

# Early childhood care and development helps to give all children an equal start in life



**Guidelines for early childhood care  
and development in Albania**

*Cristian Fabbi*



**Early childhood care and development  
helps to give all children  
an equal start in life**

*This publication is supported by Save the Children*

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## **Credits**

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## **Index**

Early childhood care and development in Albania	<i>pag. 9</i>
Image of children, philosophy and educational practices	<i>pag. 17</i>
Children development: connections between Hand in Hand and Albanian learning achievement standards	<i>pag. 71</i>
<i>Annex 1 - Suggestion for parents education</i>	<i>pag. 79</i>
<i>Annex 2 - Suggestions for using public spaces</i>	<i>pag. 82</i>
<i>Annex 3 - Average costs of the preschools</i>	<i>pag.84</i>
<i>Annex 4 - Hand in hand</i>	<i>pag. 86</i>
Bibliography	<i>pag. 87</i>





## **You only see black**

*A man owned over one hundred sheep. A visiting friend asked him:*

*- How are your floks?*

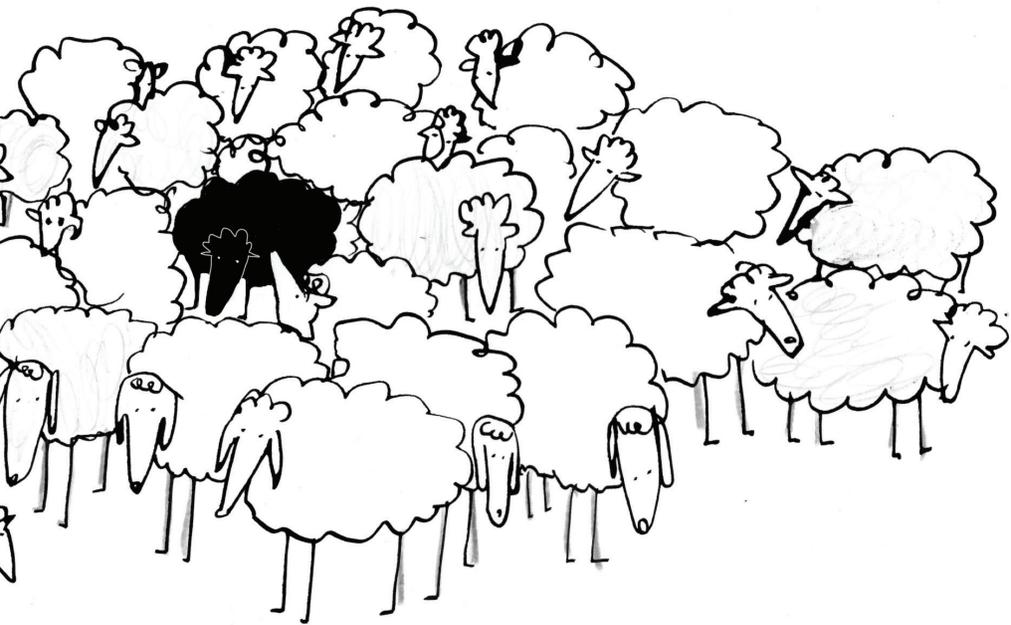
*- Just fine – the man said and showed him the sheep.*

*- Oh, you have a black one! - his friend noticed.*

*- How come you only spot the black one and not one hundred white ones; you only see black – he said.*

Salih Zogiani, Albanian anecdotes, #169







# Early childhood care and development in Albania

## **The present and future context**

The improved legislation for children in 2010<sup>1</sup> has been supported by the approval of the Action Plan for Children (2012-2015) requiring inclusive and quality education for all children. This is currently the political and administrative guidance document for children in Albania.

Preschool education in Albania is not compulsory, and refers to children aged 3-6<sup>2</sup>. However, the Government's vision is to mandate the last year of kindergarten by 2018.

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<sup>1</sup> Law 10 347, date 4.10.2010, "For the protection of children rights"

<sup>2</sup> Law no. 69/2012 "For the pre university education system in the Albanian Republic"

The Albanian education aims are:

- the education and upbringing of free and conscious individuals, participating in social life;
- the acquisition of the communicative, expressive, logical and operational abilities and competences;
- the development of psycho-motor, cognitive, emotional, social and moral abilities.

Preschool education, a shared function of the education system and local governmental units, is offered in public and private kindergartens and public schools (preparatory classes).

Preschool services were initially developed in the country during the regime. During the transition there have been a significant limitation of public and private possibilities for children, that started to emerge significantly in the last 10 years.

The preschool education counts for a stable number of enrollments in the last years, however it remains low in comparison with other countries in the region. This is related to low fertility levels, migration and attendance level.

Reported net enrollment rates range depending on the source, from 33% (Living Standards Measurement Study (LSMS), 2012) to 76% (Institute for Statistics, 2013). According to the 2012 LSMS data, the main reasons parents report as to why they do not send their children to preschool are that they believe their children are too young or they prefer to keep them at home. More than two-thirds of parents of children 3-4 years old who were not attending

preschool thought their children were too young, suggesting that perhaps early learning experiences are not appropriately catered to the younger age group. Nearly one-quarter of parents of all preschool aged children (3-6 years) reported that they preferred to keep their children at home.

Wide disparities between rich and poor exist in the sector. Only roughly a quarter of poorest quintile of Albanian children attends preprimary school, while 60% of children from the richest quintile children do. The gap in prevalence of learning materials for children at home is even wider, with just 15.5% of Albanians from the poorest quintile providing learning materials at home, compared to 52.3% of the children in the wealthiest quintile. The gap in adult support learning is also substantial: 68.1% of Albanians in the poorest quintile supported learning, while 96.2% in the wealthiest quintile did.

Based on the same database (LSMS, 2012) reflecting the actual attendance of children, rather than their official enrolment, the percentage of children of the age cohort 3-5 excluded from preschool is 86.8%, 69.3% and 41.5% respectively<sup>3</sup>.

The latest data in the country is for 2013-2014, reporting 4498 kindergartens and 81448 children enrolled in public and private sector. The public kindergartens are accessed by 319 children living with disabilities. The data on Roma children is currently unknown<sup>4</sup>.

Although the infrastructure standards for kindergartens facilities exist, there is no report on the number of institutions that fulfill the standards.

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<sup>3</sup> Ravens, J.V. (2014), 'Universal preschool at five', UNICEF Albania, September 2014, pg.

<sup>4</sup> UNICEF is currently gathering data for 2014

As infrastructure and other materials/equipments in the preschool are to be financed by the local government units, this has influenced negatively the investment and supply. The expenses on materials and basic infrastructure are supported by the parents of children in kindergartens

The Normative Provisions for Public Schools determine the number of children in upbringing groups of preschool establishments as follows:

<b>Age</b>	<b>Area</b>	<b>Ratio</b>
3 to 5	Urban	Not less than 1:25
3 to 5	Rural	Not less than 1:15
3 to 5	Remote villages	Not less than 1:10

The ratio of children reported for 2013-2014 for all preschool groups (3-4, 4-5, 5-6) and kindergartens (public and private) is 18:3.

The preschool curricula (3-6 years old) is not based on any curriculum framework developed specifically for the age group or as part of the preuniversity one. It is oriented by the approved standards of Content and Achievement. The Programs are developed for the specific ages 3-4, 4-5 and 5-6 years old, encompassing 6 learning fields/areas: language, maths, science, social and personal development, arts, physical and health education. The curricula documentation has been developed over the years based on learning objectives; it lacks coherence, and conceptual continuity<sup>5</sup>. Currently, the MoES is committed to develop a new preschool curricula based on competences.

<sup>5</sup> Karameta. P. et al (2014) "The preuniversity Reform in Albania Report", July 2014

In the meantime, across the main cities of Albania there are pilot preschools applying new methods and advanced didactic elements of educational models. These activities are monitored by local educational authorities and the staff of under pilot pre-schools.

Preschool education is based on lessons, usually held between 9,30 to 11,30, with differences in the organization of the preschools. Usually the preschools offer 240 teaching hours (lessons) per year.

Preschool teachers must complete a four-year pedagogical programme or be graduates from faculties of education in order to teach in preschool establishments. Recently, some faculties have established three-year training programmes for preschool teachers. Curricula for pre-service teacher training (not only for preschool teachers) encompass three basic groups of disciplines:

- the disciplines in the field of academic education;
- pedagogical and psychological disciplines (pedagogy, psychology and teaching methods for vocational subjects);
- teaching practice.

Psychology includes developmental and pedagogical psychology.

Concerning in-service training and teaching philosophy, in general, there is a strong orientation of the preschools toward the achievement standards, connected also to the practice of inspection, where every preschool should show that there is a high level of commitment in this overall goal. Some of the preschools interviewed before the preparation of the Plan have also practiced some or all of the content of the step-by-step program issued by Soros Foundation, that have also educated and licensed teachers on it.

At the same time, educators and preschool teacher have to gain a minimum of three credits *per-annum*, and attend a test, which appear as not so hard, but this process has to be considered necessary to keep the teaching license and continue to work as a preschool teacher.

The recent assessment on inclusion practices of preschool in Albania, provides an overview of what hampers inclusion of preschool children<sup>6</sup>:

- the high ratio of children and teachers
- lack of knowledge and skills among managers and staff to provide an holistic approach towards development and learning
- limitation is infrastructure (including space and support materials/ equipment)

All these aspects are to be taken into account for the development of this Guidelines document. Rather than problematic, they should be taken as a starting point for the development, trying to understand in which direction make the ECCD evolve. As well, the Guideline is being published before the reform of the Standard Learning Achievement, announced in 2010 and forecasted issuing in June 2015, according to the interview conducted during the preparation of this Plan.

For these reasons, the Guideline will absolutely respect the philosophy underpinning the Standard Learning Achievement of 2004, but according also to the recommendation edited by professor Kagan for Unicef (2013), it will start to develop a more holistic process focus on different aspects of the development of the child considered as a whole person, and not only a Learning Achiever.

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<sup>6</sup> Voko, K. et al (2014) "Inclusion practices in Albanian preschool system", Save the Children, 2014.

The achievement standards and the achievement curriculum are an important milestone in the development of the ECCD system in Albania, as they are guarantee of common purpose, efficacy, good continuity between preschool and school, common ground for the education of teachers. This has to be considered as the starting point for a preschool system which have the task of educating children and give them possibility of develop talents, skills, knowledge.

Achievement standards are also well defined (considering also the recommendation edited by Sharon L. Kagan in 2010, included in the report “UNICEF Early Childhood policy consultancy: examining the content and use of Albanian Early Learning and Development Standards”) and able to create a curriculum oriented to the cognitive development, open and aimed to support all other area of development.

The Albanian Achievement Standards, released in 2003, have had a great importance in enhancing the awareness of the preschool system. As Kagan stated:

The Achievement Standards are noteworthy in several ways. First, that they address all domains of development, including Approaches towards Learning and Art, is notable. Second, they are designed to span three age groups of children (three-year-olds, four-year-olds, and five- year-olds). Third, they provide a great deal of information, and should serve as a springboard for early education and development in Albania (Kagan, 2010).

At the same time, after 11 years, there are some observations that should be made.

Having noted these considerable strengths, it is also important to indicate that the presentation of the Achievement Standards (and this may be an artifact of translation) is only moderately easy to follow, and would be very difficult to implement. Because the Achievement Standards document is long and somewhat cumbersome, users will need to search for specific information. The linear presentation format also makes it very difficult to compare constructs across the ages, which limits our ability to discern the accuracy of the developmental progressions (e.g., are constructs presented at one age appropriately sequenced for the next age group?). In general, an alternative formatting might be considered (Kagan, *op. cit.*).

We consider the process started in 1993, and ended up twenty years later with the paper of professor Kagan as our milestone. We actually believe that you can not develop an Guideline for a complex system like preschools are without taking in big consideration the history of the system. At the same time, we believe important to start to consider Albanian preschools in the wider, European context, and start to bring in ideas, competencies, know-how, discoveries, best practices coming also from other experiences, developed by other curricula, that we think can fit with Albanian preschools, nowadays and in future.

# Image of childhood, philosophy and educational practices

Our goal is to develop the work shaped by the Albanian Learning Achievement Standards and to define Guidelines that will include all the areas of development of children at this age. It is important to define the organization of the ECCD and the education approach, in order to:

- create an ECCD centered on children's rights;
- allow children to have the best preschool experience possible;
- create an inclusive environment;
- support and facilitate teachers action and reflection;
- make the parents become aware of children's potential;
- be able to evaluate, modify and (if needed) correct the preschool action.

