

# Chapter 15

## The Transition to Primary School as a Challenge for Parents

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### 15.1 Introduction

The transition to primary school is considered an important stage in children's and parents' lives. Both parents and children are faced with the challenge of coping with the transition to school and successfully and actively participating in the process. According to the regulations of the German federal states, children reaching the age of six by a certain cut-off date must start primary school. In Saxony-Anhalt, for instance, the cut-off date is June 30; in North Rhine-Westphalia it is September 30; in Berlin it is December 31. In recent years and with increasing frequency, children attend Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) centres for 3–5 years prior to starting school (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung 2014). Since 2013, children in Germany have had a legal right to attend an ECEC after the end of the first year of life. Between 2006 and 2012, this right applied to children only over the age of three.

Parents play a supportive role influencing how their children cope with the transition. Reichmann's studies (2011/2012) have shown that parents' views about the start of primary school are reflected in their children's attitudes. One of the roles of educators and teachers is to positively influence parents' attitudes regarding the start of school through information on, and transparency about, collaboration activities between ECEC centres, primary schools and family homes. This encourages parents to accompany the transition of their child in a supportive fashion.

In recent years, the organization of the transition as a partnership between ECECs, primary schools and parents has become part of Germany's educational policy (KMK/JMFK 2009). The demand for collaboration between educators and teachers in managing the transition is based on the assumption that collaboration

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between ECEC and primary schools during the transition to school has positive effects on children, parents and educational activities. However, there is a lack of studies that examine how collaboration actually supports the transition for parents and children and the ways in which it can be constructive for education.

The major focus of the project *WirKt* (Collaboration between ECECs and Primary Schools in Transition from ECEC centre to Primary School) was to investigate the perceptions of all participants (children, parents, educators, teachers) of the effects of collaboration between ECEC centres, primary schools and parents during the transition to primary school and on the educational activities of educators and teachers. This project specifically examines the perspectives of parents because they take an active role in coping with the transition and supporting their children.

## 15.2 Background and the Current State of Research

### 15.2.1 *Transition to Primary School – A Challenge for Parents*

A theoretical model incorporating a multiperspective approach for investigating collaborations between ECEC centres and primary schools can be found in the work of Cowan (1991), Griebel and Niesel (2015) and Dockett and Perry (2007). They describe the transition to primary school as a process of transformation in which certain aspects of the lives of children and families undergo reorganization and in which intensive learning occurs. Adjustments and changes are needed at the individual, interactional and contextual levels, building intra-psychological processes and relationships with others (Griebel and Niesel 2015). The transition from ECEC centre to primary school is understood as a constructive process that is managed and organized by the child, the family and the environment as well as by the ECEC centre and primary school (Dockett and Perry 2007; Eckerth and Hanke 2015; Griebel and Niesel 2015). This approach distinguishes between the active participants in the process – the child and the family, say – as well as participants such as educators and teachers who organize the process so that children and their parents can relate to it. The general goal is to manage the child's transition so that school becomes a normal part of his or her life. The point is for children to feel comfortable at school and take advantage of what it offers for cognitive, social, emotional and psychological development (Niesel and Griebel 2007).

Because children and parents are involved in the transition, Nagel et al. (2012, p. 22). refer to it as a 'family affair'. Parents have a dual role: on the one hand, to support their child's transition; on the other, to cope with the challenges and changes the child's transition involves for them personally at the individual, interactional and contextual levels (Griebel and Niesel 2015; Eckerth and Hanke 2015).

At the *individual* level, parents of an ECEC child become parents of a school child with particular demands. School success is also their responsibility. At the same time, parents must relinquish a certain degree of control and responsibility

because teachers are responsible for the school education of the child and must follow mandatory curriculum (Griebel and Sassu 2013). Hence, parents consider school very important for the further development of the child (Nagel et al. 2012).

At the *interactional* level, there is a loss of attachment figures at the ECEC centre – they must say goodbye to educators and other parents– but a gain in the new relationships formed with teachers and parents of primary school children. Interaction and communication with teachers works differently at the primary school level because the central topic is focused on a child’s school success. The role of the teacher is also of great importance for families because the teacher provides information about children’s achievement (Griebel and Sassu 2013; Nagel et al. 2012).

