying behind the methodological choices?
- What were, in her/his opinion, the strength and weaknesses connected with implementation?

### *1.3 Focus groups*

A further tool that we have deployed for teachers' reflexivity on existing continuity practices is represented by focus groups. The focus groups with school professionals were used to analyse the needs characterising the school context studied, which also represented the first stage of the research. Focus groups with teachers have been then enriched with information provided by parents and children, in relation to their perception of continuity and transition. The focus groups were based on semi-structured, open-ended questions, to facilitate the discussion and to highlight similarities and difference in the perception of continuity. The ultimate purpose of the focus group was to explore the meaning and the lived experiences around educational continuity.

The semi-structured questions were organized around three major themes: (1) critical issues, (2) good practices, (3) support offered by the project. Below we offer some example of the questions asked during the focus groups with teachers:

1. What do you think are the main difficulties that children face in their transition from childhood to primary education? (observations related to concrete experiences from primary school teachers, feedback from parents reported to ECEC professionals, if younger siblings are present);
2. How do you try to facilitate this transition to childhood and primary education? Are there any particular devices that are adopted in the case of children with special educational needs? What positive feedback did you have regarding the effectiveness of these strategies? (story of a concrete episode);
3. What are the major difficulties that you think a teacher has to face in moving from ECEC to CSE and which support could be useful? And at the same time, what kind of support would ECEC professionals receive, compared to their primary school colleagues?

The idea of the focus group is then to promote a dialogical exchange between the participants, generating a shared reflection grounded in the experiences of each teacher. Such shared reflection

represents the foundation of a renewed process of educational continuity where all actors are involved in the transition from ECEC services to CSE, while prioritizing children's needs.

In one of the focus groups, Teacher 1 working in preschool elaborates an argument about some of the issues that parents reported to her in the transition of their children to primary school:

“I can tell you that some parents came back to speak to us ECEC educators precisely about this aspect: their children go willingly to school, but they miss an authentic relationship. They miss, for example, the possibility of hugging their teacher, and then going back to their tasks. You see this is natural for us. I think that for you in primary school to have such relationships is hard. I'm sure a lot depends on the academic requirements of primary school, because if children are not performing well the school loses all funding and cannot continue the projects [...].”

(Preschool Teacher 1)

In the above passage, Preschool Teacher 1 describe a crucial issue in transition from ECEC to CSE: the different ways in which teachers build their relationships with children. Passing from a nurturing environment, whereby relationships are more intimate and so it is the display of emotions, to a more detached type of relationship can cause distress in children. Importantly, she recognizes a systemic factor influencing CSE teachers' attitudes towards children: neoliberal reforms in education, emphasizing predetermined academic outcomes, standardised testing (i.e.: national INVALSI tests) and compliance. Such factors play a pervasive influence on teachers, who seem to not prioritize relationships over predetermined academic outcomes.

Primary School Teacher 6 reflects on two important aspects of the educational continuity: children's autonomy and the structuring of the day:

“I think that in ECEC services children are more free, and in primary school they have to get to the point where they are sitting down, quietly; then your methodology has to include an alternation of time, moments, and so on, this is clear; but the question is <<do you want the child to be autonomous while at ECEC services or at the beginning of the primary school?>> And here the management of time and space is important. Kids need to learn how to manage themselves at a time of non-structured activities and this is becoming more and more difficult because nowadays children are more curious [...].”

(Primary School Teacher 6)

Teacher 6 highlights the substantial difference between ECEC and CSE as the latter being more organized in terms of spaces and time, and where learning happens more as through listening to an adult instead of through a free inquiry process. She also believes that is important that ECEC and CSE teachers agree on a shared objective around children's autonomy and when and in which context they should be expected to achieve it.

The following section presents the tools used to centre the voices of children and their families in their experience of transition from ECEC to CSE.

