

# **Years of Ascent**

## **Preschool Curriculum Framework**

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# CONCEPTION OF THE CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

## Introduction

There is only one period in a person's life that contains so many possibilities, when a human being is full of such energy, enthusiasm and perseverance and can develop and master such complex capacities that will determine his or her abilities, personality and successful functioning in further life. This period only occurs during a person's preschool years. The quality and focus of these 'years of ascent', as reflected in the title of this report, will depend on the efforts of everyone working in the area of preschool education and care.

The *Preschool Curriculum Framework* defines the approaches necessary for preschool education and care. In particular, the document establishes time frames for the:

- design of a preschool curriculum at the level of preschool institution;
- development of a real curriculum in the context of specific educational practices;
- development of various programmes and types of preschool education and care;
- establishing the criteria for monitoring and evaluation of the quality of preschool education and care;
- ensuring continuity of preschool and primary education; and
- development of resources to implement the Preschool Curriculum Framework.

The Preschool Curriculum is founded on:

- current educational policy and legal documents related to education in Serbia;
- contemporary theoretical perspectives on childhood, early childhood learning and development;
- relevant international documents: Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989; General Comment No. 7 of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child on Implementation of Child Rights in Early Childhood, 2005; Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO);<sup>1</sup>; Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, a document of the European Parliament, 2006;<sup>2</sup> Key Principles of a Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care – European Union (EU) Commission, 2014;<sup>3</sup> and Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care, 2011;<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Delors, Jacques, et al., *Learning: The treasure within*, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Paris, 1996.

<sup>2</sup> Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning (2006/962/EZ).

<sup>3</sup> *Key Principles of a Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care*, European Union Commission, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> *CoRe: Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care*, European Union Commission, 2011.

- the traditional rootedness of the Serbian preschool curriculum in humanistic values, integrated approach to care and education, recognition of the age specificities of the child and the central role of play in the child's learning and development;
- positive experiences of preschool education practices in Serbia developed through various projects implemented through partnerships between educational policy stakeholders, the non-governmental sector, research institutions, UNICEF and other relevant international organizations and foundations (such as Development of an Open Curriculum in Preschool Institutions, 2002–2004; IMPRESS – Improvement of Preschool Education in Serbia, 2011–2014; Kindergartens without Borders, 2012–2013; Kindergartens without Borders 2, 2014–2016; Kaleidoscope – Diversification of the Preschool Curriculum, 2014–2016); and
- contemporary curriculum theories, cross-national analysis of Preschool Curriculum Framework documents<sup>5</sup> and examples of good practices of high-quality preschool education programmes worldwide.<sup>6</sup>

The Preschool Curriculum Framework is intended for anyone directly or indirectly involved in preschool education and care – preschool institution staff (preschool nurse-teachers, preschool teachers, preschool pedagogues, psychologists and other employees), families, local communities, professional and academic communities, and all other state and civil organizations, institutions and bodies related to the field of education.

The Preschool Curriculum Framework primarily aims to provide practitioners<sup>7</sup> with foundations, guidelines and incentive to understand and re-think the practice of curriculum development through individual reflection and dialogue with colleagues.

To ground one's own practice on the Curriculum Framework does not entail merely to read the document but to engage in constant, recurrent process of the document re-reading and re-thinking one's own beliefs and starting points and also to change the practice. At the same time, this is a mean of deepening the understanding of the Curriculum Framework and developing real curriculum based on its conception.

## Structure of the document

This document, which presents the Preschool Curriculum Framework, is structured in two parts – 'Conception of the Preschool Curriculum Framework' and 'From the Curriculum Framework

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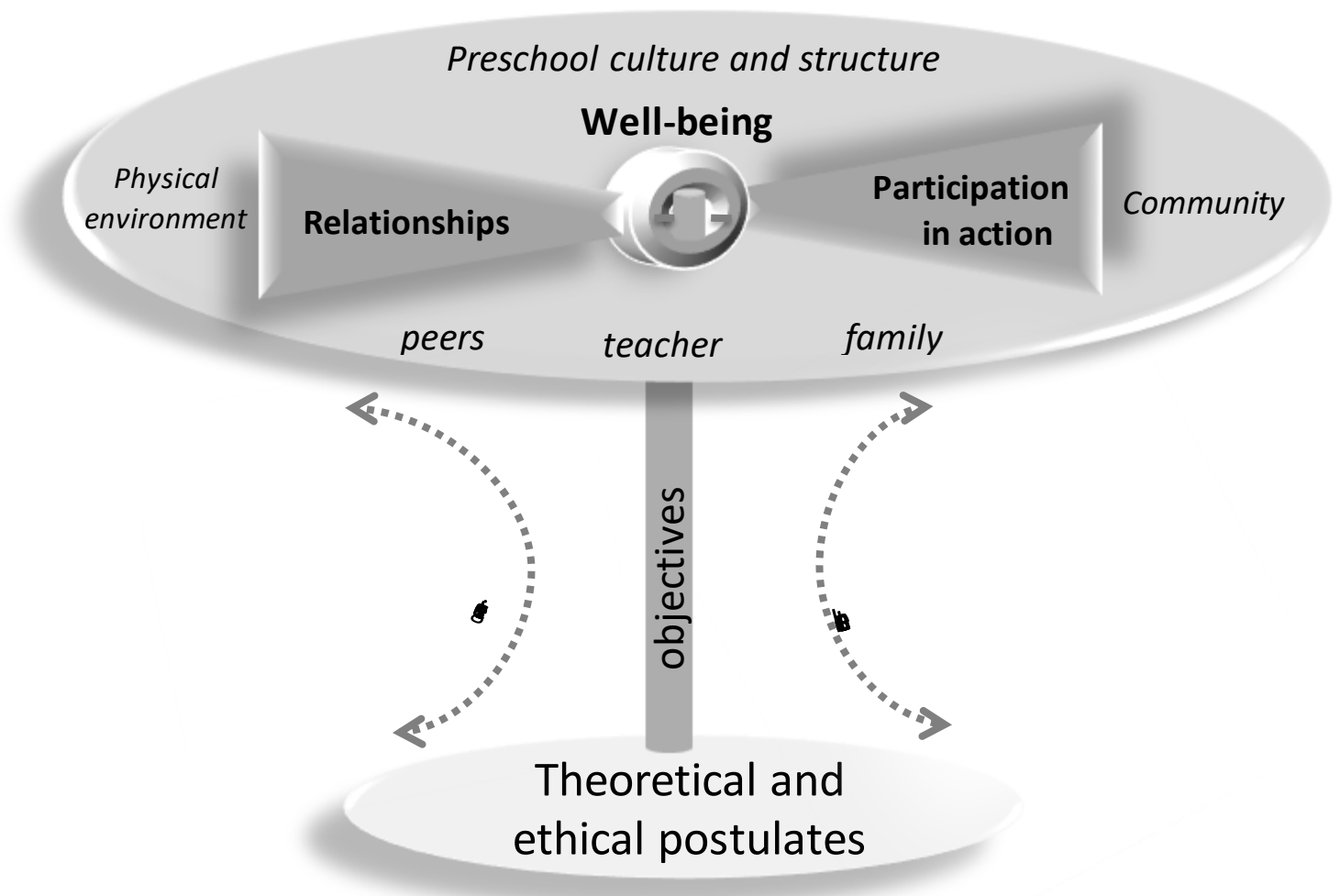
<sup>5</sup> Krmjaja, Ž., and D. Pavlović Breneselović, *Gde stanuje kvalitet – Politika građenja kvaliteta u predškolskom vaspitanju. Knjiga 1*, Institute of Pedagogy and Andragogy, Belgrade, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Aistear, 2009; *Te Whariki*, 2016; *Curriculum for pre-school Lpfö 98. Revised 2010*; *Nacionalni kurikulum...*, 2014; *National curriculum guidelines...*, 2003.

<sup>7</sup> The term practitioner refers to all professionals working in education practice. The term preschool teacher refers to all practitioners who directly work with preschool children (preschool teachers, preschool teacher-nurses).

to the Real Curriculum’, in accordance with the understanding of the curriculum and children’s learning and development.