By summarizing these focal points, we dare say that our goal is to develop democracy in preschools, and to consider preschools as a context of democracy.

The objective of this Guidelines is also to support policies and policy decision makers in order to create a **children-centered ECCD system**. To reach this goal we believe that it is important to share appropriate opportunities for children and parents in a systemic perspective. It includes the following issues:

- Preschools should recognize children’s right of learning opportunities and education as well as care, in an holistic perspective;
- All ECCD should reflect an equal opportunities approach;
- Parents and staff together should be actively involved in projecting, planning and running preschool services for the long-term benefit of their children and of the community;
- Preschool services should be community based and sensitive to local needs, attitude, rights, including employment and training needs;
- There should be active co-ordination of services in each community (or district), in a network perspective, involving parents, council staff, voluntary organizations, citizens, policy makers, health services and other appropriate agencies (including cultural institutions);
- Voluntary organizations and community groups should be considered as partners in the provision of services capable of enhancing and complementing ECCD;
- Preschool provision should be developed according to regional priorities, considering the context and the economical, cultural, social situation;
- Places in preschool should be allocated according to agreed (written) admissions criteria. Referrals from social and health work should be given priority and offered within the complete range of services;

- Services should be organized so that any provision can accommodate and meet the needs of children, including children with special needs or chronic illness, no matter how severe the conditions are.

The emphasis should be on directing resources to the community where the child live. No child should be denied access to a service on the grounds of health or disability, if possible.

ECCD should be considered as a big, fundamental, opportunity to develop children's potential. These institutions should be devoted to support children development of each own life project, starting by the basis.

Another focus point is about the pedagogical documentation in preschools, and especially about the Learning Achievement. They are a good starting point to develop a future oriented ECCD system. The focus of the Albanian Learning Achievement is well oriented toward the cognitive and toward language development. It is important, after having consolidated this challenge, to start to work around other topics/issues.

Area of interest for the future should be the emotional and the relational development, that should be seen as part of the holistic development of the child.

It is useful in this Guidelines to focus on emotional and relational area.

Another important focus is creativity. Creativity not seen only as part of the artistic skills, but as a more systemic "engine" of the development of the child. There is creativity not only in painting or handcraft production. Creativity involves relations, but also mathematical skills, or language production.

We think also that the development of ECCD should take into consideration the perspective of the multiple intelligences stated by Howard Gardner. If we work

in order to support the development in respect of all these intelligences, then we really create an ECCD system able to support the life project of every child. The theory of multiple intelligences involves different kind of teaching.

Seven kinds of intelligence would allow seven ways to teach, rather than one. And powerful constraints that exist in the mind can be mobilized to introduce a particular concept (or whole system of thinking) in a way that children are most likely to learn it and least likely to distort it. Paradoxically, constraints can be suggestive and ultimately freeing. (Howard Gardner, 1993)

The underpinning concept is that every child have different ways of learning, and therefore there should be different way of teaching or supporting them in the discovery of the world. Our task for the future should be to share with the educators a conceptual framework in order to organize and reflect on curriculum assessment and pedagogical practices. This reflection has led many educators to develop new approaches that might better meet the needs of the range of learners in their classrooms. It is important to work in order to create preschool considered a place of democracy, where children can find opportunities to develop their human potential, both individually and in cooperation with others. As Peter Moss stated,

There is a long tradition of viewing democracy and education as inseparably interconnected: democracy as a basic value and practice in education; and education as a means to strengthen and sustain democracy (Moss, 2011).

Democracy is a concept in continuous evolution, and often used as an utopic desire rather than a true, concrete way of living and growing together. It has to do with different forms and practices connected to the history, the context, the situation.

If we want our preschool to be a context of democracy building, we have to define our educational philosophy.

Democratic practices in early childhood education and care should intervene on several levels: not just the institutional (preschool), but also a national, regional, district and local level. Each level has responsibility for developing processes, in order to take decisions which should be as democratic as possible, meaning with it a certain level of discussion, sharing, contemplating the possibility for the population to intervene in those choices, in order to make the population perceive the preschool as a common good.

In Albania, the central government has the task of developing learning achievement, learning standard, and curricula at several level: children, teachers, but also parents. The national level is also responsible for the payment of the preschool teachers. The regional level (Qarqeu) has the task of enabling the development of new infrastructure. The local level is in charge of food and other services connected to the needs of the preschools. It is important to understand how parents, citizens, decision makers could work together to develop a democratic system supporting and scaffolding the preschool and the ECCD system in the development of every action and choice.

If the overall system is democratic, then the preschool can be a democratic system itself. Developing democratic policies into ECCD means that both

children and adults should engage each other in several activities, according to Peter Moss:

1. Decision-making about the purposes, the practices and the environment of the Preschool. Democracy here is considered a principle of government of the micro-community of the preschool. Example of this might be nurseries workings as a cooperative team, parent group co-working with/for the preschool, elected boards of parents involved in pedagogical, management and staffing issues (with the limitation prescribed by the working rights). Children or adults must share decisions about everyday activities, events or major matters like the design of the environment or the organization of the time schedule.

2. Meaning building or understandings of learning. Instead of looking at learning as a mere reproduction of pre-determined content and skills, it must be a true construction of knowledge, in which children are seen and considered as active constructors of their own learning and culture, and producers of original points of view concerning the world. They should be considered as researchers around the meaning of life and of every event, concept, fact they can get in touch with. Adults, like children, should be open to unpredicted outcomes, new ideas, opinions, discoveries, thoughts, which are the fundamental basis for democratic values and practices.

### ***Inclusive education as a vocation***

Recognizing and giving value to cognitive, communicative, emotional

differences is a big challenge for every aware teacher. It has to be an attitude but also a way of meeting cultural and social changes emerging in a classroom of a preschool.

There are many dimensions concerning the concept of diversity. It includes disabilities, cultural differences, difference in learning and, more in general, individual differences, which, however, are important and generate significant influence, especially in the context of preschool relations and in educational institutions. The differences are part life. As Darwin well explained (not alone), the humankind has developed due to differences and the multiplicity, variety, wealth they gives us. Also if it is not always easy to perceive, read and understand, diversity offers us great opportunities of development in everyday life in an ontological perspective.

What we propose is not a unconditional acceptance, a moralistic awareness of differences or a radical-chic oriented pleasure for what is different, but rather a genuine welcoming of responsibility towards one of the rights that everyone has: equality.

Equality should be an ideal model and we must avoid that differences should not become an excuse for unequal treatment. Working on what we call languages of the differences is the basis for this kind of working choice: ensure equal rights to all those involved in the educational relationship, be them children, teachers or families.

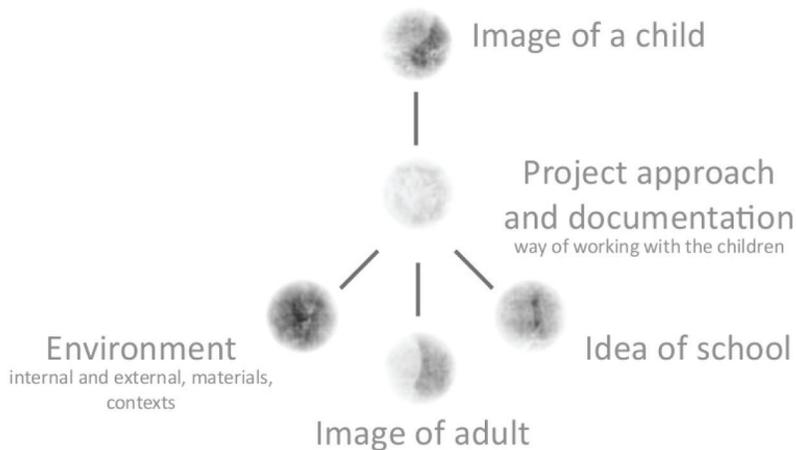
The ambition of this project is to “educate” an attitude toward the others, allowing us to seize every opportunity that differences involve. We believe in the educational potential of all differences, and want to support the ability to read it, mainly with children.

### ***Image of child, teacher, parent, preschool***

Preschool is a complex system. We think it is important to respect and put into practice many of the fundamental aspects of the work of John Dewey, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky and many others (like Howard Gardner, Jerome Bruner, Loris Malaguzzi). It is a system that relies on

- the role of collaboration among children, teachers and parents, considered as inter-dependent;
- the role of children and teachers (but also parents) as co-structor of knowledge;
- the inter-dependence of individual and social learning, considered in mutual empowerment;
- the role of culture in understanding this interdependence.

At the heart of this system we want to share a powerful image of the child. At the basis of our Guidelines, there should be an image of children, not considered as empty vessels that require filling with facts. We see children



as full of potential, competent and capable of building their own theories regarding life. Children have the right to be recognized as citizen, giving to the word *citizen* the full meaning it has also for grown-up. Children are subjects of individual, legal, civil, and social rights, and in this field the action of Save the Children is an example. Children are both source and constructors of their own experience, and thus active participants in the organization of their identities, abilities, and autonomy, through relationships and interaction with their peers, with educators, with parents, with ideas, with objects, and with real and imaginary events of intercommunicating worlds.

We want to participate in the overall aim of creating aware citizens of the world, by improving the quality of human interaction. It is possible by crediting children, and each individual child, with an extraordinary wealth of inborn abilities and potential, strength and creativity.

Starting from this point of reference, we recognize the right of children to realize and develop their potential, focusing on the ability of socialize, receiving affection and trust, and satisfying needs and desires to learn.

This is concretely put into action when children are reassured by an effective alliance between the adults in their lives, by placing higher value on the search for constructive strategies of thoughts.

The strategy is oriented to the development of creative intelligence, critical thought, sensitive and aware individuality, through an ongoing process of differentiation and integration with other people and other experiences.

### ***Playing activity as didactics***

As Ole Langsted stated, “The culture of play is used by children to learn in their

own special way”. Adult approaching children playing are based on the idea of allowing children to practice experiences for a long time and then perform the activity concerned once they have learned to do it right. Children do not separate the learning process in compartments. They play, practice and learn at the same time. The game itself and social relationships are the most important things. Skills and competence pops up naturally, spontaneously as the dynamic result of a complex process of learning. It is an innate process of learning that emerges in every life experience, no matter if it happens in ECCD, at home, in public or private environment.

As Plato stated, you can discover more, of a person, in one hour of playing-activity than in a day-long conversation.

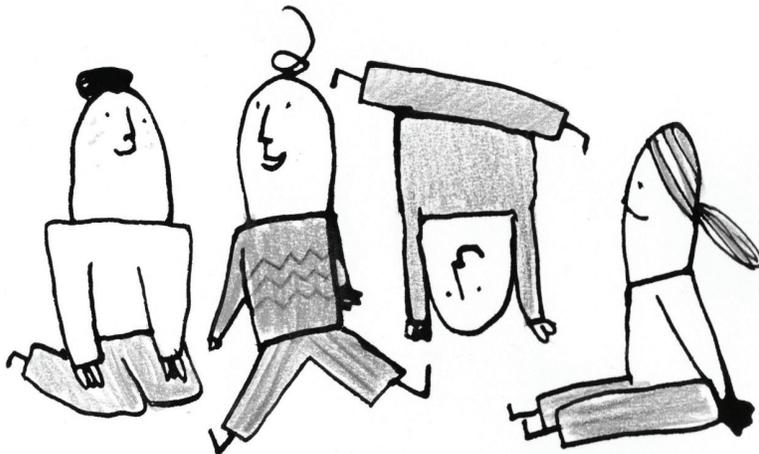
Playing is a fundamental value of our educational experience. Playing activity is a prerogative for living context, relationships and situations. Playing is a premise to life, and helps experiencing situations that promote the well-being and joy in preschools.

Play should be considered a language to discover and a way to increase knowledge and understanding of the world. It develops freedom, creativity and innovation, and by this, cognitive development. Playing requires and fosters commitment, tension and research, and ability to discover the concept of risk, which is fundamental in life.

It is an exercise, a learning process that promotes discovery of potential and possibilities for individual, social and cultural rights by favoring dialogue with reality.