At the *contextual* level, parents are confronted with the task of combining three spheres of life – the worlds of family, school and work. School greatly shapes the daily and weekly routine throughout the year, including the holidays. Some parents may have to make use of additional care for children so that they can return to work. At the same time, parents must also participate in their child’s education and in the school community in general in order to establish an educational partnership (Griebel and Sassu 2013; Nagel et al. 2012).

Starting primary school is a prominent theme in families. Using a qualitative survey, Graßhoff et al. (2013), interviewed 74 parents before the transition, and some again after the transition. The survey showed that parents regarded the school start as a fundamental change and challenge. Parents considered the beginning of school as the beginning of the ‘seriousness of life’ (Graßhoff et al. 2013, p. 129), with changes in a family’s daily routine the most often mentioned aspect in parental interviews. Reichmann (2010) reported that parents experienced the new daily routines and their efforts in supporting their children’s adjustment as a stress factor. The study concluded that meeting the new requirements and adapting to the change takes time.

The new role of the child – that of a child in primary school – also requires parents to make adjustments (Graßhoff et al. 2013; Reichmann 2010). Reichmann (2010) reported that parents at first showed ambivalence; they regret the end of the toddler phase yet welcome the independence that school brings their children. Parents must also contend with their new role as parents of a school child and with the tasks that accompany it (Graßhoff et al. 2013; Griebel and Niesel 2006) (cf. Chaps. 2 and 10 in this book).

### ***15.2.2 Collaboration for Helping Parents Cope with the Transition***

Researchers point out the importance of collaboration between ECEC centres, primary schools and parents in the transition process. They view collaboration as a process of cooperation and a form of social interaction based on trust that demands

a certain degree of autonomy (Hanke et al. 2013; Hanke and Rathmer 2009; Maag Merki 2009; Spieß 2004).

Of the various ways of organizing the transition to school, WirKt distinguished thirteen activities involving collaboration between ECEC educators, primary school teachers (and parents):

- joint conferences and meetings;
- joint work on pedagogical concepts and school curricula;
- joint support strategies;
- joint parent evenings;
- joint school festivals and events;
- joint projects and activities;
- visits of ECEC educators at primary schools (e.g. for observation or assistance);
- visits of primary school teachers at ECEC centres (e.g. for observation or assistance);
- visits of ECEC children at school;
- visits of school pupils at ECEC;
- joint work on observations and pedagogical documentation;
- joint transfer of pedagogical documentation; and
- joint implementation of monitoring and diagnostic procedures.

Following Gräsel et al. (2006), WirKt also distinguished three collaboration levels reflecting different intensities and qualities. These three levels are explained using the case of “parent meetings” to illustrate the differences for collaboration between ECEC centres and primary schools:

### **Level 1: Exchange of Information**

ECEC educators and school teachers inform each other about goals, dates and contents of internal parent evenings at their institutions.

### **Level 2: Division of Work**

Joint parent evenings at ECEC centres and primary schools are mainly organized by dividing the work between them. Each institution completes a task.

### **Level 3: Co-construction**

Parent evenings are mostly organized and planned by ECEC educators and school teachers *together* at meetings and afterwards carried out cooperatively.

Studies of collaboration in everyday teaching situations indicate that joint activities with parents rarely occur (Faust et al. 2011; Liebers and Kowalski 2007). The most common activities include orientation day at school, open houses, discussions about activities and parent evenings (Liebers and Kowalski 2007). Similarly, Graßhoff et al. (2013) report that the most common activities involving parents are parent evenings and similar events such as information sessions in the afternoons and teacher/parent conversations. These activities have different emphases: the purpose of parent evenings is to communicate general information and circumstances, whereas individual conversations are more private and individual (something that

parents value more highly) (Graßhoff et al. 2013). Parents indicate that these two activities are the most important for them in relation to the school transition.