## Real curriculum



In the second part – ‘From the Curriculum Framework to the Real Curriculum’ – the conceptual foundations of the Curriculum Framework are elaborated in the context of the real educational practice in three chapters. The chapter titled ‘Support for children’s well-being in the real curriculum through relationships and participation in action’ presents key dimensions of the real curriculum from children’s perspectives. For children, the curriculum manifests itself through relations that they build and activities in which they participate (such as play, practical everyday situations and planned learning situations). This chapter outlines different aspects of relationships and actions; their importance for children is elaborated on, as is the type of support that can be provided by the preschool teacher. The chapter titled ‘Preschool Institution: The

Context of the Real Curriculum” concretizes the key dimensions of the context of preschool institution that are of importance in development of the real curriculum: culture and structure of the institution and participants in the preschool practices (peers, family, community and preschool teachers). The last chapter titled “Preschool teacher’s strategies in Curriculum Development” integrates the principles and strategies for development of the real curriculum, based on assumptions presented in the previous sections, through planning, joint curriculum development, and monitoring, documentation and evaluation.

<b>First part: Conception of the Preschool Curriculum Framework</b>		
First part of the document is divided in two chapters:		
<b>1. The Preschool Curriculum Baseline: Theoretical Postulates and Values</b>	<b>2. Preschool Curriculum Framework Goals</b>	
Theoretical postulates and values that outline the concept of the Curriculum include such topics as: <b>How do we see the preschool child?, What kind of practice do we want in preschool and what kind of preschool education and care do we believe in?</b> Within each topic, the text is divided into two columns. The left column explains the theoretical grounds for the topic, while the right one explains how we see the child, kindergarten and preschool education arising from the theoretical starting points.	The theoretical postulates and values are followed by <b>the goals</b> of the Curriculum and the <b>objectives</b> of preschool education <b>focused on the child</b> . Children-focused goals are formulated as long-term goals for support to the well-being of children and specified at the level of programme.	
<b>Second part: From the Curriculum Framework to the Real Curriculum</b>		
The second part of the document is presented over three chapters:		
<b>1. Support to well-being through action and play</b>	<b>2. Preschool institution: The context of the real programme</b>	<b>3. Strategies in curriculum development</b>
In this chapter, the assumption that the programme for children is manifested through the relationships it builds and the modalities of action (play, practical life situations and planned learning situations) is elaborated. For each aspect of relationships and actions, the definitions, significance for the child and support	This section details the key dimensions of the context of preschool institutions that are necessary for developing the curriculum: <b>culture and structure of the institution</b> and participants in the preschool practices ( <b>peers, family, community and preschool teachers</b> ).	This section integrates <b>the principles</b> and <b>strategies</b> for development of the real curriculum, based on assumptions presented in the previous sections, through planning, joint curriculum development, monitoring and documentation.

<p>options for teachers are given.</p>		
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# 1. THE PRESCHOOL CURRICULUM BASELINE: THEORETICAL POSTULATES AND VALUES

The Preschool Curriculum Framework determines the conception of preschool education and care, which encompasses understanding of children and their learning and development, understanding of the preschool curriculum and practice, and functions of the preschool education and care. These understandings integrate theoretical knowledge and value orientation that are the baseline of the Preschool Curriculum Framework. They express what we consider as important and valuable and what we seek to achieve with the preschool curriculum. To be able to create a curriculum in preschool institutions that is based on the Preschool Curriculum Framework, all preschool teachers should adopt these theoretical postulates and values, by developing mutual understanding and revising own knowledge and beliefs, to be personally relevant and closely related to their own practice.<sup>8</sup>

## Theoretical postulates about childhood and children

The Preschool Curriculum Framework is founded on theoretical postulates of socio-cultural theory, sociology of childhood and post-structuralism which share the common perception of childhood as visible social category and valuable *per se*. Therefore, the focus in understanding children shifts from the individual developmental perspective towards the perspective of socio-cultural structure of childhood and position of children as actors in the given social context; understanding of children as agents – i.e., competent participants in their own lives and learning, rich in potential; understanding of the importance of children’s pro-activism and participation; underlining collaboration in the development of a community of practice among the children and adults in which all participants experience

## Perception of children

**Children are unique and holistic human beings.** All children are individuals with their own and unique abilities and equal rights to have their uniqueness recognized and acknowledged. Children (re)acts holistically, with their whole being. Children’s intellectual, emotional, sensory, motor, social and language development are mutually conditioned.

**Children are competent and full of potential.** Children are not only beings of needs; they have potential and evolving capacities that make them competent participants in their own learning and development. Children do not own the competence *per se*, nor is the competence a final state. Rather, it develops through relationships with adults and peers and depends on the quality of these relationships – the extent to which they are stimulating and supportive. In order to realize their potential, children must have adequate care and a supportive environment and relationships, and be protected from any form of neglect and abuse.

**Children are active participants in the community of peers and adults.** All children

<sup>8</sup> Theoretical and ethical postulates are based on knowledge, experience, beliefs and values forming an interpretative framework as a mediator of the preschool teacher’s activities – i.e., a ‘filter’ through which the teacher makes his/her decisions, builds relations and takes action.



transformation through mutual interaction.<sup>9</sup>

Play is a dominant practice of children. Through play, children build relationships and participate in the process of adoption and transformation of culture.<sup>10</sup> Play is an ‘authorship’ act of processing the reality and imagining experiences. Play is an early expression of the deepest human feature – the capacity of flexibility,<sup>11</sup> a form of expression of the most significant creative potential of human beings. This capacity, characteristic solely of humans, is of key importance in the constant process of adaptation and transformation.

Contemporary neurobiological research on brain development shows that early childhood experiences have a decisive impact on the architecture of the brain, and therefore on the types and levels of abilities in adulthood; early childhood is a sensitive period of development which carries optimal opportunities for learning from experience; social interactions play a key role in children’s development, as they influence manners of brain ‘networking’ and each child is born biologically ‘pre-installed’ for creating social bonds; the brain seeks to create patterns and learning is based on recognizing relations and patterns; plasticity is the key feature of the brain and, depending on external experiences and demands, some neural connections would grow stronger while others would weaken and disappear – which reflects children’s huge capacity for

are social beings, naturally oriented towards forming relationships with peers and adults. Every child is an active participant in social relations and processes in the family, preschool and community he or she belongs to and, through that participation, the child contributes to his or her shaping.

**Children are dedicated to learning.** All children have the intrinsic motivation to learn and gain knowledge. From the very moment of birth, children strive to understand and master the world that surrounds them. Learning is a process of co-constructing that knowledge together with peers and adults in situations that are meaningful for the child. Children learn in a holistic way: their physical, emotional, linguistic, sensory and intellectual learning is mutually connected and occurs simultaneously.

**Children are creative.** All children have the creative potential to express themselves and their own understanding of the world in many different ways, by connecting various dimensions of experience and creatively processing own ideas and experiences. Children use different, though equally valuable, ways and means of expression in order to express, understand and share their feelings, ideas, thoughts, values and beliefs.

**Children are playful beings.** Play is an inherent way in which children relate to the world; create, broaden and process their own experiences; construct knowledge and shape their own identity and the world, and thereby develop the potential for openness, flexibility and creativity as the basis for comprehensive learning and development. Children do not learn through direct teaching, but rather through situations and activities based on the play pattern that entails

<sup>9</sup>Anning, et al., 2004; Dahlberg, et al., 2007; James and Prout., 2005; MacNaughton, 2003, 2005; Qvortrup, 2005; Rogoff, 2003; Corsaro, 2011.

<sup>10</sup>Fleer, 2009.

<sup>11</sup>Marjanović, 1987.

learning but, at the same time, their vulnerability.<sup>12</sup>

volunteerism, initiative, dynamism, negotiation, dedication, openness and reflection.

### Theoretical postulates about curriculum and practice

The main postulates of contemporary curriculum theories, based on socio-cultural theory and post-structuralism, include: that a curriculum is not a ready-made model to be directly implemented in practice, but rather a ‘flexible framework’ that details basic values and principles to be implemented in a specific context through experimentation and innovation; that a curriculum is an ‘educational proposal’ designed to be explored and developed further in practice; and that curriculum development is a social practice based on participation, multiple perspectives and collaboration.<sup>13</sup>

According to socio-cultural theory, learning is a process of transformation of participation in the community of practice. Children learn to use cultural tools and products (such as language, symbols, material objects, customs, etc.) and apply various strategies to create meaning through everyday participation in the community of practice in which they are a part (family,

### Perception of preschool practice

**The preschool<sup>14</sup> as a context for implementation of the real curriculum** is based on distinction and understanding of the relationship between the Curriculum Framework and curriculum in practice (real curriculum). The Curriculum Framework, as a document, defines the foundation for development of the real curriculum and operationalizes that process of implementation of the conception.