## 2. Tools used to center the voice to children

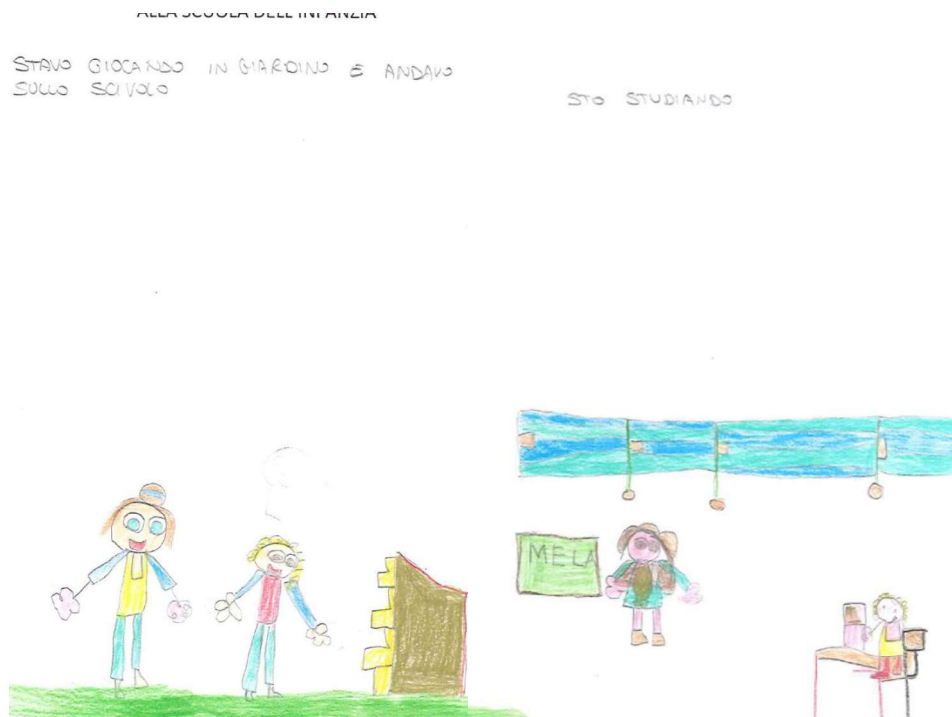
### 2.1 Drawings

In order to research how children themselves experience the transition from ECEC services to CSE, we have used tools that valued their nuanced perspectives, as well as those of their parents. Drawing was one of such tools. The drawing process was facilitated in a context in which children would have not felt judged by the primary school teachers, nor the researchers. Additionally, it followed a specific strategy to ensure children's spontaneity during the process. During an agreed visit to children who recently transited to primary schools, ECEC educators have asked them to prepare a gift consisting of a drawing about their experience in the new school settings and how it differs from the preschool. In this section we present some of the drawings we deemed as more significant.

Left: boy in ECEC classroom setting while colouring. Right: same boy in primary setting, sitting on his desk, studying the different seasons



Left: child in ECEC setting, playing in the garden. Right: same child in primary setting, sitting on his desk listening to the teacher



The analysis of the graphic representations produced by the children in first grade highlights that the elements of discontinuity with ECEC settings are predominant compared to those of continuity (which are highlighted only in rare cases). In particular, as can be seen from the images above, the main elements of discontinuity that characterize the transition between the two educational contexts refer to:

- learning environment: multiplicity of environments represented at the kindergarten (classroom, garden,) versus class as the core of the teaching activities (the gym and the external environment are rarely illustrated in primary school settings);
- activities: while activities mainly represented by children in kindergarten refer to free play with classmates, to creative activities and routines such as lunch and afternoon rest, the activities represented by children in primary school refer to situations such as listening to the teacher and copying what is written on the board (only rarely are moments of play during the recreation or the time of the table);

- body and agency: if the body is designed in its infancy, referring to a full involvement of children in the learning situations represented (also through the body), at primary school the body tends to be represented mostly in partial way and with a predominantly passive role (children sitting behind a desk, only the teacher is represented in full);
- relationships between children: although in both cases the children are mostly represented together with their peers, peer interactions seem to be the focus of the situations illustrated in the childhood school while in the situations represented at primary school this aspect rarely appears (in most part of the cases the children are drawn frontally seated in separate counters).

## *2.2 Children's individual interviews*

From the analysis of the data collected through the conversations with the children of the last year of preschool (Annex 1) it was found that their expectations regarding primary school contained both elements recalling their experience in preschool (the possibility of becoming of friends, to play in moments of pause between one activity and another, to learn new things) and elements that anticipate change (Corsaro and Molinari, 2005), such as a different structuring of spaces (presence of benches and blackboards) and a greater formalization of learning (learning to read and write, numbers, doing homework).