## *Project working*

Due to the reasons explained, we believe that it should be fundamental, in preschools, to work by projects. Teachers should work on projects with small groups of children, trying to make research on one or more topics, using several languages and strategies to proceed in this process of knowledge-building. The projects that teachers and children develop in start by children's interests and curiosity, and are developed in a circular process empowering the knowledge process itself. The topic of investigation may derive directly from teacher observations of children's spontaneous play and exploration, or by the discussions made in morning assembly, or maybe from a curiosity of the parents. No matter which origin they have, projects should generate an amount of interest and uncertainty in order to provoke children's creative thinking and problem-solving. Project are also open to different dynamics of exploration.



Projects should pay attentions at least to the following dimensions:

-**Relational:** children should work together, by questioning and challenging each other, but moreover by sharing process of cooperation and collaboration.

This is supported by working in little group instead of individually. Children help each other by “borrowing” ideas and strategies of learning;

- **Cognitive:** cognition is one of the main focus of this process. ECCD are schools, where children learn and get ready for life challenges. There should be a big attention to the issues children are learning, keeping it all visible through documentation;

- **Emotional:** emotional aspects are fundamental in education, also for the result of cognitive processes and achievement learning. Traditional measures of intelligence, although providing some degree of predictive validity, have not been able to account for a large portion of the variance in work performance and career success. As Goleman (1998) states, “when IQ test scores are correlated with how well people perform in their careers the highest estimate of how much difference IQ accounts for is about 25 percent (Hunter & Hunter 1984, Schmidt & Hunter 1981). A careful analysis, though, suggests that a more accurate figure may be no higher than 10 percent and perhaps as low as 4 percent” (Sternberg 1997);

- **Perceptive:** the way we perceive the world is fundamental to give shape to our thoughts. Aesthetics aspects should be of maximum interest for preschool teachers working with/in a quality environment.

Projects begin with teachers observing and discussing with children about different topic of interest, and by this we develop the process of knowledge and investigation.

Project should be developed in little groups. This is a choice guided by the nature of learning and the nature of groups. First of all, our focus point is that we are interested in the learning processes and outcomes involved in solving problems or creating products that are considered meaningful in a culture. This is in accord with Howard Gardner's definition of an intelligence as the ability to solve problems or fashion products that are valued in a culture or community. We respect the tendency to simplify the complexity of either the individual's or the group's learning process or the content oriented learning, but the type of learning in which we are interested engages children cognitively, emotionally, and aesthetically. It is based on real-world problem solving that draws on critical and creative thinking as well as disciplinary knowledge and skills. Moreover, we believe that individuals learn by participating in a group process. We consider knowledge as socially constructed and distributed among individuals, groups, and cultural products and productions.

We believe that participation in groups is key to the construction of individual learning.

We also believe that group learning can lead to the creation of a shared culture or collective knowledge that is greater than what any one individual knows.

Of course, though they are part of groups individuals learn autonomously, constructing their personal understandings of the world. In this sense, all learning is individual. But when children and adults are in groups, they also learn from and with others. In groups we encounter new perspectives, strategies, and ways of thinking that enable us to learn from others. We also learn *with* others, modifying, extending, clarifying, and enriching our own ideas and those of others. This process of learning should be shared through what we call project.



reflections

sharing & dialogs

...

*framework  
connections between  
researches and experiences*

sharing & dialogs  
with parents

games, actions,  
gestures, expressions

observations

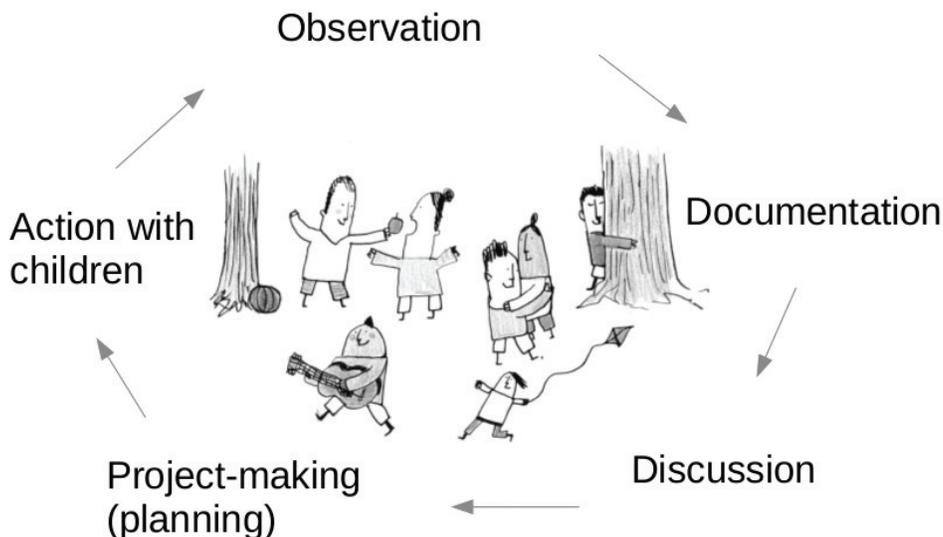
project proposal

mind maps

...

projects

Teacher should start by observing children, meaning with it to collect information about curiosities, interest, and cultural desires of children. They should be documented and put together, in order to create the basis for a discussion between teachers and adults around the true interests of children. This process should lead to decide in which direction explore the world with children, and then act with them, to start again an observation and so on. This process should continue until there is interest for the little group of children toward the topic they are investigating.





## **Observation**

*Children are all different, have different intelligences, different languages and different strategies to discover and give a meaning the world. Our work is to support their learning strategies ad processes. This is the reason why we have to observe them. Observing not to evaluate but to know, and to enter in relation.*

## ***Documentation***

The children in their learning and the structuring of knowledge, develop a continuous research about everything. In the classroom, in the square, in the garden, in common spaces in atelier but also at home or elsewhere, children dig into constants and variations of what they encounter, generating theories on it, and creating cognitive maps and patterns of meaning.

They build and invent reciprocity between the “elements” (subjects, objects, situations, events and experiences). This cognitive process facilitates the structuring of knowledge. And this is a process of pure research, which brings into play a variety of strategies and countless methodologies, some of which are more or less naive, while others very close to a scientific approach.

Adults can support this work of cultural construction by children’s listening, reinforcing and underlying their discoveries. The first strategy is the documentation.

Documentation allows adults to have working material, and to be able to investigate the processes of children, enhancing the products (in terms of products of learning, and therefore culture). It develop an increasingly awareness and make it circular and continuous the process of learning.

There are several strategies of documentation. Some of these require a lot of preparation tools and high technological capacity, while others are very simple but also effective. The choice of the type of documentation depends on the process to document and then by observation.

The observation, in our perspective, is subjective and participatory. It is performed by the teachers, who shares the experiences and stories with children, and therefore can not have an objective, aloof point of view. This

*Documentation of processes of learning give us working instruments.*

*We can collect observations about behaviours, phrases, drawings, creations, relations...*

*The task is not to evaluate but to know.*





subjectivity gives us a great potential, and should not be seen as a problem or as a limit. In a preschool there are many subjective points of view, like those of all the teachers. Sharing these different point of view can create a sort of social objectivity. The observation should start by different, well defined focuses, by which the teachers should start the observation and define issues regarding the project or the development of the child.

We have to work on documentation in order to enable educators, children and parents to perceive and become aware of children's learning, by telling stories, by displaying dialogue, models, planning books and charts, project pamps and charts.

Documentation is also a support for the education of teachers, enabling adults to have first-hand material to reflect on children's processes in group meetings. Documentation is also a mile stone for the development of the curriculum, including planning and consulting with children, parents and staff.

Documentation is considered one of the most important opportunity of qualitative evaluation, encouraging staff to look deeply at their practice, question and review their own philosophy in the light of their knowledge gained through studying and exploring experiences with children.

Documentation is, in the end, an opportunity to link with teachers of Primary 1, and share informations regarding the history of children.

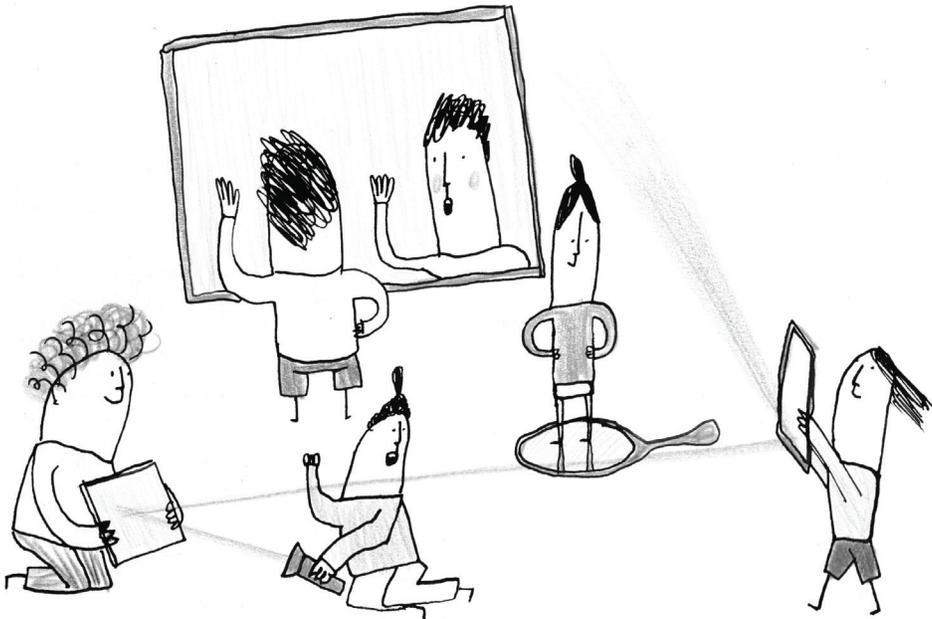
### *Environment as third educator*

An appropriate environment support the educator's role in promoting children's development and learning. It is necessary to set up attractive, open, recognizable and rich space organized in different interest areas.

Environment can be considered as a living system, in which children and adults build a dense network of significant relationships, able to support communication.

Preschool as a place where people live and where it is possible to strengthen this process of knowledge construction.

The role of the environment is crucial in children learning processes. It is either directly, in the relation, in the exchange, in the dialogue, in the clash



too, but also indirectly, in contexts that we create and design. An environment that allows children to implement relevant behaviors, which oblige or encourage them to develop the possibilities, the potentials and the skills they can master. An environment that does not inhibit the children's cognitive processes. The child, driven by curiosity by an innate need to give a meaning to the world, conduct a continuous research for new focus and new areas of investigation and exploration. The ability to explore is an action that develops by the interaction and by the sharing between adults and children. This must be a starting point when we design spaces, environments, situations which are direct and indirect tools scaffolding this exploration.

The physical environment and the psychological-relational system help to reinforce the sense of safety, self-esteem and self-empowerment of the child, which is aroused by the perception of being listened in all its potential.

The preschools are life-contexts that are continually being changed by facts, events, happenings, personal stories or relations.

The design of spaces should start by this awareness. The space is designed to unite, encourage, and not only to contain these narratives, these events. It must support the individual, the relationship and the group in this difficult process of knowledge construction. It must maintain and promote individual and collective memory.

The actions and the significant steps of these processes should be clearly visible, and the environment should encourage and relaunch experiences by keeping visible the documentation.

The environment must allow the collective relationship such as the individual

reflection. It must arouse curiosity. The preschool is a relational system where children are not only initiated into a culture, but must have the ability to produce and create it. The documentation has an important role. The task of the documentation is to provide the group and the individual the ability to read themselves by an external point of view, external but participating.

It is important to select, choose and arrange materials. They should not be structured. They can be mostly either natural or recycled. The children can experiment with the materials without expectation, just giving expression to their potential and creativity.

Also nature and natural materials should have a place in classrooms.

The recycled materials help developing awareness around environment and nature.

Children have right to a challenging environment, where everything has been thought by the beginning to meet their interests and curiosities. So it is fundamental that the teacher observe the children and the way they use spaces, in order to continuously develop and modify the organization of the environment, which should be considered as a living and changing element rather than a box.

The organization of the educational space is planned in order to meet the rights of children. It has to combine need for intimacy/emotional safety of the child with the need for exploration/discovery. So spaces should not be too tight or too open. There should be a good balance of these two elements. The space qualifies itself as a place characterized by intentionality, able to communicate friendship, accessibility, readability and to guest functional differentiation. The organization of space should encourage and support the

variety and quality of relationships, allow children to work in big or small groups, supporting every possible children experience in a dynamic way.