A real curriculum is created in the actual context of educational practice. Therefore, it should be seen as a previously written document, but rather as practice created through joint participation of all actors, shaped by the culture of preschool, family, local community and wider social context, as well as by planned and thoughtful actions and activities of teachers, based on the concept of the Curriculum Framework.

**Preschool is a place of joint cooperation** where support to children’s learning and development is provided through **joint participation** of children and adults in the form of authentic human relations and togetherness in shared situations, events and activities that are meaningful for them. Preschool practice is developed as a process of shared learning of children and adults through which they jointly

<sup>12</sup> National..., 2004; OECD, 2010; Shore, 1997; Shonkoff and Philips, 2000.

<sup>13</sup> Bennett, 2008; McKernan, 2008.

<sup>14</sup> The term preschool refers to every administrative-space-time-based organizational form created for development of the preschool curriculum.

preschool, intermediate surrounding ). Each curriculum is oriented towards operationalization of children's participation in various situations and relationships.<sup>15</sup>

Preschool, as a community of children and adults, 'has shared areas of activity, common reasons and opportunities for learning, common problems and ideas geared towards acquiring knowledge and competences'.<sup>16</sup>

Contemporary theorists of preschool practices developed a democratic model of the preschool institution, as an alternative to the technocratic one, in which the educational institution is perceived as a space of democratic community of practice heeding the interests of the community, family and children. A democratic model of practice implies that practice cannot be repressive, and should be based on respect for equality and diversity, to be supportive, responsive and based on sharing power. Educating children entails expanding their abilities, thus creating social justice and equality and critically revising the issue of power, control and fairness.<sup>17</sup>

Educational practice is transformative and ethical by its nature. It is perceived as a complex system of creation of relations, and, as such, it is prone to changes,

construct (co-construct) knowledge and understanding of themselves and the world, rather than as a process of imposing the curriculum on children based on pre-planned activities and separated content of teaching.

### **The preschool as a place of democratic and inclusive practice entails:**

Respect for the right of all children *to* education through an inclusive practice in the preschool that is based on: respect for gender, cultural, health and all other differences; development of sensitivity to discrimination (based on gender, cultural, social, national background, etc.), paying special attention to inclusion of children from vulnerable groups.

Respect for the right of all children to active participation *in* education through orientation towards children's well-being, support of their potential and active participation in preschool.

Creating partnerships with families, recognizing the primary role and importance of parents and family in early childhood education.

Creating connections with the local community through various types of participation of children in the community and participation of the local community in the preschool practice.

Implementation of the rights of children as citizens through children's full participation in social and cultural life of the community.

### **The preschool as a place of reflective practice entails:**

Development of relations among preschool teachers, pedagogues, psychologists and other

<sup>15</sup> Rogoff, et al., 2001.

<sup>16</sup> Marjanović, 1987: 52.

<sup>17</sup> Bourdieu, 1993; Dahlberg and Moss, 2005; Mac Naughton, 2003; Moss, 2007.

unforeseeable, and always shaped by the context.

The profession of preschool teacher, as a relational practice realized in a dynamic and ever-changing context, is essentially an ethical practice, governed by values and based on critical reflection and taking responsibilities.

Perceived as having multiple perspectives, educational practice is developed through relations of mutual respect and interdependence, co-construction and creation of shared meaning among participants.

Improving the quality of educational practice entails constant change that cannot be brought from the outside, but instead must be created internally by changing the culture of the institution and implicit pedagogy of practitioners.<sup>18</sup>

professionals in the preschool based on trust, respect, sharing and mutual support.

Development of a reflexive approach to preschool practice through ongoing re-thinking of theoretical postulates, personal beliefs and practice in dialogue with colleagues, families and children.

Initiation of joint research of practitioners on the issues of relevance to the preschool practice, aimed at the development of a curriculum in line with the conception of the Curriculum Framework.

Professional development through which practitioners are trained to conduct research and critical re-thinking of their practice towards continuous changes, learning and development.

Cooperation, in the form of joint research, with other preschools, research institutes and other institutions.

## Values and functions of education

Education through support to the development of full potential of individuals and their capacities for a productive personal and social life is aimed at enabling their self-actualization and achieving the continuity of human culture and social progress.

As a social practice, it is always based on and promotes certain social values and ideals. Some of those values are universal, based on the perception of human beings and society, while others are actualized in a given historical and social context. Such universal values include altruism and tolerance, morality and responsibility, creativity, initiative and innovation, readiness to

## Review of the nature and functions of preschool education – principles

In preschool education and care, the values and functions of education are realized through:

**Comprehensive understanding of education** as an integrated process of education and care embedded in each segment of joint cooperation between adults and children in the preschool.

**Orientation towards long-term goals** rather than short-term outcomes. Preschool education and care are oriented on the process of development of long-term goals and outcomes – such as the ability for self-regulation, symbolic expression, social and emotional competences, positive identity – as the basic competences for successful human functioning, learning and development. Specific knowledge, skills and habits should be perceived as a means of support

<sup>18</sup> Cochran-Smith, 2010; Dahlberg, Moss, 2005; Fulan, 1999; Kincheloe, 2008; Kemmis and Smith, 2008; MacNaughton, 2005; Pešić, 2004; Miller, et al., 2012.

cooperate, fairness, and a positive personal, cultural, national and global identity.

These values are embedded in the United Nations and European Union education policy documents, and in Serbia legislation as well, by recognition of the holistic nature of education, founded on its four ‘pillars’: learning to know, learning to be, learning to do and learning to live together.<sup>19</sup>

The underlying principles of education as institutional practice are implemented by connecting social values and goals with functions and an understanding of the nature of education.

and scaffolds for development of these basic competences, rather than short-term outcome to be achieved.

**An integrated approach to learning and development** implies that children should learn through integrated experience related to their activity and situations that make sense and are meaningful to them, rather than through separated contents and activities related to specific education areas or aspects of development.

**Continuity in education**, achieved by setting grounds for lifelong learning and development of educational competences.

**Evaluation in the function of quality improvement, oriented towards structural and procedural dimensions of the curriculum.**

From the aspect of the orientation towards long-term goals, the quality of a curriculum is not monitored based on assessing the achievement of children or their progress according to development norms, but rather by focusing on the quality of key dimensions of the curriculum arising from the curriculum conception. Evaluation should cover all participants in the process.

## Preschool Curriculum Framework goals

### Preschool Curriculum Framework overall goals

- Ensure that all children of preschool age have equal opportunities for learning and development through support to their well-being.
- Ensure that, through participation in the curriculum, all children are able to feel fulfilled, accomplished and accepted, to build relationships based on trust and respect, closeness and friendship.

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<sup>19</sup> Delors, et al., 1996.

- Ensure that children develop predispositions for lifelong learning such as openness, curiosity, resilience, reflexivity, persistence, confidence in themselves as capable learners, and positive personal and social identity – thereby setting the foundations for development of educational competences.
- Ensure that, through participation in the curriculum, children have the opportunity to get to know, explore and re-think different areas of human knowledge and activity, to use various cultural products and manners of making and expression of meaning.
- Ensure that families are able to choose education for their children, to actively participate in education and in issues of education at the public level, to become aware of their latent needs and capacities and to develop their parental competences.
- Ensure that teacher-nurses, preschool teachers, expert associates (pedagogues, psychologists...), professionals from various fields and other practitioners are able to express their autonomy, creativity and professionalism and to proactively advocate for children and their families.
- Ensure that the preschool and other surroundings within the local community (school, cultural centres, sport and recreation centres, public spaces, other relevant institutions in the local community) become places for the joint participation of children and adults in learning and through meaningful dialogue and mutual support.
- Ensure that preschool teachers, expert associates (pedagogues, psychologists), other associates and relevant experts, researchers, education policymakers and all other stakeholders in the preschool education and care form associations and create a research community which, through research and mutual support, upgrades the quality of the preschool education and care.

## **Child-oriented curriculum objectives: Support for children's well-being**

The preschool curriculum aims to support children's well-being. Well-being is a multidimensional construct that incorporates understanding of the holistic nature of children's development, comprehensiveness of the process of care, upbringing and education, and an understanding of the integrated learning of the preschool child. In its broadest sense, well-being is the capacity for successful personal and interpersonal functioning, expression and cultivation of human potential for development and progress, and it can be perceived through three dimensions: personal dimension (to *be* well and to function successfully), activity dimension (to be able to and to be willing to) and social dimension (to belong, to accept others and to participate). All the foregoing dimensions of well-being are interrelated, overlapping and mutually conditioned.