'I think that [in primary school] there are so many desks, the blackboard, the IWB and I think I can learn to read and write in italics' (Giorgia, age 5)

'I think that [in primary school] I'll be doing well, I think I go out and play, I expect to learn how to do gymnastics and write' (Abraham, age 5)

'[In primary school] I think I find so many friends to tell secrets, I expect to learn a lot of words, numbers, and study and I want to study leaves to know how they become leaves'(Halit, age 5)

'[In primary school I think I find] many friends with whom I can play, and then also a nice park, and then also some nice things, and I think I learn to read and write' (Thomas, age 5)

At the same time, children were interviewed individually by preschool teachers about their achievements. Children's perceptions about what they have learned in preschool offered rich insights about their capabilities and coping strategies, feeding into the reflective process that involved both preschool and primary school teachers in the design of the pilot. In this sense, the image of children as competent and confident learners was put at the core of the experimentation. Discussing children's excerpts with teachers also gave them the opportunity to reflect upon the

diversity of children's interests, attitudes and learning strategies. This provided a very important starting point for experimentation, acknowledging that no 'one size fits all':

'[In preschool I have learnt to] play and also to draw which is beautiful. [My favourite activity is] to tell [made-up] stories and those that the teachers tell us. [The thing I am best at is] drawing. [When I do not cope with something] I feel like crying but then I try again' (Yassmin, age 5)

'[In preschool I have learnt] not to hurt the others [children], to listen and understand what my friends are saying. I learned to colour and drawing. I learned that when someone calls me I have to go, and also when the teachers call me I have to go. [My favourite activity is] gymnastic. [The thing I am best at is] doing gymnastic. [When I do not cope with something] I ask my friends how to do it.' (Francesco, age 5)

'[In preschool I have learnt to] to share toys and colours and to play with the others [children]. [My favourite activity is] writing and drawing. [The thing I am best at is] drawing. [When I do not cope with something] sometimes I get angry and then I try again.' (Gabiella, age 5)

'[In preschool I have learnt to] play with my friends, to go on the swing, I have learned to eat by myself and to colour. [My favourite activity is] building with blocks. [The thing I am best at is] carrying out the morning roll call and numbers. [When I do not cope with something] I try again.' (Godswill, age 5)

'[In preschool I have learnt] how to play with the castle, to draw and to look at books. [My favourite activity is] drawing. [The thing I am best at is] reading books. [When I do not cope with something] I try again.' (Marwa, age 5)

'[In preschool I have learnt to] to behave well, to work, to draw and to make effort. [My favourite activity is] colouring. [The thing I am best at is] drawing castles. [When I do not cope with something] I think I look for other things to draw and I draw those which I am better at' (Alessio, age 5)

### 3. Tools used to center the voice to parents

#### 3.1 Questionnaire for parents

One of the tools that has been used to engage parents and families in the discussion about transition of their children has been an open-ended questionnaire (Annex 2). Whereas children's drawings and individual interviews were carried out only in the preschool involved in the pilot, the questionnaire was administered to all parents of preschool children moving to primary school within the DD Vignola, having in mind the more long-term goal of scaling up the experimented transition practice beyond the duration of the project. The questionnaire was aimed at understanding parents' hopes and expectations – as well as perceived challenges – in their children transitions from preschool to primary schools and how these could be potentially overcome. The semi-structured questions included the following questions:

- In September your child will move on to primary school. What are your hopes and expectations for your child's education in the new school? And what are your worries, if any?
- What do you think it would be important to support your child in facing this transition?

The data collected through the questionnaires revealed that discontinuity assumptions – related to the different ways in which children's learning and socialization experiences are fostered and/or regulated across the two environments – are often at the origin of fears and concerns:

"[it worries me] Negative initial impact. A very rigid method of learning could lead to the "closure" of my son who already has a character who is shy in the group. "

"I expect a school where the children are always sitting at the desk and this worries me a lot because my son has problems with a condition of hyperactivity and oppositional disorder. [...] All schools of every grade and level should have at least some characteristics of kindergarten. The ability to play even if with different frequencies and times, to move, not to receive summary evaluations but only for competence".

"The biggest concern is to know that it does not resist so much sitting saw its liveliness"

"The greatest concern is that you need reassurance even emotional at school and that there is not much room for this in primary school."

"The emotional aspect of the transition to primary is what worries me most. To have new rules, to change the comrades, the environment, the teachers, I think the conditions are for those who are more sensitive and introverted. I fear my son gets scared and loses his enthusiasm for going to school."