Children work on projects that are shaped by their interests and ideas and the learning environment can change with the theme of each project. The projects inspire and stimulate creativity. They are based on group work, research and exploration. The education focuses on a child's natural development. It's child-centered.

The preschools, for example, should have piazzas, or common spaces like halls, entrances, aisle, hallways; common areas where the children can get together with children of other classrooms.

Classroom should be large, consisting of different spaces (not necessary separate rooms) all connected to each other. They basically need a large, multipurpose circle time area where the children are encouraged to discuss and share their own feelings or ideas. Other spaces should welcome every children activity. The children can shift from one space to another to work on different activities with different groups. This allows them to interact and communicate with all the other classmates.

*Environment should be considered as third educator. We have to create a “complicity” with environment in order to be able to scaffold, together, children's learning of processes*

Each child should have a mailbox to send and receive messages from friends. This is a perfect way to encourage communication between children and a proper opportunity for the children to express themselves through their paintings or messages.

As said before, one of the most important features of the schools is the documentation. There should be a documentation dedicated to the children. Panels should be visible on the wall at children's height, so that they can read and see the experiences of which they are protagonists. The documentation allows the children to re-interpret their projects and the parents to see what their children have been working on.

Each class has also a parent-information table where they share feedback on the projects and the daily activities with parents.

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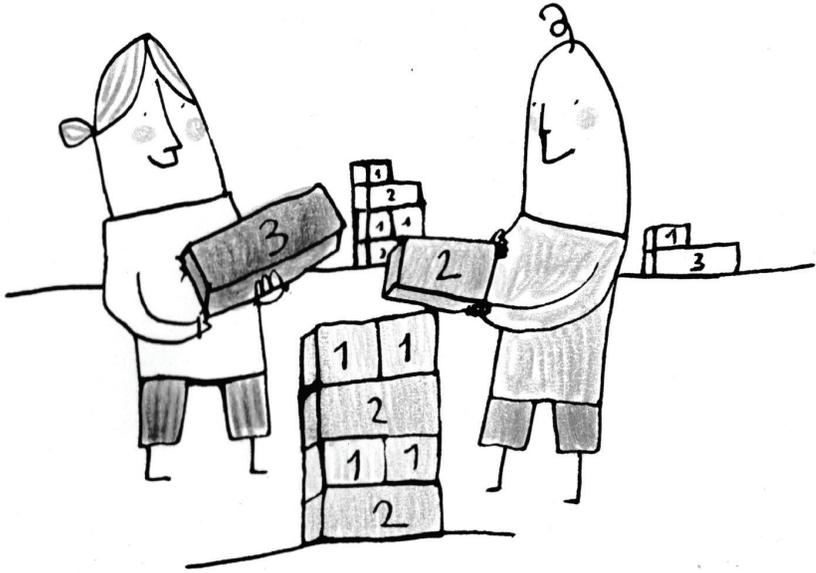
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### ***constructivity***

*In this area children experiment, through playing activity, the possibility to work with mathematics and physics concepts.*

*They should be free to play and through observation it is possible to perceive their learning achievement. Having a theme can support their meaningbuilding and the motivation*

#### **Learning Achievement Standard**

1. Physical Health 2. Approaches toward learning 5. Cognitive development 6. Motor development



### ***make-believe area***

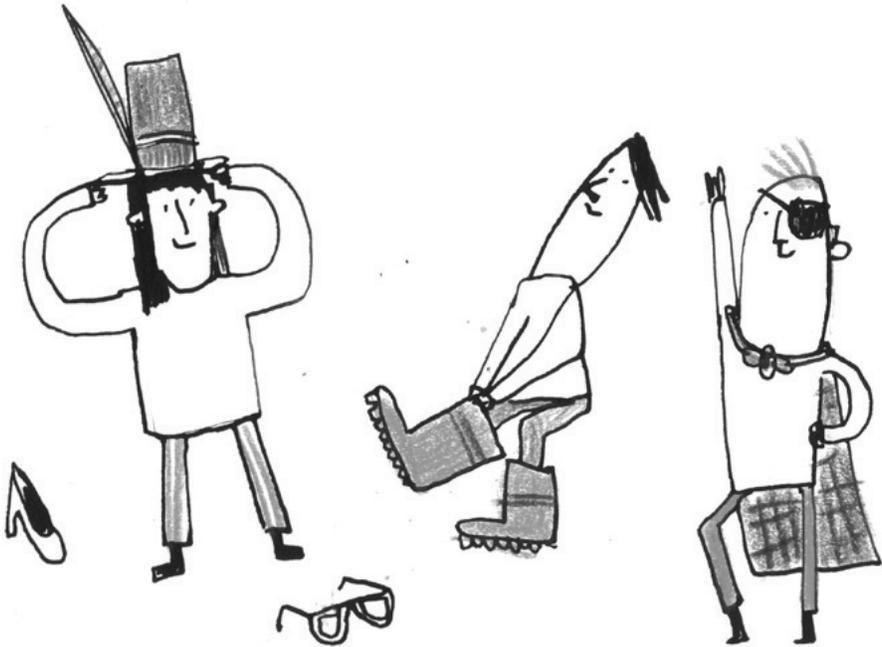
*In this area children can express their deep reflections, thoughts, emotions in a free way, through the make-believe playing, which is an activity that can give a lot of information regarding their holistic wellness*

#### **Learning Achievement Standard**

1. Physical Health 3. Social and Emotional development 4. Linguistic development and Communication 5. Cognitive development 6. Motor development

## ***drama playing***

*Children as well can benefit from playing in a drama playground where they can find old dressing, hats, shoes and accessories to support their make believe playing activities.*



### **Learning Achievement Standard**

1. Physical Health 3. Social and Emotional Development 4. Linguistic development and Communication 5. Cognitive development 6. Motor development

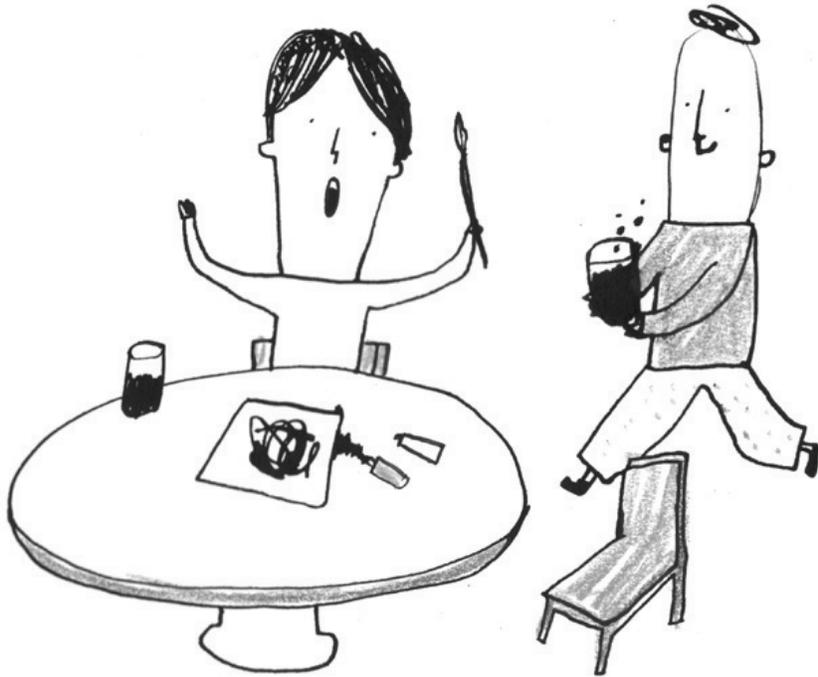
## **book area**

*Starting to handle books, reading stories, discussing about it is proved as the best way to start to work with literature, code learning and not only. It helps children with storytelling and mening building, two processes which empower each other.*



### **Learning Achievement Standard**

2. Approaches toward learnings 3. Social and Emotional Development 4. Linguistic development and Communication 5. Cognitive development



### ***atelier of arts***

*Children like to build, paint, work with clay, draw, make handycraft.*

*Atelier of arts can be the area where children find ready-to-use materials for their artistic and creative activities.*

*It is important that they have materials at hand, that can take and use without asking to the adults.*

#### **Learning Achievement Standard**

2 Approaches toward learnings 3. Social and Emotional Development 5. Cognitive development 6. Motor development

## ***garden and outdoor***

*The relation with the outdoor area is fundamental as well as with the garden. When it is possible, children should stay in the playground area outside and be free to discover the world around. This is good for mind and body.*



### **Learning Achievement Standard**

1 Physical Health 3. Social and Emotional Development 6. Motor development

## *Time schedule*

The organization of daily time is linked to the need of creating an harmony between the timing and pace of the child with those of the institution. Not often, indeed, this two “rythm” are well balanced and there should be the capacity, for the preschool environment, to find a continuos negotiation without de-structuring the organization.

It is a difficult job that needs a strong level of collaboration.

The daily time schedule must have a regular structure that allows the child to find stable points of reference and fit into a temporal context recognizable and predictable. The attention to time must be extended to the phases of transitions between an activity and another, paying attention to continuity and coherence with the education proposals. This all must be considered planning the organization of educational time schedule.

During the **morning assembly**, children have to express their potential and their possibilities in all fields, including social competencies and democracy-building.

Morning assembly helps children expressing their idea, listen to others, negotiating, building strategies of peer decision making through consensus. Early in the morning as well as in the afternoon there should be time for **free playing** be it in little group or individual. Playing is a fundamental activity of discovery of the world (Gregory Bateson).

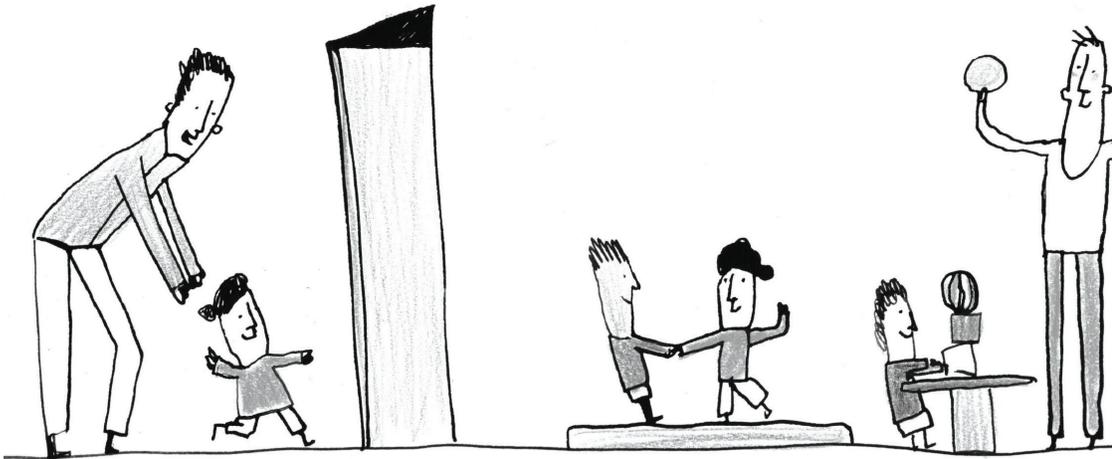
Free playing activity, out of being a time to fulfill the day schedule, is a fundamental process that have to be observed to grab ideas on children development.

Free playing is one of the basis for the **project activities**, that are the time

and period in which children explore and investigate concept useful for their individual and collective growth. Children divide in little groups and work together around topic of interests.