Thus, the concept of well-being reflects the essence of children's learning and development – children are beings who simultaneously *are* and *are becoming*. Through what they are, children become what they will be and, therefore, at the same time, supporting children's well-being means projecting goals for the future while understanding what well-being means for children here and now, under the real existing circumstances.

<b>Objectives of the support to children's well-being</b>	<b>What is well-being for children in the real curriculum?</b>
<p><b>Support to personal well-being</b></p> <p>Development of an awareness of and care for own body and well-being            Development of motoric abilities and skills and sensory sensitivity            Development of self-regulation as an internal control mechanism, ability to delay desires, accept demands and find alternatives            Development of instrumental and psychological independence            Development of identity and self-acceptance            Developing emotional competence as an ability to experience and express a wide range of emotions, to regulate and control emotions and understand personal and others' emotions</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>To feel</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ well and vital</li> <li>▪ accomplished, satisfied and happy</li> <li>▪ safe but not overprotected and overregulated</li> <li>▪ secure that their needs and interests will be recognized and supported</li> <li>▪ being a part of the preschool community and wider community</li> <li>▪ in harmony with rules, norms and requirements set by the immediate surroundings</li> </ul>
<p><b>Support to activity dimension of well-being</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of creative expression and creative articulation of children's experiences and knowledge</li> <li>• Development of diverse forms of communication and mastering of different functions of language</li> <li>• Development of reflexivity and self-direction as the foundation of learning to learn</li> <li>• Development of dispositions for learning, such as persistence, curiosity, initiative and creativity, openness for cooperation, responsibility</li> <li>• Development of key competences for lifelong learning</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>To be</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ included in the community of peers and the wider preschool community</li> <li>▪ included in diverse, creative and meaningful activities</li> <li>▪ heard and respected</li> <li>▪ surrounded by sufficiently familiar environment and, at the same time, faced with new challenges</li> <li>▪ accepted in their own uniqueness</li> <li>▪ physically active, dexterous, courageous and gracious</li> <li>▪ friends with somebody</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>To be able to</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ get to know surrounding world, expand experiences and knowledge about own and other cultures, about various physical and</li> </ul>

- Development of resilience to stress and challenges and the ability to constructively approach problems and changes
- Creation of a sense and meaning of life through deeper understanding of the fundamental manifestations of human living, values and the beauty of civilization and human activity, and pathos of living

### **Support for children's social well-being**

- Development of a positive cultural and social identity, contentment and pride for belonging to various communities (peer, family, local, national, global community)
- Development of social competences as capacity for emotional bonding and empathy, successful social communication and cooperation
- Development of moral values and norms, the capacity for moral judgment, fairness and respect for differences
- Development of altruism and humanistic characteristics such as affability, empathy, tolerance, generosity and solidarity
- Development of the sense of interconnectedness between people and nature and care for the environment
- Development of a proactive attitude towards life and the environment

natural phenomena and various artefacts of human culture

- observe, wonder, share, explore and imagine
- explore with the whole body and all senses and gain a variety of aesthetic experiences
- express themselves in different ways, through different symbolic systems, using different operations fitted into those systems
- express themselves creatively and imaginatively through various forms, media and materials
- express their own interests, make choices and take initiative
- gain insights about their own strengths and abilities
- express their own abilities and be successful in learning
- take care of their own needs
- contribute and see that their contribution is important and recognized

### **To know how to**

- make good choices, make decisions and take responsibility
- manage their own emotions and understand emotions expressed by others
- delay fulfilment of their own wishes and expectations and accept the wishes and expectations of others
- successfully communicate and cooperate with others, negotiate and resolve conflicts through mutual agreement
- accept others, and develop close and reciprocal relationships based on respect for and acceptance of differences
- contribute to the community, and care for others and the environment
- learn and love to learn
- accept changes, and be flexible and open



Preschool education is an integral part of the education system in Serbia. The Law on the Foundations of the Education System defines seven key competences for lifelong learning in compliance with international education policy documents.<sup>20</sup> As the first level of the education system, preschool education and care is the basis for the development of these competences, thereby ensuring the continuity of education and lifelong learning.

### The specificities of key competences for lifelong learning in preschool education

<b>Communication in the mother tongue</b>	This competence is developed through opportunities for enriching vocabulary and the use of various language functions; by providing support to children for proper, expressive and creatively verbal expression and language creativity; by encouraging different manners of graphic and symbolic representation and their practical use, as well as by raising awareness about their importance and usefulness; and by raising awareness about the importance of language in relations and the use of language in a positive and socially responsible manner. Early literacy is developed in a stimulating language environment, through activities where different manners of symbolic expression and written communication have their purpose in the activity itself, rather than through teaching children to read and write in an isolated manner.
<b>Communication in a foreign language</b>	The basis for learning foreign languages is set at the level of preschool education, through development of the mother tongue and by raising awareness and knowledge about different cultures and languages and the role of language in communication among people and cultures. If a second language is introduced at the preschool level, the learning implies <i>situational</i> adoption of the language by ‘interweaving’ the foreign language into situations and activities through which the child becomes acquainted with it and learns to use it meaningfully, rather than through isolated teaching based on specially formulated methodical procedures.
<b>Mathematical, science and technology competences</b>	Mathematical, science and technology competences are developed by rich sensory experiences and practical manipulation; stimulating the development and implementation of logical/mathematical thinking in studying and understanding phenomena and relations as well as in the process of problem solving; by support to exploration, wonder, discoveries and making conclusions about natural and physical phenomena in various activities within certain topic/project and real-life situations; and by implementing the knowledge thus acquired in solving practical everyday needs and problems. Preschool teachers shape their participation in joint explorations with children through various types of supportive actions and by broadening the scope of activity, instead of strictly through verbal lectures.
<b>Digital competence</b>	Digital competence is developed through a meaningful use of digital technologies as tools that empowers children in accessing information; expression and representation, and documentation of different activities. Digital competence also entails the development of an adequate attitude towards and culture of the use of digital technologies.

<sup>20</sup> Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December for lifelong learning.

<b>Learning to learn</b>	This competence is developed by encouraging children to become aware of their own learning process by supporting the development of metacognitive abilities such as reflection, planning and self-regulation of the learning as a meaningful part of specific activities and situations; and by children's inclusion in the development of the curriculum.
<b>Social and civic competences</b>	These competences are realized by developing a sense of community among children and adults and among peers by: fostering the sense of belonging, values of respect and acceptance, creation of group identity; fostering the value of respect for diversity and care for others; participation in activities and situations that require cooperation, making an agreement, reconciliation and mutual support through which children contribute to the community they belong to; and through possibilities to participate in and/or initiate events, actions and projects within the local community.
<b>Initiative and entrepreneurship</b>	This competence is achieved through support to children's open play; by children's participation in various situations and activities and developing projects that support children's initiatives and original approaches in solving various problems; by providing diverse opportunities for children to try out, re-think and evaluate their ideas; and by opportunities to creatively process their own experience and innovatively express their ideas, experiences, thoughts and knowledge.
<b>Cultural awareness and expression</b>	This competence is supported by cultivating children's play; through development of cultural and national identity as well as the identity of the 'inhabitant of the planet'; by acquainting children with cultural heritage of the community and humanity by encouraging them to creatively express their ideas, experiences and emotions through various artistic media (visual art, drama, music, movement and dance, literature, sports, tradition); by arranging the preschool environment to provoke amazement and aesthetic experience; and by encouraging children to process their experiences and feelings creatively by using different media.

## FROM THE CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK TO THE REAL CURRICULUM

### 1. Support for children's well-being in the real curriculum through relationships and participation in action

The curriculum is created and developed in the real context of educational practice. For children, the curriculum is manifested as a realization of their well-being through relationships with the physical environment, peers and adults that are developed through their participation in real situations.

#### Relationships

Children experience the world through the relationships they establish and develop. The relationships that support children's well-being and actions are the driving forces of children's development and learning.

Relationships do not happen in a vacuum and they are, per se, a dynamic and complex web of connections, feedback and influences through children's actions and interactions with their social and physical environments.