In their survey, Liebers and Kowalski (2007) asked 209 ECEC directors, 146 school principals and 129 parents about the importance of collaboration in the transition phase. Of the respondents, 88% completely agreed or mostly agreed with the statement that all participants (teachers, ECEC educators and parents) should determine the main transition issues together; 75% of the interviewed ECEC and school principals believed that a cooperative relationship with parents was important. Despite this, collaboration with parents was reported as a less frequent activity, even though parents were perceived as the most important collaboration partners. Generally, parents perceived school preparation as a less positive experience than did ECEC educators and school principals. There was significant disagreement between parents and professionals when it came to the statement that parents felt supported in their children's transition. Parents reported feeling less supported than was estimated by professionals (Liebers and Kowalski 2007). Graßhoff et al. (2013) take the view that parents perceived ECEC centres and primary schools as less compatible than teaching professionals did. What becomes clear here is the discrepancy that parents noted between the two institutions. Parents would like more involvement in the transition by, say, having the chance to observe at schools (Graßhoff et al. 2013).

Reichmann (2010) evaluated the transition program *School Children for Preschoolers* and its impact on children, parents and teachers. This program consisted of eight collaboration hours. Thirty-nine children, 26 parents and 11 teachers were interviewed at three different time points (before the program started, shortly after the program began and 4 weeks after enrolment). The program extended the usual collaboration activities and consisted of ten additional hours of parent evenings and visitations in schools and ECEC centres. Additionally, ECEC children could take part in a second grade class and receive mentoring from school children. During the evaluation process, special focus was placed on parents' understanding of their role in the transition, their emotional well-being and their impact on their children. It was found that parents who were positive and open-minded transmitted their attitudes to their children just as easily as those who were negative and stressed. Worries and uncertainties arose due to the low level of communication and to the lack of knowledge parents had about school routines (Graßhoff et al. 2013; Reichmann 2010). Hence, Reichmann (2010) recommended that teachers collaborate with parents to prevent negative attitudes from arising. The results indicated that collaboration and support can help parents cope with the transition and that parents who participated in the program had more positive attitudes about the start of primary school and less stress during orientation than the control group, who did not participate in the program. The interviews conducted by Graßhoff et al. (2013) also showed that parents were much calmer about school start when they had knowledge about coming events. The authors thus concluded that conveying information is crucial for parents. Many parents stated that they worried about upcoming events and expectations in the transition to school of their children. This was true for parents with little knowledge about the German school system (Graßhoff et al. 2013),

particularly so for parents who were immigrants (Nagel et al. 2012). Generally, parents wanted more information and greater transparency (Graßhoff et al. 2013). They wanted to be better informed about school routines and structures, materials, class organization and timetables. They were also interested in knowing who the teachers would be in advance (Graßhoff et al. 2013). Parents rated the opportunity to get to know the school, the teacher and other parents before the start of school as positive (Nagel et al. 2012).

One Australian survey has shown how collaboration activities can assist parents' involvement in their child's transition and learning. In their investigation of a collaboration program, Giallo et al. (2010) aimed to strengthen the knowledge and self-confidence of parents to improve children's adaptability. A total of 576 parents from 21 primary schools in the Australian state of Victoria participated in the survey. One group took part in a transition program especially designed for parents to give them more information about the transition process, to increase their participation and to improve their children's adaptability to school. All in all, parents who participated in the program reported a higher level of efficacy in the support of their children than did the parents in the control group (Giallo et al. 2010). The involvement of parents in school and in the enrolment phase was also higher than in the control group.

The international research consistently shows that when families and schools work together during transition to support their child's learning, children not only cope well with the transition but also tend to do better in school and actually enjoy going to school. In other words, collaboration can have benefits for children both academically and socially (Barnard 2004; Dockett et al. 2011; Henderson and Mapp 2002; Hirst et al. 2011; Lee and Bowen 2006).

Recent studies of the transition to primary school and the impact of collaboration between ECEC educators, primary school teachers and parents have focused primarily on the child. Although parents are considered important for their child's successful transition to school, their own transition and the tasks they have to master are often overlooked. A special focus of the WirKt project was to investigate the significance of collaboration between ECEC centres and primary schools in how parents cope with the transition.

### 15.3 Research Focus and Approach

The aim of the WirKt project was to capture the (perceived) effects of the collaboration between ECEC and primary schools on ECEC educators, teachers, parents and children and to examine the role of pedagogical documentation in the transition phase (Backhaus *in preparation*; Bogatz *in preparation*; Hanke et al. 2013). The triangular design included questionnaires and interviews with principals from ECEC centres and primary schools as well as interviews and test procedures for the social-emotional development of children shortly before and after school enrolment (see Table 15.1).