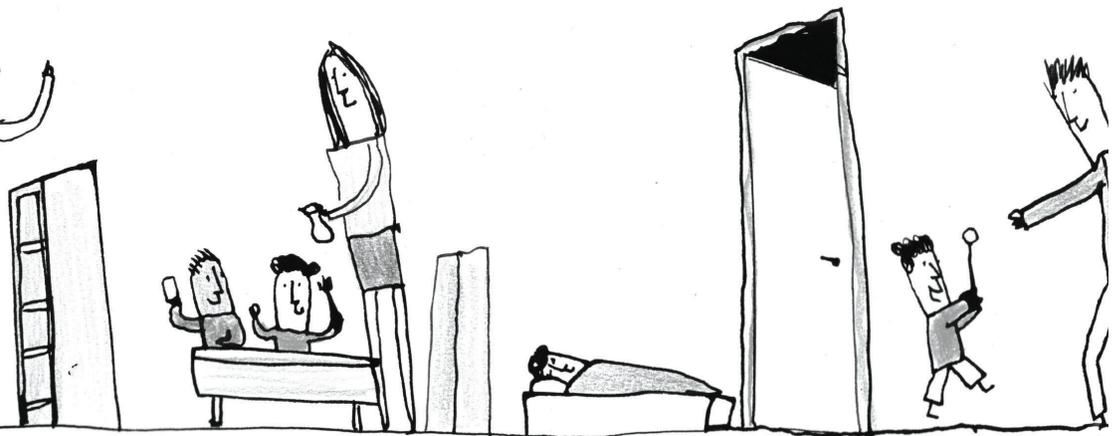
**Lunch time**, just like every single moment of the daytime, is an educational opportunity. Eating together means, for example, sharing rules, sharing an activity and a convivial time in which children are deeply involved in an analysis of what the other children do, and in conforming their behavior with those of other children, or else, to behave differently in order to create an identity. We can not consider the breakfast and lunch time as a mere feeding opportunity, which is also, as well, important.

Children can be observed during the breakfast/lunch time. Preschool teachers can get ideas or information about the health of the child, about the emotional situation and about the level of well-being of the child, in a proactive perspective, in order to be able to support him/her as much as possible.



The basis must also be created by sharing with board of parents choices about the tender of the food, or about the kind, quality and quantity of it before starting to buy that.

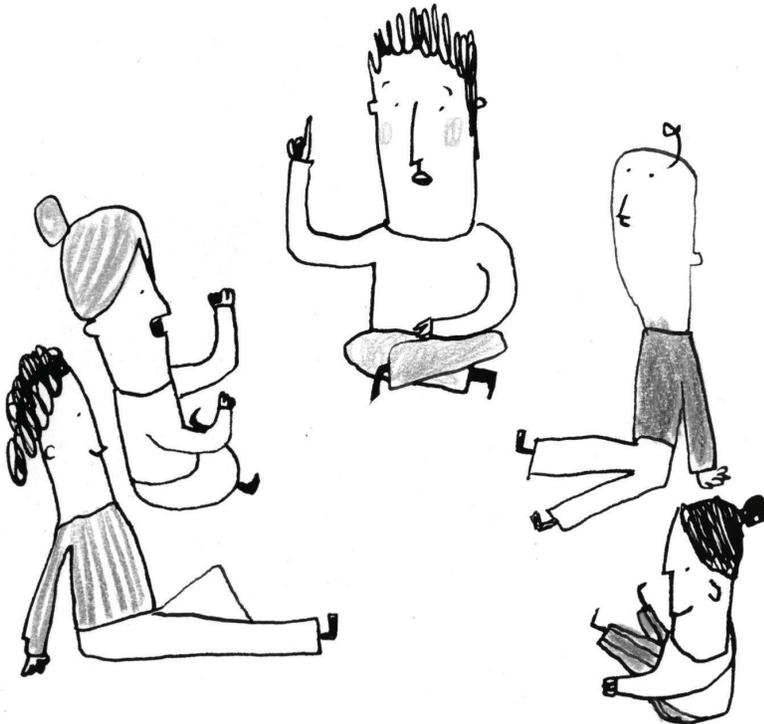
*Day time schedule is important to organize the day.  
At the same time it is necessary to create a time  
schedule centered on children's need.  
Time should be predictable but at the same time  
they should not become a cage.*



## ***morning assembly***

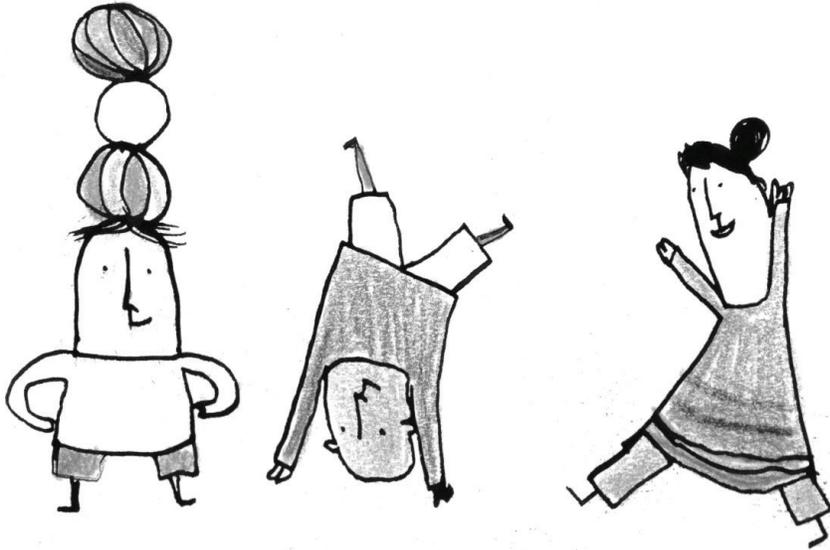
*Children have to express their potential and their possibilities in all fields, including social competencies and democracy-building.*

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### **Learning Achievement Standard**

2. Approaches toward learnings 3. Social and Emotional development 4. Linguistic development and Communication 5. Cognitive development 6. Motor development



### ***free playing***

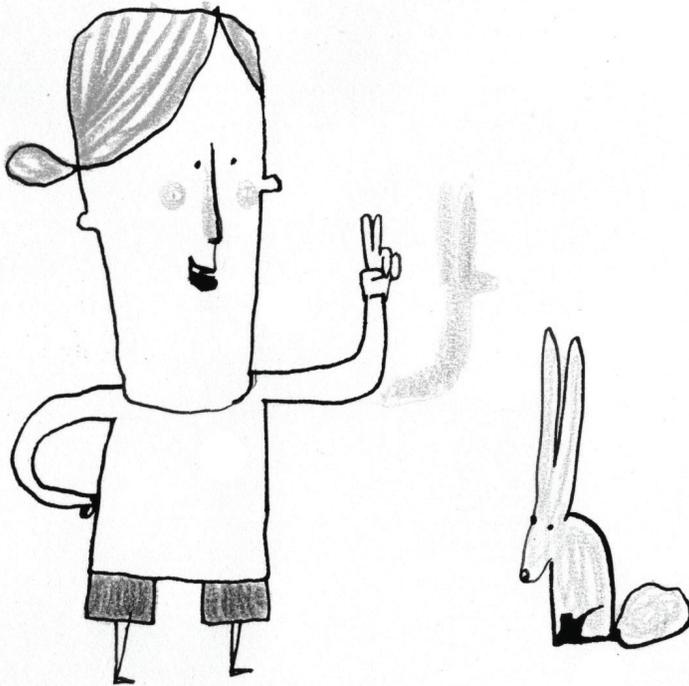
*Early in the morning as well as in the afternoon there should be time for free playing be it in little group or individual. Playing is a fundamental activity of discovery of the world (Gregory Bateson). Free playing activity, out of being a time to fulfill the day schedule, is a fundamental process that have to be observed to grab ideas on children development.*

#### **Learning Achievement Standard**

1 Physical Health 3. Social and Emotional Development 4. Linguistic development and Communication 6. Motor development

## ***project activities***

*The morning assembly is useful to plan the daytime, including the project working around different themes interesting for the children. In this time, children go in deep with different topics, and build all together with the adults their knowledge and meaning.*



### **Learning Achievement Standard**

2. Approaches toward learnings 3. Social and Emotional development 5. Cognitive development 6. Motor development



## ***lunch time***

*Eating all together is not only a moment to feed. In this period children negotiate rules, way and strategies to stay together and to develop a shared image of the group. By this activity we can have a better group management.*

**Learning Achievement Standard**

3. Social and Emotional development 6. Motor development

## *Participation of families*

The dialogue with families is a strong element of the educational project of the kindergarten and more in general, of the culture of childhood.

In preschool, the relationship between children, parents and teachers are developed and strengthened in the exchange, in dialogue, sharing ideas and resources: the preschool is in fact a place of collective evolution and communication between individual, groups and society. ECCD are a community of people living together for a great number of hours a week (an average of 30 in Albania), sharing a process of personal and mutual growth between children, parents and professionals.



Preschool has to be seen as a system, a network in which communication and exchange between children, teachers and parents become deep and tight, generating co-construction of knowledge and co-education.

The preschool should be seen as an educational space based on relationship of co-responsibility in the scaffolding of children growth, enabled by recognizing the active role and responsibility of each family in the education of their children.

The preschool must recognize the parent as an “expert” of childhood. Especially during the initial period, when children start to attend the preschool, relating to parents as experts means to give them the role of those in charge of accompanying and reassuring children, but also enabling them to gradually decentralizes children by their selves, with strong benefits for their emotional development.

Using a drama metaphor, talking about parental involvement in this context means asking parents to become active actors, not just “interpreter”, in the educational process within the institution (and not from outside).

Sharing and co-building meaning between parents and teachers means giving value to everyone’s point of view, facing the risk of the arising of possible conflicts that may generate from the perception of the difference.

Listen to the difference in order to construct and share a common project is not easy and requires everyone an effort to understand and accept the others’ point of view and consider it not a constraint but a resource.

Participation in school life expresses the concept of democracy as a way of life, as a fundamental act to build the future.

Malaguzzi said that:

Education, requires a lot of solidarity, extensive comparisons, there are several places, choices socialized, many stakeholders and especially of many skills.

Participation has deep historical and cultural roots, but it is also true that the family system is still in continuous and gradual transformation. Collaboration with families is not frozen in time, is constantly evolving, in relation with the changes in society.

Make good proposals of opportunities for interaction and exchange becomes the first step in the preschool, and grow on daily basis. The parent awareness, as well, grows and evolves with the child, in preschool.

*Educating is an action that should be performed by the whole community.*

*Parents should have a pivotal role in this process, be it because they are psychologically fundamental for the children, be it*

*because they spend a lot of time with children.*

*So we have to create an alliance with them in order to create a so-called educating community.*

We can share with them different opportunities. Among these, there can be an **opening assembly**, which describes the preschool to families and inform about the organization, the philosophy of education, the facilities provided. Generally, it is important that there is also an official of the municipality to strengthen the relationship with the Institutions.

The opening assembly is held usually between the last week of August and the middle of September.

During the year there are at least **three general meetings** of all the parents of every classroom, with the participation of the teachers, and a representative of the supporting staff (cleaners, cooks and so on). In these meeting we share the development of the projects/program/learning achievement, and of the general situation of the classroom.

We can organize also one or more **working meeting for parents**, in which we can work together to build things for the preschools (like furnitures, toys or other needs).

It is necessary to organize **thematic evenings** meeting with parents, as Save the Children usually does, in which we can discuss with parents about different topics related to early childhood, like parenting or daily life in kindergarten. Then there are the **parties**, which have great value for meeting and conviviality. Parents should work together with teachers to organize this party.

The **parents board** of the preschool is also very important to organize the opportunity of participation of parents in the management of the ECCD.

The board may activate so-called **project groups**, thematic groups that can be activated for a specific purpose which can be attended by parents interested. The project groups are a very effective strategy to achieve certain results in



## ***Continuous Professional Development (CPD)***

Continuous professional development (CPD) plays an essential part in increasing ECEC professionals'

competences. In certain cases, participating in training allows staff not only to improve their knowledge

and develop additional professional skills in ECCD, but also to upgrade their qualifications. CPD is more often compulsory for educational and care staff than for auxiliary staff, cooks, assistants. Therefore,

this analysis focuses on the status of CPD for educational and care staff.

The Continuous Professional Development training is one of the most important opportunity concerning quality in preschools.

Thinking and being alive are the same, as Hannah Arendt says, and we assume that teachers training is a strong support in their continuous process of thinking, sharing, discussing about children's processes. We believe that questions are more crucial than answers, so that the knowledge and the understanding must pop up from constant exploration of concepts.



As also Howard Gardner thinks, one of the most important process of education of the staff is based on group-work, considered as fundamental to refine tools, ways, methods, approaches.

It is a way of thinking and working that begins by sharing different points of view, concerning the concrete application of theories to situations that are continuously changing.