#### Factors affecting relationships for children

**Security.** To be able to learn and explore, children must feel safe. Only when they feel secure can children seek challenges. Security derives from relationships of trust and predictability. Predictability is important as it enables children to develop feeling of having control of situations and events. Predictability can be social ("People that I know will be there for me") or physical ("I know where I can find my doll"). Predictability does not only eliminate chaos, but also rigidity in relationships. Children will feel safe in an environment in which they are integrated and in compliance with, in which the rules are well known, clear and consistent, where they are protected from any form of physical and psychological harm (e.g., humiliation, labelling, disparagement, etc.).

#### Children need opportunities to:

- express their needs and feelings
- rely on others and build feelings of trust, safety and belonging
- develop a positive image of themselves
- develop positive modalities of interaction with others
- develop the necessary capacities for dealing with conflicts, problems and new situations

**Continuity.** Children primarily need continuity in relationships with significant close adults e.g., the continuity of the attention of a preschool teacher who knows the child well, interprets and responds to her/his messages, enables the child to express her/his intentions, to play and explore freely while at the same time giving the child security to engage in a wider range of relationships and activities that involve new people and new situations. The issue of continuity is not an issue of repetitiveness but of compliance of relationships in a variety of settings and activities. Continuity does not entail the same kinds of experiences in a variety of settings and with different people, but the absence of contradictions and the linking of different types of experiences, connections with the child's life context and previous experiences.

Transitions to a new environment, such as, for instance, starting preschool, transitioning from nursery to kindergarten and from kindergarten to school, are sensitive periods in which continuity is particularly important. In transitioning to a new environment, children need to find support in something/someone close and familiar: e.g., to familiarize with the new environment with a person who is close to them and whom they trust; encounter experiences that are close to the experiences in their family life and culture; be surrounded by familiar objects and new adults who show them that they are important and provide them individualized and personalized care; and have the opportunity to express their feelings and fears and share their family life experiences with others in the new environment.

**Participation.** Participation means active involvement, being an agent, someone who learns through participation and influences the surrounding world, rather than being a passive participant in activities and events organized for children by others. Children actively participate in everything that surrounds and involves them, with their specific previous experiences, needs, interests, preferences and abilities. Active participation entails the right to make a choice and the possibility to influence events and situations.

be involved in making decisions and choices

share information and participate in dialogue with other children and adults based on mutual respect and exchange

be genuinely consulted and know that their feelings and opinions will be considered

see that their ideas, expectations and feelings lead to changes

contribute by their active participation to the activities of adults that they consider as being meaningful and important, and to events in their community

#### **Through interactions children learn:**

to understand their needs, feelings and actions

how to safely explore their environment, create and test their assumptions about the world around them

how to communicate and interact

how to gain acceptance and to accept others

what is expected from them and what they can expect from others

how to express themselves, understand others and how to interact with them

about the mutual dependence, sharing with others, making choices

how to solve problems and take responsibility

There is no age limit for the right to participation – children may actively participate at any age. The manner in which children participate is determined by the evolving capacities of children, their previous experience and interests. Since their birth, children begin to develop participation skills and competences. The responsiveness and respect they experience in interactions with close adults and the environment increase and support the development of these competences. Children’s capacities are often underestimated because adults tend to see them through their own prism and fail to create an environment in which children are able to articulate their own expectations, views and competences.

develop metacognitive capacities of reasoning, reflection, planning and anticipation

create sense and purpose

In a relationship between an adult and a child there is always an asymmetry – not only of knowledge, competences and experiences, but also of power. This asymmetry of power should not be the result of the adult’s domination and governance over the child, patronizing and overprotecting her/him and creating an illusion that the child is the ‘centre of the universe’, but there is a responsibility for the adult to putting his or her own power into the function of empowering the child and her/his capacities. For the child to feel safe, to have a continuity of experiences and relationships and opportunities for active participation, the preschool teacher should build relationships based on this active engagement, maintaining balance and respect for the child.

### The preschool teacher builds relationships through:

#### **Engagement**

Engagement entails genuinely being involved and taking part in the activities with children. Engagement is manifested through sensitivity to the child’s needs and capacities and being attuned to the child.

*Closeness, sensitivity and personalization of the relationship.* For each child it is important to have close and constant relationship with the preschool teacher, to feel as a unique human being whose presence and uniqueness is acknowledged by the teacher who pays attention and shows respect to the child. Quality care and education is not only a matter of fulfilling children’s needs but is also a process in which the preschool teacher treats the child as a valuable and unique human being. *For instance, even when busy with another activity, the preschool teacher should send this message to the child – in words, a smile, a look, a touch, when interacting with a very small child, or by explaining his/her activity or involving the child in his/her activity, when interacting with an older child.* Physical care is the basis for establishing a relationship in cases when it is personalized and focused on the

	<p>individual needs and preferences and when the preschool teacher understands that every child has her/his own individual pace which fluctuates and changes even over the course of a single day.</p> <p><i>Atonement (compliance).</i> Harmony entails being attuned to the child, understanding her/his perspectives and communicating personal understandings with the child. Being attuned to the child means being a careful listener, responding to the child, adequately interpreting the child's interests, feelings, opinions and intentions and taking into account the child's perspectives. When children are very young and/or when they cannot express their needs and preferences verbally, the role of the preschool teacher becomes even more important – in developing sensitivity in interpretation of the child's needs and preferences and recognition of her/his capacities. This includes reflection – re-thinking of the child's and one's own actions, professional stances, experiences, beliefs and expectations; and provision of support to the child accordingly that is based on empowering the child.</p>
<p><b>Maintaining balance</b> To maintain balance does not mean to have an equal or similar number of activities initiated and led by the teacher and activities developed by children independently, but rather it means to balance modalities of the teacher's participation in all events, situations and activities.</p>	<p>Teacher maintains balance through planning, organization and activities. Balance is maintained between:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- continuity – known and predictable, that is necessary for the child's feeling of security, and flexibility, challenges, novelties and unpredictability that stimulate children's learning and development;</li> <li>- showing respect for the child's feelings, encouraging curiosity, initiative and autonomy and underlining rules that enable children and adults to live in harmony and contribute to the development of children's self-control;</li> <li>- children's vulnerability and dependence on adults and seeing the child as competent, respecting children's rights and providing adequate support for children's greater independence;</li> <li>- initiative, choice and participation of the child and the teacher's planned intention, direction and guidance</li> </ul>
<p><b>Respect</b> Respect is a process of building a relationship of mutual understanding and appreciation. The preschool teacher builds understanding by observing and listening to the children, establishing</p>	<p>A preschool teacher:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- accepts every child through her/his strengths and by perceiving her/him as valuable <i>per se</i></li> <li>- respects the child's family and cultural context and establishes good relations with the family</li> <li>- respects the child as an individual and her/his rights: and recognizes and respects the specific needs, feelings and interests of the child</li> </ul>

openness to learn from children and persons close to them, and through a flexible, individualized approach and active involvement of every child.

- takes seriously into account the child's interests, concerns, and activities
- values the child's relationship with close persons – friends, family members, but also pets and things that are important to the child
- creates opportunities for the child to express her/himself in various ways
- builds team spirit through the joint participation of children and adults in activities and events
- is available for the child and shares moments of closeness with the child
- helps children understand what is acceptable and what is not
- respects and accepts diversity as a value and not as a disadvantage, by:
  - efforts to change ideas, practices, narratives and relations that reinforce inequality and subordinate some persons or groups
  - questioning stereotypes and prejudices
  - providing special support to the participation of children from vulnerable groups
  - assisting children in recognizing what is fair and unfair and coping with injustice
  - developing democratic relationships within the group
  - supporting the development of children's capacities for solidarity and activism

## Children's participation in action

Children learn through their own activities and through participation in joint activities with peers and adults – which are described in the Curriculum Framework as children's participation in action. Actions in the preschool include play, practical everyday situations and situations of planned learning.

### Play

Play is the freely chosen, self-regulated and intrinsically motivated action in which children 'feel good', activates all their potential and overcome personal limits. Play is the basis for development and expressions of all dimensions of children's well-being.