**Table 15.1** Sample and enquiry period of WirKt

<b>Survey in Early Childhood Centres</b>	
March to June 2011	<b>Survey with principals (n=258 principals; response rate: 25%)</b>
	<b>Survey with educators (n=98 educators; response rate: 59%)</b>
	<b>Survey with parents (n=550 parents; response rate: 59%)</b>
	Tests for social-emotional well-being with children in their last year of kindergarten (n=163 children)
<b>Survey in Primary Schools</b>	
October to December 2011	<b>Survey with principals (n=162 principals; response rate: 64%)</b>
	<b>Survey with teachers (n=91 teachers; response rate: 35%)</b>
	<b>Survey with parents (n=551 parents; response rate: 22%)</b>
	Tests for social-emotional well-being with 1 <sup>st</sup> grade children (n=163 children)
<b>Interview Study: Documentation of Good Practice Examples</b>	
April to May 2012	<b>Focused Interviews with principals, educators, teachers, parents and children from ECEC centres and School (n=44):</b>
	<b>Focus on collaboration: 12 interviews (2 institutions)</b>
	<b>Focus on pedagogical documentation: 32 interviews (4 institutions)</b>

This chapter will discuss particular results of questionnaires collected from principals of ECEC centres (N=258) and primary schools (N=162), and from parents with children in ECEC centres (N=550) and parents with children in primary school (N=551) conducted during 2011 in the federal state North Rhine-Westphalia shortly before and after school enrolment. The selected results include the organisation of collaboration between ECEC and primary school, the perception of the transition as well as the perceived effects of collaboration on parent's coping with the transition.

Further, an example of good collaboration practice in the transition to primary school was identified using the above mentioned questionnaires. Two principals, one educator, one teacher and four parents from an ECEC centre and a primary school were interviewed using a partially structured interview. The focus of the example lies on eight interviews about the collaboration between ECEC, primary school and parents. Interviews were evaluated using Mayring's (2010) qualitative content analyses.

## 15.4 Research Questions

The main aim of this study was to find out when collaborations occurred, to identify whether these supported parents in meeting challenges during the transition phase, and to determine how parents perceived the positive and/or negative effects of collaboration on their experiences of the transition process. It asked the following questions:

- What are the activities, levels and settings of collaboration identified in the transition phase?
- How did parents experience the transition to primary school and how content were they with its organization?
- What were the perceived effects of collaboration on how parents coped with the transition?

## 15.5 Results

### 15.5.1 *Activities, Levels and Settings of Collaboration Between ECECs, Primary Schools and Parents in the Transition Phase*

ECEC and primary school principals reported engaging in a variety of collaboration activities (see Fig. 15.1). The collaboration involved mostly traditional areas (Tietze et al. 2005), such as visits of ECEC children at school, festivals and activities or projects.

The collaboration levels for every activity were calculated from questionnaires with principals of ECEC centres and primary schools. A collaboration level was determined for each of the thirteen collaboration activities. Multiple entries were possible.

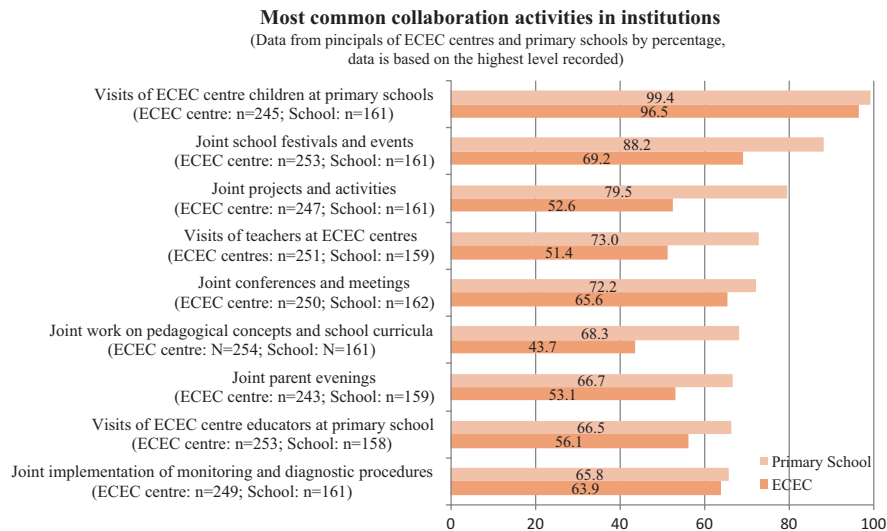
Figure 15.2 shows that a collaboration – if it occurs – mostly takes place at the level of ‘exchange of information’ (level 1). Parent evenings tend to be organized on the level of ‘division of work’ (level 2) and ‘co-construction’ (level 3). However, the last two levels are still exceptions. The statements of primary school principals about their occurrence and intensity are considerably higher than those of ECEC directors.