It is a highly qualifying process because it involves the continuous questioning, discussing and sharing of ideas, thoughts and experiences which turn out to be extremely creative, generating new ideas about processes of work with children.

The training in kindergartens must be consistent with the system of which it is part: preschool should be considered as a system of systems, relationships and communication between children, teachers and parents.

In the delicate approach to education and training with the children and their families, there should be a huge investment in education and reflections between the staff.

It should be held through meetings between experts and working groups, but designed so that the thoughts produced in the meetings can “go out” and get to the families, also giving them the opportunity to give their contribution.

The group education thus have a dual purpose: to train and at the same time to develop reflections coming in and going beyond.

In the groups reflections, in addition to the theoretical componence and the production of different points of view around a certain theme, inevitably pop-up a reflection about the quality of the different working experiences. A sort of naïve evaluation. Expert teachers and young teacher can put together

their resources (experience vs education) to open a debate which, if properly mediated, can bring enrichment to the whole group.

The key issue is that everyone (and everything) is or can be included in the system. Focus groups are a good tool to sharpen professionalism

We consider the preschool as an environment that strongly represents and declares thoughts, philosophies of education, the choices concerning values ethic and policy. ECCD are a place dialogue between children and adult is boost for learning processesn and knowledge; active listening supports and enhances the subjectivity and complexity, and then training becomes an essential tool for growth.

### ***In-service training***

One of the greatest benefits of continuous professional development is the opportunity to get together with other early childhood teachers or caregivers and share ground experiences.

It allow preschool teachers and caregiver to learn more about the latest trends in education and discipline. At the same time, they can share choices on how to implement practices and procedures in classrooms, and in all context with children. Moreover, Continuous education can support the sharing of a felling of professionalism. Often early childcare educators are underpaid and feel unappreciated. Investing in education shows the importance of this work. There are different types of education in the kindergarten:

- 1) an internal education, carried out within each ECCD, with individual and working groups;

2) inter-experiential education (permanent): it grows every day in the practices between preschool teachers and coordinators;

3) “external” education, based on experts, which may vary from year to year, depending on the training plan, and on the education need of the ECCD.

Internal education is usually carried out by the educator of the ECCD and is based on the meeting of the preschool teachers of the same classroom or with the working group. The themes are mostly related to the happenings of everyday life, documentation or the planning and evolution of the project.

Inter-experiential (permanent) education is a sort of co-construction of the processes of work. It combine the “savoir faire” with the “how to be” of teachers within a working context. It constitutes the “know-how” of the teacher, based on the dialogical interaction with the working group. This can, for example, allow the teacher to take possession of actual practices work and knowledge that constitute the “how to be”. The role played by the expert teachers is crucial in the process of socialization to the work of the new practitioners entering in the educational context.

Through continuous dialogue around practice and experience, the preschool teacher and the caregiver becomes capable of performing a self-assessment of his/her own educational and professional behavior and the capacity of assume different roles within the system working.

Learning and self-evaluation grows in a whole-educating context, enabling all the participant to become able to participate in a process of attribution of meaning to the experiences and the emotions oof learning.

Opportunities of education organized with experts or with professionals which have experiences to share (exterbal education) produces a system

of opportunities emerging in a more complex framework, represented by the training plan that can vary from year by year, based on the needs and professional curiosities emerging. It should not be based on each preschool, but instead should be the opportunity to put together all the preschools of a context, a municipality, a district, in order to share energies and resources, and at the same time giving the possibility of meeting other experiences.

### ***Planning adult education***

It's still a widespread belief that the training can be done without too much commitment, without designing it, as if it could produce useful effects to an organization without a preparatory action consistent with the requirements of the system as a whole.

We believe that, before acting, before spreading out the program and the education opportunities, we must strongly motivate the initiative, the logical structure, and also to define the conditions of the process of education, in direction of a change that should be clear in the minds of designers as well as of the coordinators and mainly of the same practitioners. Indeed, we believe it is important to spend a lot of time in planning, after having collected the ideas and the needs of the preschool teachers and of the caregiver toward continuous education (and, if possible, also of the other workers). We believe that, as a prerequisite, it is important to imagine what kind of change we want to produce, and therefore, what kind of preschool, childcare, ECCD we would like to offer to children and parents, and then translate all these ideas in a project.

To perform this action, and to plan this Continuous Education Plan, directors

and coordinators in a specific area, at the end of the school year (or at the latest at the beginning of the new one) should organize a meeting with the working group (preschool teachers and staff) in order to collect their training needs and desires. Training needs should arise from periodic (year-long) observations of the educator and by their projects actions.

The reference of this development should be the sharing, in a defined (but not closed) context, of the culture of childhood between children, parents, families, citizens. This is the cultural framework of our action, which over the years should evolve to meet progressively meet the contemporary world of children and families.

We believe that the starting point for an effective Continuous Development Plan is based on the concept that all contemporary organizations are based on the most important strategic issue, which is the human capital, declined in the intelligence of all employees, without exception.

Starting by this reflection, we believe that the educational plan of the adults working with early childhood does not mean only to organize courses for teachers. It also means creating contexts for reflection, study and training for support staff, educators, civil servants, but also for students in order to enable them to perform the skills at the basis of their education. And we also believe that times for reflection and training can also be offered to parents and administrators.

### ***Opportunities***

As we have said, the training plan consists of various actions and opportunities, planned in order to meet the needs at the basis of the project.

Group Discussion (focus group): it can be considered as the main opportunity. It is the main approach to discuss the main specific issues regarding the project work with children, and the themes emerging in the daily context. These themes usually emerge in the discussion with/between the working groups, but also with families or between directors and coordinators of the ECCD. Once captured these in-depth needs, begins a journey of self-assessment with regard to specific issues or broader themes. The group reflect in-deep and assumes the function of “amplifier”, widening the reflection so as to embrace and exploit any different opinion as a richness, and supporting any changing point of view.

Action-Research Groups: this training method grows in continuity (and as a logical consequence) to the focus groups. The action-research group sometimes meet the local and/or regional lines of thought and do more targeted actions concerning children’s processes of learning.

Through the construction of the Action Researches in the classrooms, in the preschools and between preschools, though a problem-solving approach, we aim to prospective teachers to develop, in

concert with others, an approach to teaching that grounded in collaborative problem posing and problem solving. By thrusting each others into situations where we have to rely on one another to identify problems, asking questions, collecting information and generate a plan of action, we ask each others to craft very specific type of preschool teacher identity. We envision this

teacher as professionals who understands that there are multiple ways to see, analyse, reason and imagine the possibilities inherent in classroom

research. Rather than just superimposing upon the teacher the identity of researcher, we want prospective teachers to experience a commingling of these identity by practicing ground research everyday.

It is a process in which the contribution of educational staff is central as an object for reflection, analysis, thus supporting a research project that evaluates and delineates values and thoughts socially defined and co-constructed.

Lectures and assembly meeting: by working with Continuous Development Plan, we have the possibility of entering in dialogue with several people about theoretical issues: authors, theories, cultures. Assembly meetings, lectures, seminars, conferences offer the possibility of a more classic option of education, which should turn out as useful and sometimes subsequent with the focus groups and action-research groups.

Workshops: these meetings are designed to deepen knowledge of one or more children's language and/or technique. It has a more practical focus, considering the need of daily practice that can be available in the field work with children, with their processes of learning, and it becomes an additional opportunity to "feed" ideas. It is characterized by a strong focus on action. A "to do" that is expanded to a broader cultural context that seeks to exploit the full range of possibilities relating to that particular language (or technique).

All kinds of meeting contributing to the Continuous Development Plan are to be considered as "in network"; they create a circular continuity between the conversations, the debates the researches and the experiments within the classrooms. It is fundamental to plan an evaluation and a self-report of every action of the Development Plan, not just in the way of "customer satisfaction",





# Children development: connections between Hand in Hand and Albanian learning achievement standards

Learning can be defined as the process of acquisition of knowledge and skills. Is the process coming into action when learners demonstrate the ability to acquire new knowledge and skills, to use existing knowledge and skills in different contexts, to recognize and solve problems, to practise what they know and to revise and replay what they know in order to retain it in the memory.

Recent literature and research in early childhood has focused on a wider view of learning involving context and relationships. Learning is embedded in social contexts and experience. It involves dispositions and relationships, including attitudes to learning and the perception of oneself as a learner.

We want to highlight the social nature of learning, viewing the child as an active and equal partner in the social process but also recognizing the

importance and significance of self-esteem.

Our perspective welcome the ideas of Jean Piaget and Jerome Bruner. They viewed learning as an active process in which learners construct new ideas or concepts based on their current and past knowledge. Piaget developed a theoretical framework that views learning as three increasingly powerful ways of representing the world: enactive representation (thought based only on actions), iconic representation (where the child can form and use images of objects without the objects having to be present) and symbolic representation (where the child can use and think in terms of symbols such as words).

Bruner claim that the learner selects and transforms information, constructs hypotheses, and makes decisions, relying on a cognitive structure or framework. This mental model gives meaning and organization to experiences and allows the individual to 'go beyond the information given'.

Gardner offers a wide perspective starting by the cognitive process. Through the theory of multiple intelligences he argued that people learn in different ways and that there are different types of intelligences. He suggested that everyone possesses each type of intelligence to varying degrees. Gardner identified the following seven different types of intelligence: bodily kinaesthetic, linguistic, logical and mathematical, musical, visual and spatial, social (inter-personal) and personal (intra-personal). A key element of Gardner's theory is that learning and intelligence is not fixed. It can and does change throughout each individual's lifetime. Gardner often criticised schooling because he feels that it recognizes and promotes a limited view of intelligence (especially logical-mathematical). One of the strengths of his theory is that multiple intelligence

draws attention to the uniqueness of the learning of each individual child and recognizes the culturally diverse patterns of learning.

We want to focus on the children's ability to reflect on their own thinking and learning. We believe that children are competent in this mind processes, that start by the day they born and continue the whole life. These processes help to regulate and oversee learning, and consist of planning and monitoring cognitive activities, as well as checking the outcomes of those activities. The so-called metacognition does not suddenly develop in later childhood: it is founded in early learning relationships. In a social constructivist perspective, the process of learning means to improve one's participation in (social) systems of activity. From a sociocultural perspective, develop mental processes are not just within individuals but also within group and community processes. A process which we believe as fundamental in supporting learning processes in ECCD is the so-called scaffolding, considering it as a metaphor for the process by which an adult assists a child to carry out a task beyond the child's individual capability. Through the process of 'scaffolding', the adult guides and supports the child's learning by building on what the child is able to do. More recent discussions of the term scaffolding have shifted from an emphasis on relations (adult directing children) to an emphasis on mutuality (same level process). Mutuality describes the degree of emotional intimacy and intuitive understanding involved in joint activities.

These ideas offer a varied scenario in which several theories explain learning process as complex. The development of every child is one of the first matters of concern and strain of parents and teachers. We believe in a preschool where all children develop together, by making experience and enriching each other

through discoveries, thoughts, ideas, opinions, co-operations.

Though the attitude is, as stated, of observing processes of children in a relational way, this will not avoid our educational operator to perform a precise and sharp evaluation of children's processes and progresses in every area of developed by the Albanian Learning Achievement.

As stated in the previous chapter, and in the introduction to the Action Plan, we are very interested in connecting the Albanian Learning Achievement with the Guidelines, that we interpret as a possibility to work with it (and an evolution of it).

So here we list the Learning Achievement, and we explain how we work on it in a holistic and concrete way. On the right column we suggest in which opportunity the Learning Achievement can be observed and evaluated, with a strong concern about considering them as a complex system.