If on the one hand the analyzed data show that the aspects of discontinuity linked to the different educational approaches and teaching methods used within the two contexts (preschool and primary school) are those that most affect the representations of children and their families during the transition, from the other they show that - in the expectations of the latter - the presence of a certain continuity in the relationship between adults (parents-teachers), between teachers and children, and within the class group (peer socialization) is seen as a potential resource to cope with these changes.

'I expect teachers to be attentive in teaching the expected subjects but also in showing to the children how to live together in a community such as the school, how to face difficult times, how to help one another among peers [...]. I hope my daughter will find a positive, collaborative and stimulating environment to grow as a student and as a person.'

'We would like that new teachers – beside transferring knowledge to the children – would induce interest in knowledge as a value for children's individual and community growth.'

'[I expect] Teachers to be aware of how important is school in the life path of a child. Respect for every child in their abilities, emotions. Not just an instructional teaching but more related to the person, something that now is not happening much.'

'[To support my daughter in the passage I think it would be important] So much communication and attention between teachers and parents.'

'I think it's important for all of us adults (teachers and parents) to understand, flexibility (in times, ways and strategies of teaching) enthusiasm, listening [...] The relationship between teachers and parents is very important for the transition because it's a big change from preschool to primary school.'

'I think our attitude as parents is important [...] Being present as parents ready to listen and support our children. Communication and mutual respect with teachers is essential.'

### *3.2 Parents presenting their children*

Conceived as a strength-based approach to facilitate children's transitions to CSE, parents were asked to present their children to primary school teachers. Such presentations happened before ECEC professionals would present the children to their colleagues in CSE. More importantly, the researcher presented this strategy to families as a multimodal tool: parents were given a variety of suggestions to introduce their children: video, letter of presentation or digital story presentation. In the Annex 3 we present some examples of the artefacts elaborated by parents. Such creative way

of introducing the children has been considered a powerful tool to facilitate children's transition to primary school settings by the teachers and parents themselves. Evidence of such positive reception of the strategy can be found in some of the parents' account, reported below:

"A very useful thing in my opinion was the presentation that we were asked to do for the teachers... Personally I preferred to make a video by giving to my son the 'responsibility' to show himself to the new teacher ... and it was amazing ... he surprised me too! I would have talked probably as a mom and that's it, but he also said the things that, let's say, are a bit more difficult to say regarding his personality ... So this thing, to bring a story, a video of the child to the new teachers in my opinion was fundamental: both for teachers and for the child himself. Because he had to take time, to think 'who I am', 'what I do' and above all 'what do I want to tell them about me?'. This in my opinion was fundamental for my son."

(Mother)

"For the first time the teachers asked us 'how is your daughter?' 'what can we know more than her beyond the fact that she is a 6 year-old girl who starts primary school?' My husband and I sat down one evening and actually for the first time we looked at each other and asked ourselves 'how is our daughter?' 'what are the right words to describe her?' And it was very nice because, yes, we talk so much about her but we never sat down to tell the positive and negative sides of her personality ... So we wrote a kind of a letter in which we also spoke, for example, of her sensitivity, that if you do not know her deeply you might not notice it ... Thanks to this interview I think we have been able to give useful and important information to teachers."

(Mother)

The above quotes speak to importance of the presentation strategy as an inclusive tool that allow teachers to understand the various aspects of a child's personality, avoiding one singular perspective of the child's attitude and behavior, which may be influenced by teacher's bias. Such tool help teacher to have a holistic perception of the child, offered by those who know her/his better: the parents. Simultaneously, it has demonstrated to be a powerful reflective tool for parents who had the opportunity of gather 'evidence' of their children's personality.

4. Information sheets describing briefly the most common activities developed in educational continuity projects in the Italian context

A) TRANSITION 0-3 SERVICES TO PRESCHOOL

A1	MEETINGS BETWEEN EDUCATORS & TEACHERS
	Early childhood educators and preschool teachers meet to discuss and organize the transition that involves both institutions in the attempt to create a better connection between the children and the adults involved.
OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Knowledge and mutual understanding;</li> <li>- Description of the characteristics of both institutions;</li> <li>- Comparing and sharing educational objectives and reference points;</li> <li>- Identification of common strategies and tools;</li> <li>- Activation of initiatives that involve children and teachers and help them grow in mutual knowledge and in the relationship.</li> </ul>
WHERE	<p>First meeting at the preschool so that practitioners can see the type of transition they need to facilitate;</p> <p>Second meeting at the 0-3 services to give teachers a concrete idea of the environment where the children come from.</p>
WHEN	<p>First meeting: beginning of the school year before the transition, to compare and choose the tools to use.</p> <p>Second meeting: before the first visit to the school and before the happening of ‘shared moments’, to discuss the use of the previously chosen tools for transition and agree on future meetings.</p>
WHO	Early childhood educators and teachers