What is play?	Children in play
<p>Play is, for a child, creative reworking of reality and the act of imagining experiences. Play is imagination in action and a form of expression. The capacity of flexibility in play enables children to imagine and build up the environment of the possible and to change themselves and their actions according to that idea. Capacity of flexibility is the main determinant of play. Therefore, activity or the content of play are not its main characteristics. Play is always more than an activity; it is the way in which a child approaches the activity. This approach is the main characteristic of play. Play is a unique act of activating children's entire potential.</p>	<p><b>Build identity and relations:</b> make agreements and are attune with others; negotiate; contribute to maintaining the plan of play; re-think and develop ethical values; explore multiple identities; see themselves as powerful and effective; make decisions and choices independently; experience themselves as members of a group and community; explore and overcome stereotypes; attempt various roles; and create, re-think and accept rules.</p> <p><b>Explore and re-construct meaning:</b> rework events, situations, and use of objects in a creative way and explore what they could be; observe and imitate others at play; create new words and use known words in different ways; and develop new strategies of problem-solving.</p>



Play is always voluntary, agreed upon by the participants who are playing, determined by the plan and rules of play, and is a goal in and of itself.

**Create symbols:** discover various ways of symbolizing experience (e.g., through disguise, role play, drawing, modelling, creative movement, dance, speech); use symbols to connect real events, objects and actions with an imagined concept in play; and involve and combine symbols from various cultures.

**Enjoy themselves and have fun:** feel powerful, active, self-realized and included; enjoy the unpredictability of play; develop a feeling of community with others in play; are dedicated to playing; practice particular abilities; create openness for new experiences; and enjoy discovering their own new potential.

Depending on the way in which teachers support play, in the curriculum we can identify three types of play: open, extended and guided play.

### Preschool teacher's support for play

**Open play.** In open play, children build the plan of play and rules of play based on their own initiative. The preschool teacher focuses on arranging the environment and observing children's play. In open play, the preschool teacher:

- continuously provides and makes accessible various appropriate materials which children can explore
- continuously re-organizes a space that is inviting for play (e.g., by reorganizing equipment, arranging interior and exterior spaces, enabling children to play in outdoor and public spaces, to explore through play, etc.)
- helps in preserving the products and materials after play, so that they can be used in other activities
- provides children with sufficient time for play
- observes play and attempts to understand the context of play, follows children's reactions and ideas in play

**Extended play.** In extended play, the preschool teacher supports play by playing along with the children. In extended play, the preschool teacher may:

- take on a given role that supports the initiated play
- for children who do not speak yet, offer a rich repertoire of non-verbal characters (mimicry, gestures, movement, touch, pantomime), and at the same time points to actions, objects and actions that occur in the game;
- for younger children, offer toys that represent real objects as an incentive to symbolic games;
- uses different materials and makes children's play requisites;
- use various materials and create tools for play together with the children
- propose alternative, new roles for children that enable continuation of the play
- introduce additional materials and ideas for expanding the play scenario to support children in problem-solving during the play

- support other children to join the play without violating the concept of play, by proposing creative roles or a certain way of using the materials
- write down/document the scenario of play, and support children to agree on the roles and how to continue the play

**Guided play.** In guided play, the preschool teacher initiates, participates and directs play, through discussions and agreement with the children, and is careful not to disrupt the form of play (its voluntary nature, imagination, challenge, experimentation, creativity, dynamic nature). In guided play, the preschool teacher may:

- encourage adequate use of equipment and items
- demonstrate play steps and movements, lead games on the polygon, show games with rules, etc.
- offer a concept of play and rules, and help children to form groups during play
- lead a dialogue with children about play

## Practical everyday situations

Children participate in various daily situations that are part of the everyday context of joint cooperation between children and adults in the preschool – such as routines, rituals or authentic events within or outside the preschool.

Practical everyday situations	Children in practical everyday situations
<p><b>Routines.</b> Everyday established activities within a group of children (meals, rest, care and hygiene, being outside, tidying up the space, etc.).</p> <p><b>Rituals.</b> Established patterns in specific situations that have a symbolic meaning (rituals upon arrival and leaving the preschool, holiday rituals, ritual of changing activities, welcome rituals for new members).</p> <p><b>Authentic situations within the preschool and outside of it.</b> Situations and activities in addressing real-life issues that are of importance for children (such as newborn children or other family novelties, care for plants and pets; making equipment for outdoor play; walks and visits outside preschool; situations in which children and</p>	<p><b>Build relationships:</b> participate in making decisions and rules in the group and contribute to the realization of common tasks and obligations; perform activities important for group functioning and contribute to group the cohesion; and develop a sense of predictability, safety and belonging to the group.</p> <p><b>Learn and practice:</b> develop independence, confidence and various skills in routines including a skill of self-service; observe and imitate adults and other children in performing routines; learn to care for own health and healthy environment; engage in recreation and understand the importance of physical activity and healthy nutrition; learn to live with nature; learn the routines and rituals of other cultures; develop responsibilities and care for themselves and the environment; have the opportunity for</p>

adults share their experiences, problems and fears, make jokes and create friendships, talk to preschool visitors, hang out with younger and older children in the preschool; participating in activities and events in the local community.

authentic aesthetic sensations; create a sense of everyday life relations and tasks.

**Develop symbolic expression:** develop symbolic expression in authentic situations (label, design, remember numbers, add up, use information and communication technology, ...), use symbols from other cultures; in everyday situations use signs from various domains of human activity as means of communication.

**Enjoy and feel joy** – enjoy humour and communication with other children and adults (retell own experiences, make jokes); relax and rest.

The preschool teacher supports the participation of children in practical everyday situations and plans and organizes those situations as an integral part of the curriculum.

### Preschool teacher's support in practical everyday situations

- Provides a flexible but established rhythm in performing routines
- When working with youngest children, establishes routines in accordance with individual rhythm of each child and family;
- Re-thinks, discusses and reaches agreement with children on the rules regarding their routine
- Stimulates independence and responsibility among children in performing routines
- Delegates 'authorization' and practical tasks to children in performing daily routines
- Creates conditions in which care, common meals and other everyday situations become situations of building common social experience that brings pleasure
- Plans time and support for mutual socialization and sharing of experiences of children and adults
- Enables children to share information about themselves, their families, pets, etc.
- Encourages children to present their experiences gained in families and cultural communities in practical everyday situations
- Introduces children to the routine and rituals of other cultures
- Helps children to prepare welcome of new group members and to accept new members of their community
- Provides children with daily opportunity to be outside, play and engage in various activities in the natural environment
- Models and stimulates the use of various forms of literacy in everyday situations (e.g., by creating reminders, calculating, marking by various symbols, etc.)

- Enables children to participate in events in the local community and thus explore roles and relationships, understand and respect diversity and see themselves as part of the community
- Enables children to re-think prejudice and learn to resolve conflicts in authentic situations
- Provides continuity of group routine and rituals, also in case when he or she is absent from the group

## Planned learning situations

Planned learning situations are situations in which one enters with the intent to research something, find out, experience, discover or present. They are always active for children and are meaningfully connected to the topic/project.

Planned learning situations	Children in planned learning situations
<p>Planned learning situations initiated by children are situations in which children engage with the intent to explore, discover or present particular subject. These are situations where children are working with issues that are of interest to them, within a particular theme or project that has been developed or initiated by their own experiences. In planned learning situations, children are gathered in small groups that have common focus of interest and attention and are ‘occupied’ by resolving a specific problem or seeking specific knowledge. In such groups, children jointly direct their learning.</p> <p>Planned learning situations can be also initiated by a preschool teacher as part of the theme or project that has been developing with the children. A planned learning situation contributes to enriching and expanding children’s experiences, exploring the subject matter or solving a problem within the theme/project. Therefore a planned learning situation initiated by the preschool teacher is always aimed at developing a theme/project and is always ‘active’ for children – it enables children to</p>	<p><b>Build relationships</b> – articulate own ideas and share them with peers and adults; make plans and agreements about joint exploration; discover various ways of how to contribute to joint exploration with peers; and make choices and decisions and take responsibility.</p> <p><b>Explore and co-construct knowledge</b> – explore characteristics of everyday objects and criteria for sorting and grouping; research various ways of usage of different devices and tools; discover various movements of own body and characteristics of other living creatures; explore natural and physical phenomena; discover various ‘languages’ and ways of expression (speech, movement, sound, symbols, etc.) visual art movement, installations and expressions; explore various sources of learning; explore everyday objects, natural and non-structured materials; and explore different ways of learning and learn to follow their own learning process.</p> <p><b>Develop symbolic expression</b> – discover various symbols and modes of their use in communication; imagine, daydream and represent experiences in new ways; test</p>

be active and to practically manipulate and use non-structured and semi-structured materials and different tools, in order to explore a problem they see as making sense, deepen their ideas or experience and to discover, analyse and express their experiences. In guiding planned situations, preschool teachers rely on the past experiences of children, enabling various ways of exploration for children and various forms of interaction among children. A planned learning situation initiated by the preschool teacher always enables the inclusion of children through various forms of participation considering their individual potential and preference, as well as constructive exchanges among children. Through the way they participate, the preschool teachers stimulate children to make conclusions independently, test various options, compare their experiences and insights, and reach their own solutions in different ways.

various ways of using art materials, tools and processes; discover various forms of verbal communication through rhyme, storytelling, language games; explore various graphics symbols and use them in meaningful ways; and discover and master different ways of presenting the process and results of own explorations by using various media and technologies.