<i>Learning Achievement Area</i>	<i>Hand in Hand Action Plan</i>
<b>Physical Health</b>	<p>There are different opportunities to reflect and grab ideas around physical health. The first and general opportunity is the kind of well-being of the child. We could start by saying that a child is experiencing well-being if he/she plays alone and with the other. So for example, bricks-construction area, make-believe playing area or the garden/outside area are places where it is possible to observe the level of wellness of children.</p> <p>We also think that it is important to have a dialogue with children, as they are more and more aware of their own status (self-awareness is also another important competence that children can develop in this years of life, and that will be fundamental for their general development as persons).</p> <p>Also, physical health has a ground of observation in daily activity like lunch time or sleeping time. So the adults should be able to observe all these period of the day schedule in order to grab information on the children's status.</p>
<b>Approaches to Learning</b>	<p>Learning can be perceived (or kept visible) though a continuous and permanent process of documentation focusing on different area of interest. The main and first, meanwhile, is assembly. Children interested and curious take part in the discussion, make proposal, suggest ideas. In atelier, they can show creativity in individual and interactive situations. It is fundamental to work in little groups, in order to perform better observations, yet because in little group children express better feeling and have more possibilities rather than in big groups. All Learning Achievement will be easily observed in these context, at least.</p>

<p><b>Social and Emotional Development</b></p> <p>This domain is made up of the following sub-domains: Self-perspective, Self-control, Interaction with others, and Solving social problems.</p>	<p>This is a more general domain, covered by all the activities of the preschool, and in general by the interaction between children, and between children and adults.</p> <p>Morning assembly and little group discussion can be a perfect opportunity to investigate these indicators, but the make-believe playing activity is also another fundamental situation, according to Melanie Klein and Donald Winnicott. As said before, also lunch time has great evocative potentials in giving information regarding social and emotional development, and wee-being of the child.</p>
<p>Linguistic Development and Communication</p>	<p>Children learn languages by practicing in peer groups better than other way. And, as Chomsky taught us, language and logic development empower each other. So it is important, for example, to make children work in little group and allow them to discuss and share experiences, strategies, ideas. At the same time, with children age 5 it is important to work with projects about codes and investigate around that issue.</p>
<p>Cognitive Development</p>	<p>Constructing, make-believe playing, projecting but also visiting places and reflecting about that, are just a few examples of opportunities for cognitive development. Every activity should be documented and supported by the teachers, but should be developed through discussions between children, allowing them to make cognitive research around every topic of interest.</p>
<p>Motor Development</p>	<p>Fine Motor Development can be deeply observed in atelier area, where children can work with clay, painting, iron, plastic, wood around art handcraft production. Same for Gross Motor Development, where we can use also observation in specific areas like the hall of the preschool, the drama area and activities, the make-believe playing, out, of course of any gym activities inside and outside the school house.</p>





## **Annex 1 – Suggestions for parent education**

The role of the parents is fundamental in preschool in early childhood education, and it has had increasing recognition in recent years. Many schools now encourage parents to become involved in school life in a variety of ways, through increased dialogue and shared views with teaching staff about children's progress and development, both at home and at school. The task is to create an equal trusting relationship between parents and teachers, involving mutual responsibility and respect. By increasing the information we empower parents to ask sensitive questions about the children's processes of learning. It is difficult for parents to become involved if they are unsure or unaware about children's life in preschool. For this reason it is fundamental to work on documentation. In preschools there should generally be a basic outline of the week's projected activities, a written account of the day's activities, including children's reflections and remarks, and examples of the work produced by the children along with photographs. There may also be a detailed written account of the ongoing project.

A parent education should be provided at several level. Our suggestion is to work at least a two level.

The first is **Children's health** in an holistic perspective.

Example of framework:

- Children's feeding (with experts in the field);
- Children's relation with sleeping
  - General view of the importance of regularity

- Reflections about scaffolding children by reading stories or singing lullaby
- Focusing on the time when children wake up, that are as important as when they start to sleep;
- Awareness about the quality of the sleeping time, considered as a possible indicator of general wellness;
- Relation of the children with anxiety, fears, etc.
  - Fear should not be considered a problem if it will become anxiety
  - Giving value to fears as part of knowledge of life: people without fear can't survive
  - Supporting children in overtaking fears through narrative, art, make-believe playing activities
  - Accustom children to talk about fear as a normal process

Of course every expert can give shape to this meeting by working together with Save the Children, sharing the same values underpinning this guidelines. The second level is about children's processes of learning and the way we can scaffold them. Example of framework:

- Children's processes of learning
  - Emphasis on multiple intelligences
  - Emphasis on different learning speed which is absolutely not an indicator of intelligence and of future success
  - Explanation, in a common language, of the process of "learning to

- learn” as the basis for the first 6 years of life;
- Importance of self-esteem in children, in which parents have a fundamental role;
  - Children different way of learning as a positive process allowing adults to perceive their talents.
- 
- How the preschool support children’s processes of learning
    - Short explanation of the content of the chapter two of this guidelines.
    - Showing of documentation regarding children discoveries in preschools.

It is very important that the experts, while preparing the education, talks about things they are really aware of. So it is important to

1. Share Save The Children values;
2. Know the topic they are going to present;
3. Offer parents the possibility to interact, as a true process of co-construction of culture.

## **Annex 2 – Suggestions for using public spaces**

Public spaces are a common which is fundamental in early childhood education. As professor Tim Waller said, it is time to think also about a “school without a school”, which means to get used to consider public spaces as an educational opportunity. In particular, in public spaces, we can learn how children’s voice could be enabled and raised in public spaces. The practice of democratic engagement and the importance of time for reflection on this process find a perfect ground in public area like parks, libraries, squares, streets and more. As well, it is important for the children to leave traces of their engagement and the project must involve and inform local politicians and policy makers as well as parents.

The public spaces give the idea of something free, that you can access without paying. Free also in the sense that it doesn’t have enclosures. The public spaces are spaces opened for the whole citizenship. Spaces that can be created and transformed by the citizenship. Spaces without limits, that can be built and shared together with the children. It’s a space that can be lived and experienced by more persons, starting from the small children, but also the whole citizenship, a place that can become a meeting point between different generations.

If we let the children take their place in society, it may be a strong boost to the process of democratization of the society as a whole. We should let the children leave a mark on the place they are visiting, to make them be visible on squares and other public places. This gives children the opportunity to display their thoughts and opinions. Public spaces which are fundamental, for children, are ECCD, Pre-school yards, forests, streets, squares, parks, libraries, public facilities, market places and more.

It should be interesting to let them observe these spaces, through their interests and strategies, by giving them photo cameras to see what is their point of view is a working possibility. This enables them in changing point of view, with binoculars, periscopes, magnifying glasses, in order to offer tools that permits them to make different observations. Doing it in a small group is better because in the big group maybe we lose some of the groups interests. It would be interesting to visit these places during different moments of nature's cycles to see and perceive changes and constant issues. Open spaces invite to explore with the body. It's important to explore the same places more times, because each time you visit a place you find new elements. Outdoor spaces support are many senses that we usually don't explore: there are different sounds, perfumes, and other perceptions. The outdoor spaces sustains the imagination. Through the body the children develops their autonomy and self-esteem. It's a free way of tutoring. The families become aware of how the children doesn't need things that are already structured, already perfect or prefabricated, to move their fantasy. Children become like mediators with the families to help them to understand this. It's the children that teach the parents the way that they can use these spaces. So, offering possibilities to make experiences and then sharing with the parents, makes sure that it becomes more democratic. And it becomes even more democratic if it's not only spaces experienced by the children from preschools but by the whole community. If you inhabit and experience a place, then you take care of it more.

*Inspired by BRIC Pilot Project Summary, publication about the EU project BRIC.*

*[bricproject.org](http://bricproject.org)*

### **Annex 3 – Average costs of the preschool**

“There has been a growing recognition among governments across Europe of the importance of investing in early childhood education and care (ECEC). High quality ECEC that is accessible to all children requires substantial investment – be it from public or private sources. Private provision limits the demand on the public purse, but it is often beyond the means of the low-income families. The funding of ECEC varies significantly across European education systems. Many countries consider it an essential public service and provide substantial amounts of public funding. Some countries leave ECEC provision for younger children to the private sector and expect parents to bear all the costs of these services; while in others, children may attend ECEC free of charge from the earliest age. In a few countries, parents pay fees throughout the early years until the beginning of primary education. ECEC may, however, be subsidised via payments to families (through tax relief, allowances or vouchers), via payments to ECEC providers, or through a combination of both”\*. Here follows a short, easy-to-read average cost of a preschool, based on the model underpinning these Guidelines \*\*.

#### ***Cost (general overview)***

Human resources	74,01%
Facilities	24,35%
Materials	1,64%
Total	100,00%

<b>Human resources (74,01% of the total)</b>	
Educators and teachers	68,92%
Auxiliars	10,81%
Special Needs Educators	20,27%
<b>Facilities (24,35% of the total)</b>	
General (Water, energy, telephone)	15,75%
Maintenance facilities	10,14%
Foos	56,73%
Insurances	2,01%
Continuous Development Plan	0,34%
Security and privacy (education)	1,18%
Others	13,86%
<b>Materials (1,64% of the total)</b>	
Books, pencils, papers, materials	41,54%
Food (out of facilities procurement)	1,22%
Cleaning materials	9,55%
Hygiene and Pharmacy	17,75%
Consuming	7,12%
Working clothes	2,68%
Handicap development materials	0,76%
Lenses	0,91%
Fornitures and Hardware	7,92%

\* Report Keydata per Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe, 2014. Eurydice and Eurostat Report, European commission.

\*\* Budget control, Azienda Servizi Bassa Reggiana, Reggio Emilia.

## **Annex 4 – Hand in Hand**

Hand in hand focuses on the possibility of children to be able to discover the world together, to be co-teachers of each other and to be researcher around the meaning of life.

Hand in Hand means collaboration, exchange of ideas and praxis, and the development of the possibility of working in team, which is one of the most important skills requested in the XXI century. Hand in Hand focus also on doing things, on being actor of own life project.

The logo of this Guidelines, drawn by the Italian artist Giuseppe Vitale, is inspired by this values and can be attached to every action connected with this project. It is property of Save The Children Albania.