A2	VISIT TO THE PRESCHOOL
	<p>The older children within 0-3 services will be invited by preschool children (usually by children aged 3 to 5 y.o.) to visit the new school, starting from the garden and the common areas and then reaching the different classrooms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Moments of free &amp; structured play time;</li> <li>- Activities to be carried out in small groups (e.g. manipulation, reading);</li> <li>- Construction of materials to leave and collect in September (leaving a hint about the child’s journey), or to take with the child and bring them back in September (e.g. transactional object such as a notebook a suitcase);</li> <li>- Snack;</li> <li>- Lunch.</li> </ul>
OBJECTIVES	- Encourage a smooth and gradual transition through the knowledge of spaces, mentoring adults and peers;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Recognize and enhance the competence children have already acquired as part of their previous path;</li> <li>- Reassuring families through the documentation of these activities and giving them the opportunity to communicate with their children about the transition, starting from sharing concrete events and activities.</li> </ul>
WHERE	In the preschool participating to the transition project
WHEN	April/May
WHO	Early childhood educators, teachers and children

A6	CONFERENCE ON THE TRANSITION EXPERIENCE FROM 0-3 SERVICES TO PRESCHOOL
	This conference is intended for parents of children attending the last year of the 0-3 services. It is organized by the educators of the 0-3 services with the presence of the pedagogical coordinator who, knowing both services, can provide information and direct questions and concerns.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Inform / train on the experience of transition;</li> <li>- Presentation of the project of continuity;</li> <li>- Give information on the preschool;</li> <li>- Accept and contain emotions and anxieties</li> </ul>
WHERE	In the appropriate 0-3 service, in the class of the older children or in the welcoming hall of the preschool
WHEN	February/March
WHO	Families of children attending the last year of 0-3 services, educators and pedagogical coordinator.

A7	SHARED ACTIVITIES 0-3 SERVICES
	These are activities that can be carried out in large or small groups in common areas, such as the garden or the welcoming all, in those settings where 0-3 services and preschool are on the same site.
OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Make the relationship between 0-3 children and future teachers intimate and on a daily-basis;</li> <li>- Create memories of concrete situations that may be useful to recover the relationship during 'settle in' process;</li> <li>- Encourage the birth of friendships between 0-3 services and preschool children.</li> </ul>
WHERE	In the common spaces for both services (garden, library, leaving room)
WHEN	During the whole school year, particularly in the months where other aspects of the continuity are developed.
WHO	Educators and children in the 0-3 services, teachers and children in preschool.

A8	PERSONAL BOOK/ MEMORY JOURNAL/ 'BIG BOOK'
	An instrument created by educators to keep track of the path taken by the child

	in the 0-3 services; it is useful to collect those experiences concerning the maturation of identity, the conquest of autonomy and the development of skills. It may contain information on educational projects, documentation relating to particular moments (laboratories, parties, educational outings ...) and / or routine moments; drawings, artifacts, traces left by the child; conversations carried out with peers and educators; photographs, and any significant material encountered / produced during the journey.
OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Check the changes that have been occurring;</li> <li>- Transmit the affective baggage and the competences;</li> <li>- Make the child's learning path known;</li> <li>- Recall and share meaningful experiences;</li> <li>- Prepare for the transition to preschool;</li> <li>- Introduce yourself and tell yourself about adults and friends at the start of the new school;</li> <li>- Increase self-knowledge and increase self-esteem;</li> <li>- Acquire awareness of the progress made.</li> </ul>
WHERE	0-3 services
WHEN	During all the period of attendance of 0-3 services
WHO	Educators