**Build identity** – develop their own cultural identity and cultural diversity, belonging to the local community, and accept cultural differences; develop curiosity, persistence and responsibility; develop awareness of themselves as unique personalities with their own set of needs, interests and ways of learning; belong to peer group by sharing interests and participation; develop self-confidence and self-respect; and understand and respect others.

**Enjoy and feel joy** – engage in activities that are interesting and meaningful and feel fulfilled; learn led by curiosity, experiences of wonder; play with their ideas; feel joyful in trying and exchanging with others; and feel joyful about joint achievements and abilities and their own contribution.

In planned learning situations, the preschool teacher does not aim at providing ready-made knowledge and correct answers, but instead supports the process of learning in which children develop strategies for their own expression and understanding of themselves and the world, and thereby learn how to learn.

### **Preschool teacher's support in planned learning situations**

- Focuses on the process of learning and not merely on the learning products
- Enables children to engage in issues that are meaningful for them, that they are interested in and that make them wonder
- Provides children with various sources and support for their learning: various places, institutions, organizations and individuals in the local community; families; other children and adults; printed, digital and other sources of information
- Encourages children to use speech in interpretation of their thoughts and experiences and to expand their understanding of the sense of the world through spoken expressions

- Modulates an exploratory approach to learning: by thinking ‘aloud’ about problems, wondering, articulating the process, using various sources of learning, using various ways of expression to present their ideas and proposals, showing dedication and perseverance
- Is the source of information and inspiration through reading and telling stories, by introducing various sources of knowledge, demonstrating procedures, etc.
- Enables children to develop various forms of early literacy (language, mathematical, visual, etc.) by creating situations for their meaningful use
- Encourages various and creative modes of expression (visual expression, spatial construction, movement and dance, vocal expression, singing, making sound and music, storytelling, dramatization, non-verbal communication, etc.)
- Introduces children to the cultural heritage of the immediate and wider community, as well as heritage of the humanity (visual arts, drama, science, literature, music, sport, and other cultural products, etc.) by building a sense of importance and beauty of humanity’s actions, as well as a sense of belonging and cultural and global identity;
- Explores the outside environment together with children, and enables children to discover and understand nature and natural phenomena and develop relation to them
- Helps children to make suitable tools and equipment for the purpose of their work with particular theme or projects
- Enables children to make various choices by providing them different tools, materials and means of expression
- Provides children with safety and at the same time encourages them to accept challenges in their physical activities (thus taking care of health and safety aspects);
- Encourages children to develop and re-think their ‘initial theories’ on natural, social and physical phenomena
- Encourages children to connect their work with previous experiences and knowledge, to co-construct knowledge and notice patterns
- Develops a sense of community by encouraging support, acceptance, respect and value of mutual contribution
- Develops a proactive relationship towards the world, by respecting initiative and the right to make a choice and starting joint actions
- Supports children to jointly anticipate and imagine, ask questions to each other, and seek different ways to solve problems
- Enables children to meaningfully use digital technology as a tool in working with the learning theme or project
- Helps children to document their learning in various ways

## 2. Preschool institution: The context of the real curriculum

The real curriculum is shaped by the context of the preschool institution – a specific preschool in which it is being developed. The context consists of the particular culture and structure of the institution, the immediate community and all curriculum participants. The culture of the institution consists of a certain system of values, explicit and implicit norms, written and unwritten rules, tradition, expectations and patterns of relations that are inherent in the

functioning of the institution. The organizational structure of the institution consists of: organization of space and time, staff structure and group organization (number of children in a group, the ratio of the number of adults to the number of children, and the way of structuring groups). Culture affects how the structure is put in function, while the structure provides opportunities, limits, incentives and limitations that shape the culture. For example, a large number of children in a group directly affects the quality of relationships, the actions of preschool teachers and modes of their participation in play, everyday situations and planned learning situations. The development of a real curriculum requires constant critical re-thinking of the characteristics of the culture and structure – ways in which they affect the development of the curriculum and their compliance with the conception of the Curriculum Framework.

## Physical environment

The physical environment (spatial-temporal organization) directly shapes the position of a child within the curriculum. The relations that emerge from the physical environment simultaneously shape the physical environment and make immediate learning milieu.

Space is by no means something given by itself, regardless of the programme, but, vice versa, it reflects, in the most direct and concise manner, the concept of the programme and must be in accordance with the concept of the Curriculum. That is why the teacher devotes particular attention to the area, and its constant restructuring, development, enrichment and design.

Temporal organization relates to structuring sequences and duration of various situations and activities. Children need predictable sequences in their daily schedule and, at the same time, flexibility in time organization.

Space-time organization is not subordinate to everyday routines (dining and rest), but, vice versa, spatial-time solutions for routines are adapted and integrated into the programme concept.

<b>The physical environment should support:</b>	
<b>Cooperation and positive interdependence</b>	Space and time are organized in such a way as to provide opportunities for children to work together and cooperate Space and materials enable and stimulate various forms of grouping and joint participation in activities
<b>Respect for the commitment to activities and initiative</b>	Space is organized to provide children with the option of being on their own and for children not to be disturbed in the activity they are engaged in Materials are grouped and easily accessible, encouraging children to be independent and to make choices Children can organize and re-organize space and materials
<b>Exploration, experimentation and creativity</b>	Physical space is a predictable, safe, but also dynamic and 'rich environment that invites exploration

	<p>There is a plenty of non-structured and semi-structured material, art materials and tools that may be used in various ways, enabling various forms of expression</p> <p>There are various sensory materials and materials that support sensory activities</p> <p>The space is equipped in a way to challenge and contribute to children's 'expansion' of their thinking, abilities and experiences through various activities</p> <p>There are many 'real' and authentic objects and materials that reflect the real lives of children, their families and teachers</p> <p>There are materials and products supporting the development of literacy (printed materials, posters, books and picture books, maps, schemas, various types of created calendars and scales, graphics symbols, etc.)</p> <p>The exhibited materials in the room and on the walls reflect the activities that are taking place in the group</p>
<b>Diversity</b>	<p>Comfortable and functional furniture for children and adults</p> <p>The space is accessible to all children</p> <p>The materials provide opportunities to do things in various ways</p> <p>Decorations, materials and tools illustrate and correspond to various types of diversity (e.g., gender, culture, ability, etc.), and challenge prejudices and stereotypes</p>
<b>Belonging and personalization</b>	<p>The space is personalized and reflects the particular characteristics and life of the group and individual children</p> <p>The space reflects the life and culture of the community and the everyday experiences of children</p> <p>The space reflects common ideas and values</p> <p>The space is showing the products and continuity of activities in the group</p>
<b>Body, sensory and aesthetic sense and sense of wonder</b>	<p>The space provides opportunities for various sensory experiences and activities – for exploration of different textures, smells, sounds, melodies, movements, etc.</p> <p>Space offers possibilities for different forms for movement, use of one's own body and exploration</p> <p>The way of structuring objects and materials supports aesthetic experiences</p> <p>Elements of nature (natural and non-structured materials) are present in the space</p> <p>There are imaginative and secret spaces</p> <p>There are beauty and harmony in the space</p>

Space in the room is structured by various spatial units using low shelves and bulkhead compartments transparent curtains of different materials, panels and tents. Defined spatial units provide children with predictability and security in the space – to know where they are and to



be independent and at the same time to provide them with the possibility of different types of research. Not all rooms must have the same spatial units, nor are all the units in a room permanent. How much and what spatial units will be depends on the age of the children, the specific space in a given kindergarten, the affinity and interest of the children and teachers, as well as the project/theme they are involved in. The most common spatial units are for literary (books and other written materials, early literacy, relaxation); construction; visual arts; a symbolic game ('family space' and role plays); seclusion and hiding; and sound and movement. Spatial units can also be workshops, space exploration of light and shadows, sensory spatial units, stage and other spatial partitions according to the needs of the theme/project. In nursery, the emphasis is on the kinesthetic and sensory spatial units.