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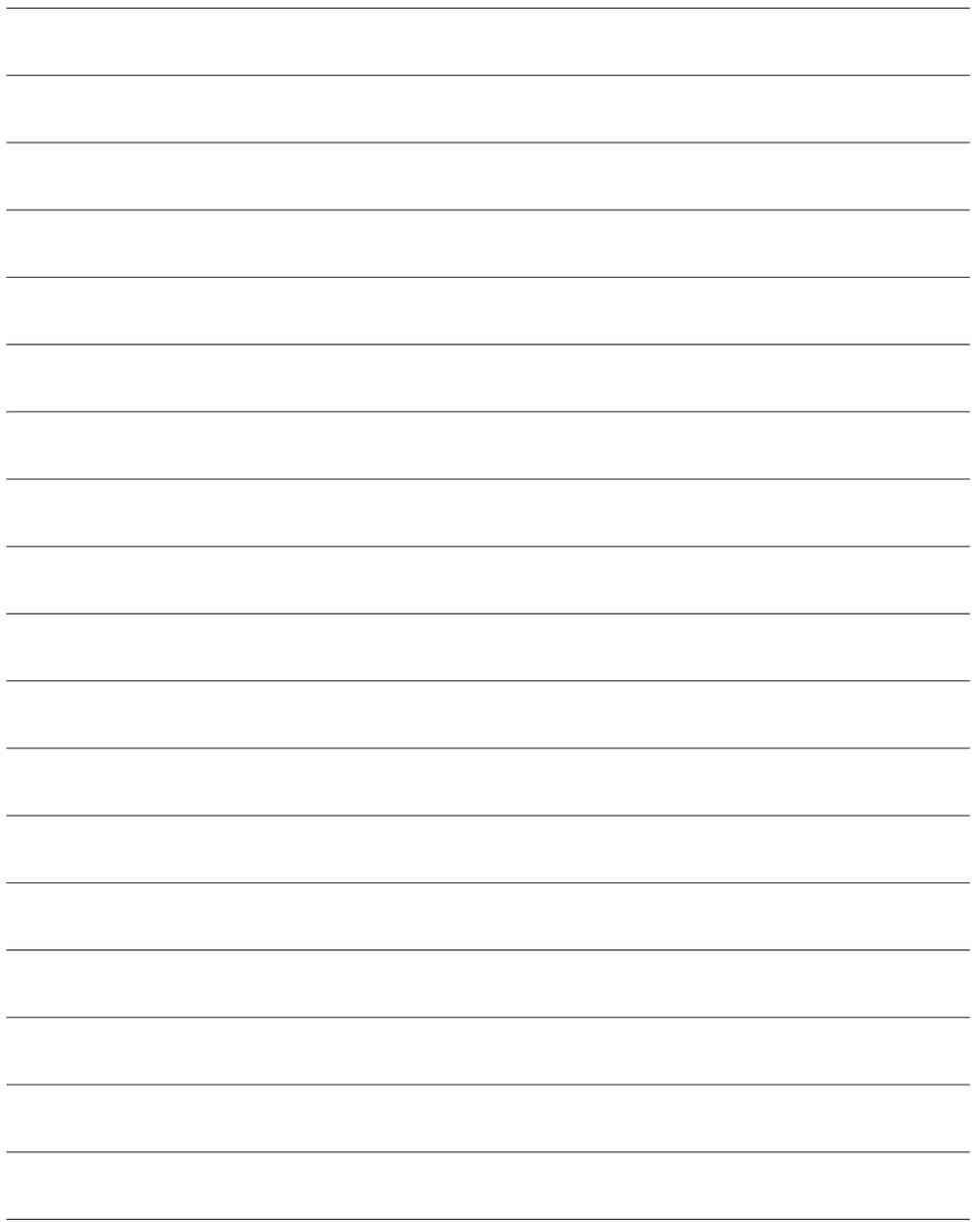
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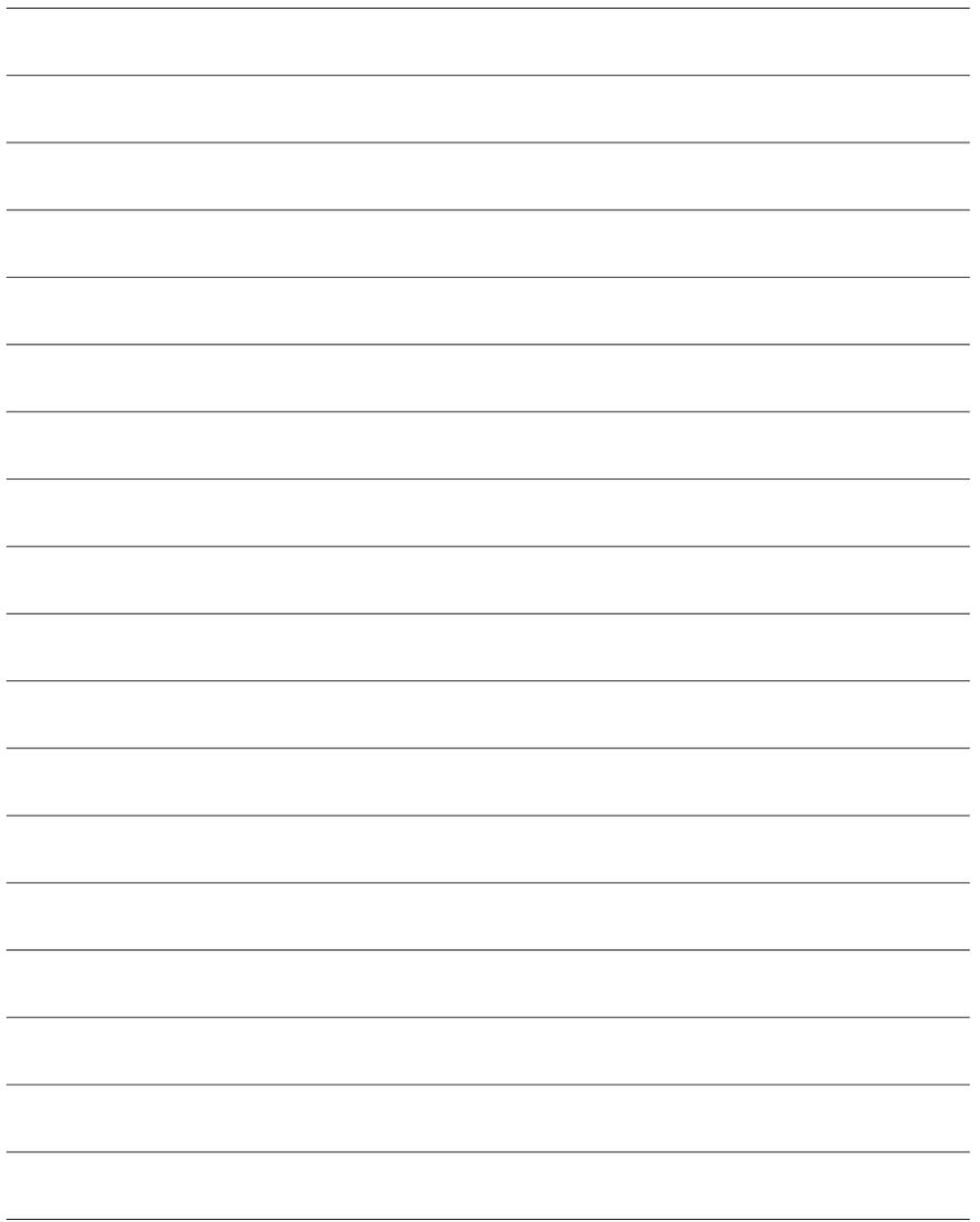
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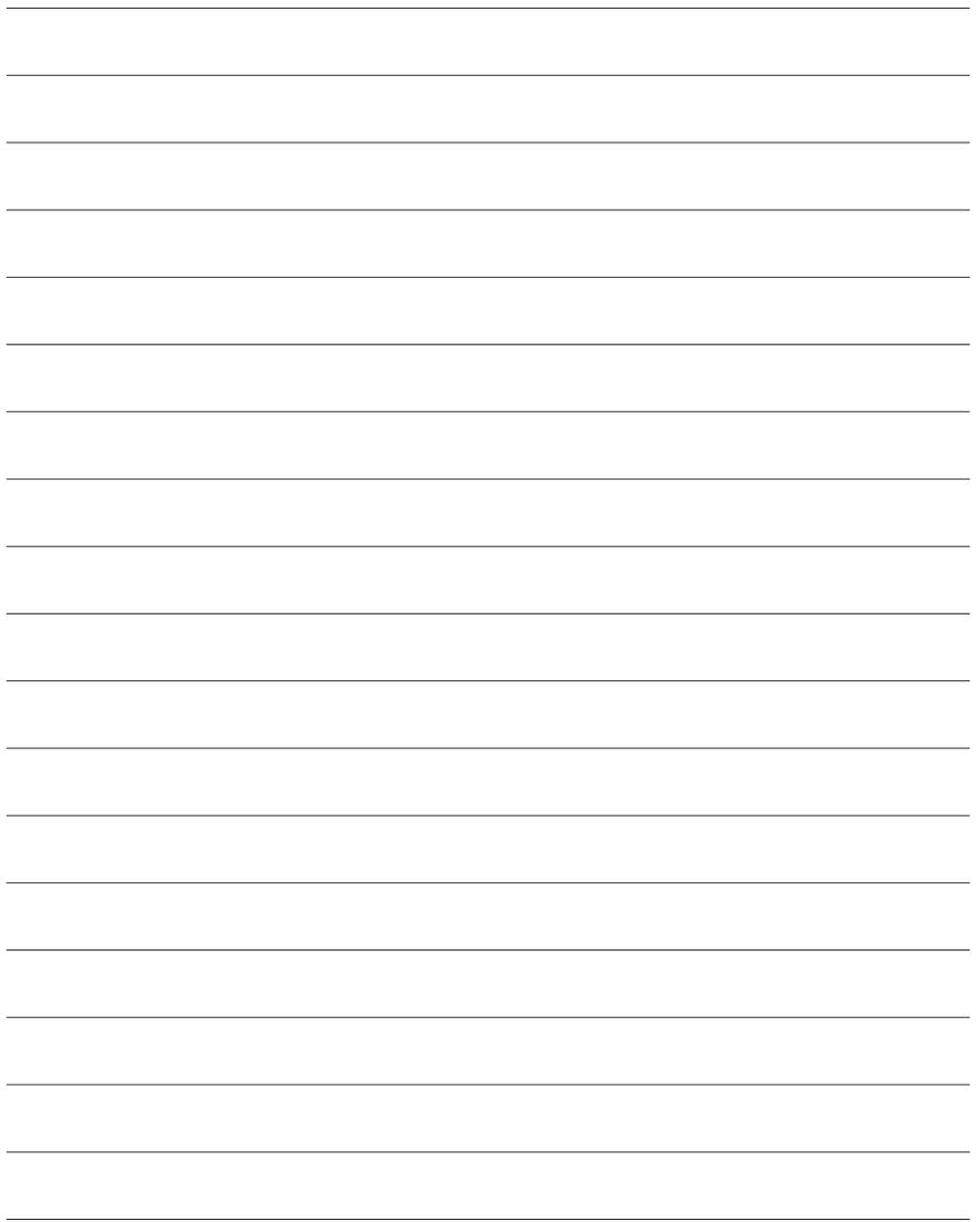




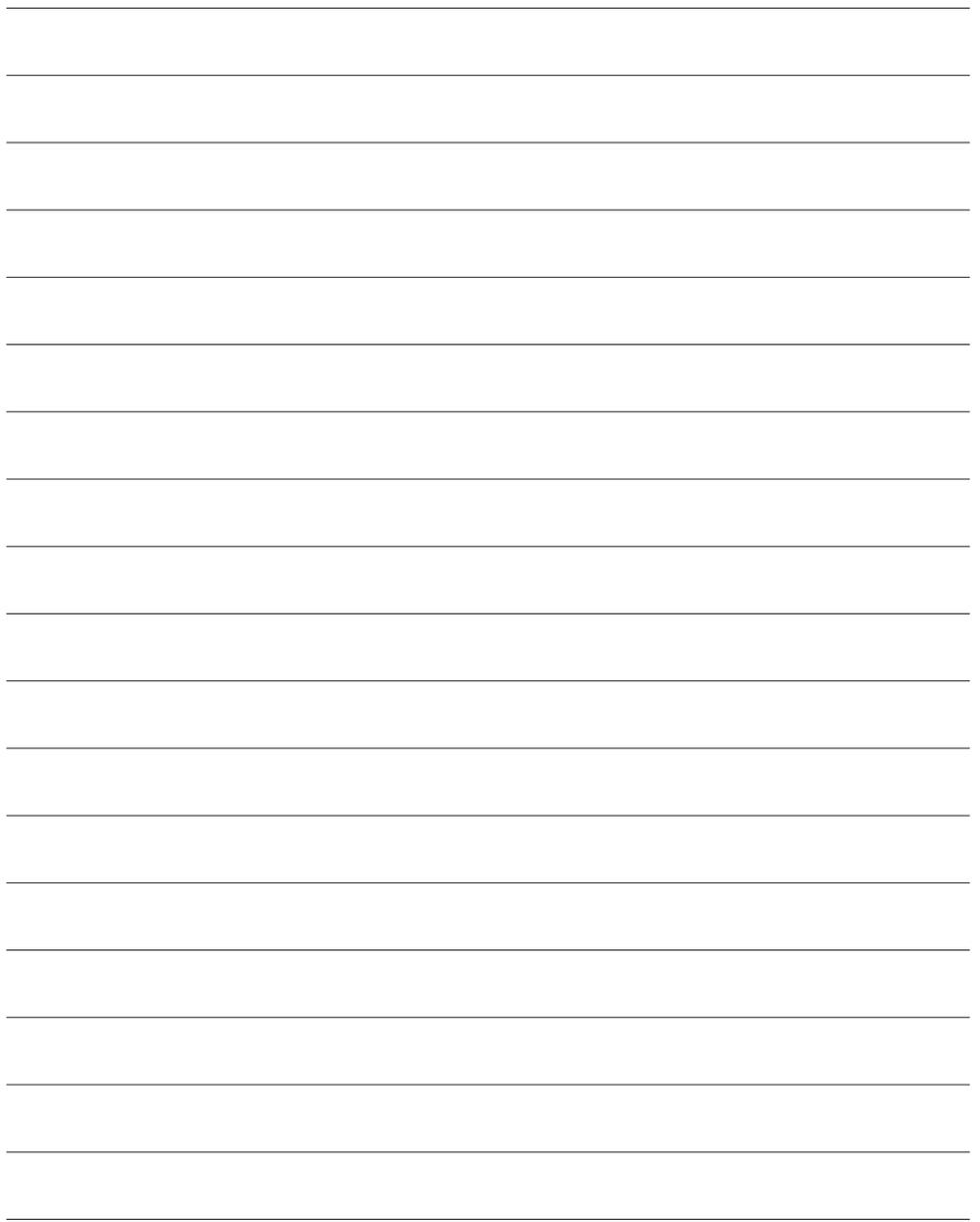














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