A9	THE SUITCASE
	<p>Tool prepared by educators and children together near the end of a cycle in which to put objects (a drawing, a stone from the garden, a photo, a music ...) chosen to represent the path, to keep track of the journey made, introduce yourself to the new teacher and companions. It can be built with containers of different types, more or less customized by children and educators.</p> <p>The preparation and presentation of the suitcase must be arranged with the teachers of the preschool, carefully organizing the moment when it will be opened and shown by each child to his/her classmates, so that it can actually be a starting point for reflection and reconstruction of the path taken.</p>
OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Make known the process of transition;</li> <li>- Facilitate the process through the use of a transitional object;</li> <li>- Create points for reflection / sharing of previous experiences;</li> <li>- Keep in mind the previous path;</li> <li>- Recall and share meaningful experiences;</li> <li>- Ease any anxieties and concerns related to the journey.</li> </ul>
WHERE	Built in 0-3 services, it should be taken to school at the beginning of the following year
WHEN	Built between May and June, guarded during the summer, and during the first days of school is presented to the new teachers and companions, used depending on the case during the whole journey to preschool.
WHO	Each individual child and educator

## B) TRANSITION PRESCHOOL-PRIMARY SCHOOL

B1	MEETING WITH TEACHERS
	Preschool and primary school teachers meet to discuss and organize a path of continuity that involves both structures and connects the children and adults who live there.
OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Knowledge and mutual understanding;</li> <li>- Description of the peculiarities of both institutions;</li> <li>- Comparison and sharing of educational reference points;</li> <li>- Identification of common strategies and tools;</li> <li>- Activation of initiatives that involve children and teachers and help them grow in mutual knowledge and in the relationship.</li> </ul>
WHERE	The meetings usually happen in the primary schools because they involve primary school teachers.
WHEN	<p>First meeting: beginning of the school year preceding the transition, to compare and choose the tools to use;</p> <p>Second meeting: before the visit to the school and the implementation of shared moments, to discuss the use of the previously chosen tools and agree on the meetings.</p>
WHO	Preschool teachers & primary school teachers

B2	PRIMARY SCHOOL VISITS
	<p>Preschool children and their teachers visit the primary school where they will spend a day, meeting the children and teachers of the primary school, visiting the environments and carrying out activities. It would be better to organize two visits and go to smaller groups in order to allow children to enter into a relationship more easily.</p> <p>On this occasion it is possible to organize various activities that leave room for the meeting and the relationship between the children, who, given their age, can be involved in their conception and development. For example, primary school children can organize a treasure hunt inside the school, organize a guided tour, answer guests' questions ...</p> <p>Another aspect that turns out to be important on this occasion is to build together something that remains in the school and that welcomes the newcomer children in September, or something that will follow the child in the passage (transitional object).</p>
OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Encourage a smooth and gradual transition through the knowledge of spaces, reference adults and peers;</li> <li>- Recognize and enhance the competence children have already acquired as part of their previous path;</li> <li>- Involving families through the documentation of these activities and giving them the opportunity to communicate with their children the theme of the transition, starting from concrete events and activities.</li> </ul>
WHERE	In the primary schools participating in the continuity project

WHEN	April/May
WHO	Preschool children and teachers and primary school children and teachers participating in the continuity project

B3	CONFERENCES FOR NEWLY ENROLLED CHILDREN
	They are collegial moments in which the reference adults (manager, teachers and collaborators) of the school meet the families of the new members. On this occasion information is given regarding the methods and timing of the insertions, some methodological and didactic choices are illustrated, the rules and practices of the school are communicated, questions and concerns of the families are answered.
OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lay the foundations of the educational alliance between school and family;</li> <li>- Increase the process of knowledge of the school by families;</li> <li>- Facilitate the time of 'settle in' processes from an organizational point of view.</li> </ul>
WHERE	In primary school
WHEN	September
WHO	Primary school professionals and families from newly enrolled children

B4	START OF THE YEAR PARENT TEACHER CONFERENCES
	Individual moments between the family and classroom teachers. In these conferences results of the observations done during the period of settle in are shared, while looking for possible strategies to address potential issues encountered. But what is really important at this time is that the teachers put themselves in a listening/understanding attitude, ready to welcome every question and possible family fears.
OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Deepen the knowledge between teachers and family;</li> <li>- Creating a climate of trust;</li> <li>- Gather information on the child's needs;</li> <li>- Receive information on the child and the family;</li> <li>- Help parents to express any anxieties and fears related to the new environment.</li> </ul>
WHERE	In the primary school assigned, in the office or in the classroom.
WHEN	October/November
WHO	Teachers and families from children attending the first grade of primary school.