A cluster analysis was performed on the data from questionnaires with ECEC centres and primary school principals to identify various patterns of collaboration in terms of the design and the intensity of the collaboration (Bogatz *in prep.*). Three clusters were identified, reflecting different types of settings. Analysis of these settings shows that they vary according to the *number* of performed collaboration activities and according to the *level of* collaboration activities. An overview of the settings is provided below.

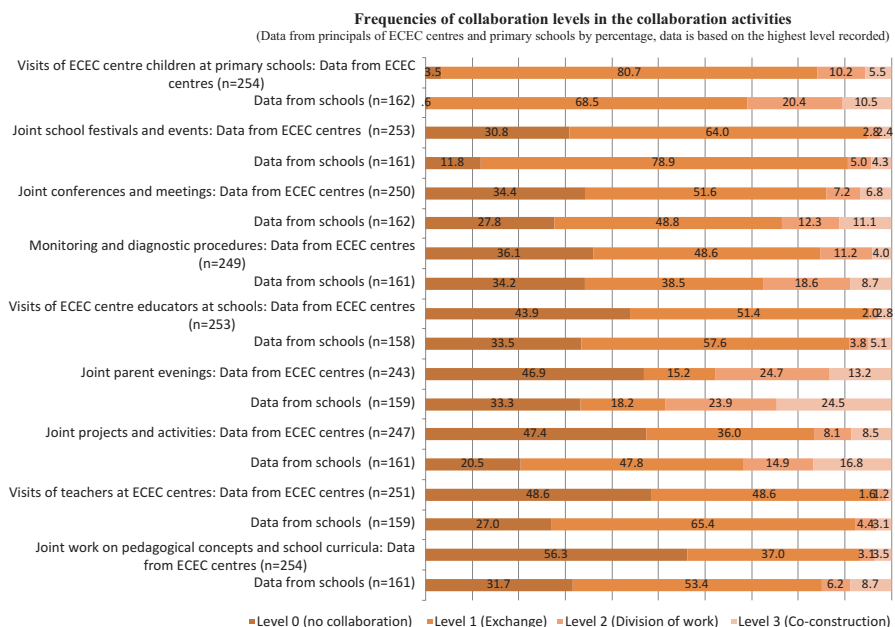
#### 15.5.1.1 Collaboration Setting I – Traditional Informative Collaboration

This setting involves collaboration activities that focus on getting to know the school (like visits of ECEC children to primary schools, festivals and activities). This is a traditional form of collaboration between ECEC centres and primary schools. The collaboration consists of small, varying activities (M: 3.5; SD: 1.5) and is primarily based on an exchange of information (on average 3.1 (SD: 1.4) of 3.5 activities).





**Fig. 15.1** Collaboration activities, data are based on the highest level recorded (Hanke et al. 2013, p. 42)



**Fig. 15.2** Collaboration levels in ECECs and primary schools (Data from principals of ECECs and primary schools by percentage, data are based on the highest level recorded) (Hanke et al. 2013, p. 48)

### 15.5.1.2 Collaboration Setting II: Informative Collaboration with Many Variants

The collaboration involves many different activities (M: 9.3; SD: 2.2) and many variants, but it mainly occurs in the form of information exchange (on average 8.3 (SD: 2.0) of 9.3 activities).

### 15.5.1.3 Collaboration Setting III: Intensive Collaboration

The collaboration comprises many different activities (M: 10.5; SD: 1.7) and many variants. We found information exchange (M: 5.3; SD: 1.6) as well as intensive collaboration levels such as the division of work or co-construction (M: 5.2; SD: 1.9).

With regard to the distribution of institutions in the collaboration settings, it appears that most institutions – ECEC centres as well as primary schools – performed informative collaboration with many variants – as exemplified in collaboration setting II.

## 15.5.2 Parents' Transition Experience and Contentment

The questions about parents' transition experiences and contentment with the organisation of the transition were analysed descriptively by collaboration cluster. Using ANOVA, the project examined whether there were significant differences among parents' average data. As for how easy or difficult parents experienced the transition, the results showed that 77.1% of parents reported that the change was easier than expected. However, 23% of parents with children in primary school also stated that the change was more difficult than expected. There are no significant differences between the clusters.

At the same time, most parents of school children stated that they experienced the transition positively (91.4%). In all three clusters, the mean value is near positive. In addition, 4.2% of parents stated that the transition was neither a positive nor a negative event and 4.4% stated it as a negative experience. There are no significant differences between the clusters.

In general, there is substantially less approval in statements about contentment with joint transition activities. Overall, 44.3% of the interviewed parents stated that there were *sufficient* joint activities and 52.4% stated that there were *suitable* activities.

There were significant differences among the clusters. Cluster I differed significantly from cluster II and III with regard to whether or not *sufficient* joint offers exist, with an effect size of 5%. Further, significant differences between the clusters arose on the question of suitable joint offers in the transition phase. All clusters differed from each other at an effect size of 8%. That is to say, the mean value in both items was higher in more intensive collaboration settings. In summary, parents from

primary schools in clusters II and III were significantly more content with the number and suitability of joint offers in the transition than those reporting activities reflective of cluster I.

### ***15.5.3 Perceived Effects of the Collaboration on How Parents Cope with the Transition***

#### **15.5.3.1 Results of the Parental Survey**

Parents from ECEC centres and from primary schools were asked to assess various aspects of how they coped with the transition during the collaboration. To identify a scale in the questionnaires of parents of ECEC children, six positive items and six negative items were entered into a factor analysis. All six negative aspects were included in the scale: *To sense the change as stress; many concerns about the change; negative attitudes about the change of the child; uncertainty; feeling pressured; and feeling overstretched*. Two scales for positive effects – relief and the reduction of worry – were excluded because the loads were too low. The following four positive items were included in the scale: *feeling supported; feeling prepared; feeling informed about the child's preparation; and positive attitude towards the change of the child*. Parents' contentment with the collaboration around transition of the institutions was evaluated as a single item.

All items in the questionnaires of parents of primary school children were included in the scale for the examination of the positive and negative aspects of collaboration's effects. This produced the following scales for eight positive items: *change as a positive event; feeling prepared; feeling supported; fewer worries about the change of the child; feeling that school challenges could be met effectively; feeling that the change was facilitated; feeling relief at the change*. There were four items with negative aspects: *more worries about change of the child; feeling the change as stress; feeling that the change was made more difficult; and negative experience*. Parents' contentment with the collaboration was evaluated as an individual item. All scales showed highly reliable characteristics.

The differences between data from parents of ECEC children (Table 15.2) and parents of school children (Table 15.3) were analyzed for positive and negative effects as well and for contentment with the collaboration between ECEC centres and primary schools for the three collaboration settings: informative collaboration; informative collaboration with many variants; and intensive collaboration.

#### **Positive Aspects of Effects**

Parents of ECEC children (Table 15.2) were more likely to affirm the positive aspects of effects. The item *feeling relief at the change* was the only exception where the data is below the theoretical average. Data from collaboration settings I

**Table 15.2** Comparison of collaboration settings: Scales for ‘aspects of perceived effects’ and ‘contentment’ of parents with children in early childhood centres – ANOVA