In conclusion, the Annexes that follow show each of the tools used in the project.

## **Annex 1. Open-ended questions asked to children prior to the transition to CSE**

**Interview to....**

**What did I learn in pre-school**

.....

**The activity I prefer**

.....

**What I do best**

.....

**When I can't do something**

.....

**What is waiting for me in primary school/ What I would like to find/What I think I will learn**

.....

**The friend I wish could come with me to primary school**

.....

## Annex 2. Questionnaire for the Families



### Information Leaflet and Questionnaire

Dear Parent,

We are writing to invite you to take part to a **research project looking at how educational transitions from preschool to primary school affect children's experiences and how transition practices can be improved for the benefit and wellbeing of children.** The project - carried out by the University of Bologna (Department of Education) in partnership with Direzione Didattica Vignola - is part of a larger European project which involve early childhood services, schools and Universities in four countries: Italy, England, Belgium and Slovenia.

The aim of the research project is to investigate how children cope with the changes that characterise the transition from the preschool to the primary school settings such as, for example, changes in the relationships with teachers and friends, changes in the organization of activities and routines, changes in adults' expectations.

In this regards, **your opinion as parent is very important as it help us to understand what your expectations and your worries are, and to focus on what matters you the most in order to better support children and families during the transition from preschool to primary school.** In particular, we would be interested to know:

- What are your hopes and expectations for your child's education in primary school?
- What worries you the most in regards to the changes that your child will have to face in the transition from preschool to primary school?
- And how do you think your child could be supported in facing these changes?

We would be grateful if you could briefly answer to these questions in the sheet attached and return the filled out questionnaire within two weeks. The questionnaire is anonymous - so please do not write your name or the name of your child on it – and the answer to the questions will be used only for the purposes of this research. You can leave the filled out questionnaire in the box that teachers will put at the entrance of the preschool exclusively for this purpose.

We very much hope that you will be willing to spend a bit of your time in answering to our questions, as this would help us to improve educational transition practices together with teachers for the benefits of children in the years to come.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation!

Dr. Arianna Lazzari and Prof. Lucia Balduzzi  
Department of Education, University of Bologna



Funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

PEDAGOŠKI INŠTITUT



## **QUESTIONNAIRE SHEET**

In September your child will move on to primary school. What are your hopes and expectations for your child's education in the new school? And what are your worries, if any?

And what do you think it would be important to support your child in facing this transition?

### Annex 3. Examples of Parents Presenting Children

IL MIO FIGLIO È UN BAMBINO MOLTO DOLCE, AFFETTUOSO E SOLARE, DECISO E CAPARBIO,

ride sempre lo chiamiamo pagliaccetto, ama giocare è molto indipendente e sa esattamente ciò che vuole, farà di tutto per ottenerlo.

Ama la musica grazie al papà musicista, ama andare in bici, adora i lego e i cartoni animati, i covini.

Gli piace fare festa con mamma e papà e gli amici che girano spesso per casa, adora fare il bagnetto, crediamo sia il bambino più pulito del mondo :)

Adora i nonni, con cui va in barca oppure in camper, adora lo zio \_\_\_\_\_ con cui passa molto tempo a disegnare e costruire cose strane con cartone e con lego, è la scimmietta del tato \_\_\_\_\_, con cui ha un rapporto di amore e odio, si menano ma non possono fare a meno uno dell'altro, è il cocco del cuginetto \_\_\_\_\_, che però vede poco, visto che abita a Bologna.

Ama la pizza margherita, il gelato, le caramelle e la frutta, noi pensiamo sia fruttariano...

Ama viaggiare gli piace sia la montagna perchè nei boschi si possono fare tantissimi giochi e correre sui sassi e diventare dei Robin Hood, gli piace il mare perchè la sabbia è magica, e quest'anno abbiamo imparato a nuotare così possiamo fare i tuffi.

Ama gli animali, tutti, vorrebbe un cane un coniglio gli uccellini ed i gatti...

I posti preferiti \_\_\_\_\_ sono il castello che visitiamo spesso, soprattutto il cannone, adora la piscina, sia di giorno che di sera, perché per noi è una seconda casa, il parco fluviale sia in bici che a piedi, ed il fiume in cui tiriamo i sassi.

IL GIRO DEI NONNI