Scales		Collaboration settings			F	p	η <sup>2</sup>
		I	II	III			
<b>Positive aspects of perceived effects</b>	<i>M</i>	1.73 <sub>a</sub>	1.71 <sub>a</sub>	2.07 <sub>b</sub>	6.664	.001	.035
	SD	0.79	0.76	0.63			
	Range	0–3	0–3	1–3			
	N	103	195	72			
<b>Negative aspects of perceived effects</b>	<i>M</i>	0.54	0.55	0.43	1.109	.331	.006
	SD	0.56	0.57	0.45			
	Range	0–2,17	0–3	0–3			
	N	101	194	71			
<b>Contentment</b>	<i>M</i>	1.46 <sub>a</sub>	1.77 <sub>b</sub>	2.22 <sub>c</sub>	17.420	.001	.094
	SD	0.87	0.79	0.74			
	Range	0–3	0–3	0–3			
	N	91	181	67			

Means with different subscript in the same row differ statistically significant. Effects: completely agree=3 | mostly agree=2 | mostly disagree=1 | completely disagree=0; Contentment: completely content=3 | mostly content=2 | mostly discontent=1 | completely discontent=0

**Table 15.3** Comparison of collaboration settings: Scales for ‘aspects of perceived effects’ and ‘contentment’ of parents with children in primary schools – ANOVA

Scales		Cluster			F	p	η <sup>2</sup>
		I	II	III			
<b>Positive aspects of perceived effects</b>	<i>M</i>	1.28 <sub>a</sub>	1.65 <sub>b</sub>	1.78 <sub>b</sub>	8.912	.001	.053
	SD	0.69	0.73	0.70			
	Range	0–2.88	0–3	0–3			
	N	54	165	102			
<b>Negative aspects of perceived effects</b>	<i>M</i>	0.78	0.60	0.61	1.935	.146	.012
	SD	0.65	0.59	0.58			
	Range	0–2	0–2.75	0–2.75			
	N	54	164	102			
<b>Contentment</b>	<i>M</i>	1.64 <sub>a</sub>	1.90	2.08 <sub>b</sub>	6.691	.002	.032
	SD	0.87	0.83	0.70			
	Range	0–3	0–3	0–3			
	N	67	201	131			

Means with different subscript in the same row differ statistically significant. Effects: completely agree=3 | mostly agree=2 | mostly disagree=1 | completely disagree=0; Contentment: completely content=3 | mostly content=2 | mostly discontent=1 | completely discontent=0

and II were similar, though there was a significant difference between the first two settings and the third collaboration setting, in which parents assessed the effect of the collaboration on their own transition process as more positive. The individual evaluations indicated that the data in the more intensive collaboration settings were mostly higher. Significant differences became especially apparent in the following

three items: *feeling supported*; *feeling prepared*; and *feeling informed about the child's preparation*. Parents from the more intensive collaboration settings felt more supported and knew how to prepare themselves and their children for the transition.

On average, parents of schoolchildren (Table 15.3) positively assessed the effects of collaboration related to how they coped with the transition. Data were mostly positive but still lower than data from ECEC centres. Data from the collaboration settings II and III differed significantly from data of collaboration setting I. Evaluation of individual items showed that parents assessed the collaboration as a positive experience, though they did not believe that it constituted a relief. On this item, parents' data were the lowest of all the other collaboration settings. A look at the differences between the settings showed that the data from parents of schoolchildren in the traditional informative collaboration settings differed significantly from at least one of the more intensive settings in each item. Data from these parents tended to be negative.

### Negative Aspects of Effects

Parents of ECEC children and parents of schoolchildren mostly rejected the negative aspects of effects. There were no significant differences between the collaboration settings.

### Contentment

Regarding parents' contentment with the collaboration, a significant difference existed between collaboration settings I and II for parents from children in ECEC centres and school children. The data for contentment was higher when the collaboration was more intensive.

All in all, parents offered a more positive assessment of how they coped with the transition when ECEC centres and primary schools collaborated in various and intensive ways. They were more content with the collaboration than parents from institutions where the collaboration primarily consisted of an exchange of information.

#### **15.5.3.2 Results from the Interview “Example of Good Collaboration Practice in the Transition from ECEC to Primary School”**

The analyzed collaboration between a primary school and an ECEC centre exemplifies the way in which collaboration can be organized in the transition. A working group made up of staff from each institution developed a collaboration plan and a schedule with a clear division of work. Employees of the ECEC centre and the primary school met regularly inside and outside the working group.

The collaboration activities were varied and took place regularly. There were plenty of opportunities for parents and children to get to know the school and become familiar with the rooms and personnel. The activities took place at level 1 “exchange of information” as well as at levels 2 and 3. All participants collaborated on organization, execution and follow-up.

### The Effects of Collaboration on How Parents Cope with School Transition

**Interviewer:** How do parents experience school transition when accompanied by intensive collaboration?

**Mrs E. (School staff):** I think most parents, especially those who are immigrants or who come from immigrant families, get to know the ECEC centre and the primary school through a variety of projects, including “parent cafés” and the “Rucksack-project”. This means that most parents are in touch with the school before enrolment and attend activities there. I believe that our intensive collaboration convinces most parents that the ECEC centre and the school are working together and want to help. It removes a lot of uncertainty and anxiety. I have experienced that parents with ECEC children approach us openly.

Staff from both institutions identified the following effects of collaboration on parents:

- positive feelings and attitudes about the school (openness; the sense they are being looked after and reassured);
- early opportunities for parents to collaborate with the school;
- the avoidance of negative attitudes and feelings;
- the feeling of support through advising; and
- early familiarization with the school (personnel, rooms, expectations, and processes).

Parents also stated that they developed positive feelings and attitudes towards school through collaboration (feeling supported, contentment with the school, feeling sympathy, feeling involved, feeling reassured and joy) and were able to familiarise themselves with the school. Some stated that collaboration between ECEC centre and school influenced their decision to put their child in that particular institution.

## 15.6 Conclusion

As other studies have shown, institutions collaborate in many different ways, but most concentrate on traditional activities and, in the process, neglect practices involving collaboration levels division of work and co-construction. If there is collaboration, it mostly involves the exchange of information.

The cluster analysis of this study identified three different collaboration settings: (1) a more traditional collaboration setting with few activities and a focus on information exchange; (2) a setting with many activities and a focus on information

exchange; and (3) a setting with many activities and an effort to realize division of work and co-construction in addition to information exchange. These collaboration settings are well suited for comparing parents' transition experiences and contentment levels and their perceived effects of collaboration on how they cope with the transition.

The results for parents' transition experiences and their contentment showed that parents mostly saw the transition as positive, although some reported it to be tougher than expected and portrayed it in a negative light. Parents at institutions that collaborated in a more intensive way were significantly more content with the collaboration activities between ECEC centres and schools than parents at institutions whose collaborations were less intense and less varied.

This study found that parents agree on the positive effects of collaboration and tend to disagree with negative effects. Furthermore, parents assessed their coping abilities more positively when children attended ECEC centres and primary schools that collaborated more intensively during the transition phase. Generally, in "more intensive collaboration" settings, parents were more content with what was offered by the ECEC centre and the school relative to parents of the first collaboration setting with a traditional informative collaboration.

The individual evaluation of positive and negative effects of collaboration in the transition phase revealed that parents perceived "more intensive collaboration" settings as helping them to cope with the transition. Parents felt more supported and better equipped to prepare for their child's transition in those settings than in settings that collaborated less intensively.

Data from parents in the collaboration settings of the ECEC centres did not differ significantly. Yet there were major differences among the settings in primary schools. Setting II (*Informative collaboration with many variants*) and setting III (*Intensive collaboration*) differed from setting I (*Traditional informative collaboration*). Parents from the more intensive collaboration settings felt more supported and prepared than those from other settings. They stated that the collaboration facilitated the transition and they felt less worried about it.

The qualitative results represent one example of a collaboration network. These institutions used many different collaboration activities at all three levels and thus fell under the more intensive collaboration setting III. The analysis of the interviews found that staff and parents from ECEC centres and primary schools positively assessed the collaboration, showed high levels of satisfaction and saw positive effects on how parents cope with the transition to school. Parents reported positive feelings and attitudes towards school, early collaboration and advising opportunities and early familiarization with the school. In addition, they reported the absence of negative attitudes and feelings about school.

Overall, parents believed that collaboration had a positive effect on how they coped with the transition. In particular, they saw collaboration involving various activities based on division of work and co-construction even more positively than collaboration involving few activities and based on information exchange alone.

In the future, collaboration between ECEC centres, primary schools and parents during transition can be expanded, including more institutional information, more

exchange and greater consultation on the child's development and more collaborative activities. These measures can aid parents as they cope with the transition and provide constructive support for the child's transition.

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