Each spatial unit is to be changed by the teacher and should be complemented by introducing various tools and materials with the intention of expanding the game and children's exploration. For example, the space of the constructor, by inserting toys such as cars and animal figures, can encourage imaginative play in children. Also, for the purposes of their games and research, children can move materials from one unit to another. For example, in the game of a family in a unit for a symbolic game, children can bring cubes from the construction site to make a baby bed.

The space in the real curriculum is not just the classroom. Curriculum space encompasses:

- Outside space for daily use in various activities, play and exploration. Outside space should enable children to make changes, to construct, build and re-build in the space; to feel safe, but at the same time to be challenged; to find 'mysterious' places, to be able to 'hide' and to be alone. Outside space should be semi-structured and non-structured with predominant natural materials. It should provoke real or imaginary reconstruction of the space during the play; and provide opportunities for diverse kinesthetic and sensory experiences, manipulations and activities. Children should be adequately equipped to be able to fully use outside space in an active way and in various weather conditions;
- The space of the entire preschool is used for various encounters, joint participation of children of various ages, teachers and other adults; and
- Use of various locations in the local community as places for children's activities.

## Peers

For children, it is of great importance to have opportunities for interactions with their peers, younger and older children, participation in joint activities and developing friendships. Peers are a source of support and challenges, and children need to learn how to integrate their belonging to the peer group (e.g., following, accepting, cooperating with peers, adjusting, respecting the rules) with other aspects of peer relations, such as competition, taking the lead, and solving conflicts. One of the key components of adaptation in childhood are relations with peers through which children develop the capacities of self-regulation and relationships of closeness and understanding.

### **Through relations in joint activities with peers, children:**

Learn how to share with others; how to participate in reciprocal interactions (e.g., by giving and taking, waiting for their turn); how to understand and consider the needs and expectations of others and respect the opinions of others; and how to control their own impulses and resolve conflicts.

Re-think their own identity; recognize strengths and weaknesses in themselves and in others; take new roles and responsibilities, acquire new experiences by taking different roles – from the role of leader to follower and observer; try different options, take risks, make mistakes and face them and thus acquire new experiences.

Explore their own theories of the world, build awareness of the existence of other perspectives; develop discussions and dialogues, learn to understand and respect the standpoints of others, use argumentation and negotiate; learn to set hypotheses, questions and develop common ideas, to overcome pre-given and generate new questions, re-think and articulate ideas, opinions and standpoints; and plan and develop purposeful communication.

Develop a feeling of belonging and acceptance; feeling of empathy and morality.

### **The preschool teacher supports the development of the peer community**

#### **Through organization, by:**

- Providing space, time and materials for children's joint activities
- Planning activities in pairs and small groups
- Supporting social and symbolic play among children

#### **By promotion of positive interactions:**

- Adequate reactions in potentially conflicting situations and supporting children to engage in their resolution
- Respecting and emphasizing the value of friendship, nurturing friendship among children
- Modelling desirable social behaviour, such as listening to others, waiting one's turn, sharing, practicing good manners such as asking for permission, saying 'thank you', etc.
- Not using and not encouraging children to use socially undesirable forms of behaviour, such as labelling other children, telling on one another, ignoring, belittling one another, etc.
- Encouraging children to help one another during activities, play and in everyday situations
- Supporting sharing of knowledge and skills among children through joint participation in activities
- Respecting diversity and supporting children to understand and respect diversity
- Emphasizing the value of cooperative play

#### **Developing group identity, by:**

- Nurturing group rituals
- Shaping a group identity together with the children - through a group name, sign, vocabulary and other symbols of the group identity
- Formulating group rules together with the children

#### **Through dialogue:**

- By initiating discussion on life-living in the group, on diversity, gender and other stereotypes and prejudice, on feelings within the group, fears and problems

Provide support and assistance to peers when they need it.

Develop friendships and receive emotional support in new situations and when facing problems.

faced by the children, on negative behavior and its causes and consequences

## Community

The community directly, and indirectly through the family, shapes the conditions and ways children grow up. For children, a community is primarily their immediate environment – family, neighbourhood, system of relatives, preschool and other institutions that children are involved in (such as cultural centres, theatres, playrooms, health centres, places for going out and having fun, public spaces, shops, etc.) and open spaces (parks, playgrounds, etc.). Even before learning to walk and speak, children are interested in various types of experiences provided by new environments. These various environments enable children to develop new knowledge, a sense of belonging and joint social participation, as well as their own identity and values.

### Characteristics of the preschool connected to the community

- Community resources and spaces are used for implementation of various activities (public spaces, educational, cultural and sports institutions, etc.)
- Children and preschool teachers participate in various events in the local community (celebrations, festivals, activities, etc.)
- Events that involve members of the local community are organized in the preschool (shows, exhibitions, performances, promotions, etc.)
- Local economic organizations (such as factories, craft shops, banks, etc.) are places for implementation of the curriculum activities or they are taking part in preschool activities
- Local economic and business organizations participate in financing certain activities, equipment and the procurement of expendable working materials
- Information on the preschool institution and curriculum are available to the local community (e.g., at the library, post office, health centre, municipality hall)
- Preschool connects to other educational organizations and programmes related to education of children and work with families (including parent organizations)
- Preschool provides opportunities for family to connect and engage in other relevant services and programmes in the local community
- Preschool cooperates with schools through mutual visits, organization of joint activities, exchange of information; in cooperation with the school and other institutions in the community, timely informs and prepares parents and children for going from kindergarten to school; together with the school organizes various programmes, activities and actions that connect practitioners, children and parents from kindergartens and schools (sports and recreational programmes, art workshops, friendship programmes, celebrations, festivals, performances, exhibitions, performances); realizes mutual expert visits and exchange of information about programme activities, providing continuity in the educational context by harmonizing the physical environment, communication style

and pedagogical approach; exchanges information to provide timely information on various support programmes for children and parents who need additional educational support and/or other forms of support

## Family

Family is the primary and key educator of children:

- Children are personally and intimately connected to their families and their families knows them best
- The earliest child's learning and development occurs in the family and family context builds the foundations for the child's learning and development in all other contexts
- The family has been involved in the child's learning and development from birth and it should be supported and strengthened in this function
- Every parent essentially wants the best for their child, while some of them merely need greater support
- The preschool curriculum can complement a child's experiences of growing up and learning in the family when developed in partnership with the family

### **Curriculum based on partnership with the family:**

- Preschool is a place that welcomes family through clear spatial-organizational indicators showing that family is invited and respected (e.g., existence of a parent room, a welcoming poster, visual labelling of spaces, etc.)
- The family is familiar with the curriculum conception (through written information, parents' meetings, etc.)
- There is a programme of cooperation with the family developed through dialogue with parents on various possible ways and modes of involving the family: e.g., as members of the parents' council, as volunteers, participants in direct activities with children

- Parents are asked what is important for them and what they would like in the preschool for their children and themselves
- Children are asked how they would like their parents to be involved and to participate
- Parents are personally invited to participate in certain activities and they can get help and support of preschool teachers and/or other parents for such participation
- There are organized social activities that provide opportunities for socializing and developing relationships between the families and between families and preschool practitioners (such as field trips, walks, joint cultural events, gatherings, etc.)
- Preschool teachers daily cooperate with parents on different basis
- Parents introduce themselves to the teachers at regular meetings and actively participate in dialogue about children and curriculum activities
- Parents have possibilities to meet the teachers and discuss with them relevant issues concerning their child on various days of the week and at various times of the day
- Parents are encouraged to involve other family members and friends by bringing them along and inviting them to take part in preschool activities
- The curriculum respects the diversity of families and provides various ways for their involvement, and it is adapted to their needs and abilities
- Parents can become actively involved at different times and in different ways, and their involvement is documented
- Preschool teachers are aware that parents also have professional and other obligations and that they are frequently overwhelmed by them
- Preschool teachers know the specific difficulties and obstacles for the inclusion of certain families and develop strategies to overcome them

### **Partnership with the family is built through:**

Mutual trust and respect

Introduction, empathy, sensitivity and respect for the other side's perspective

Constant open communication and dialogue

Mutual recognition and respect for the unique contribution and strengths of each side

### **The preschool teacher:**

- Re-thinks own standpoints, assumptions and expectations from cooperation with the family and existing patterns of power
- Actively intends to achieve ongoing open and purposeful communication with the family that is open and meaningful and enables mutual exchange of information and dialogue about the child, curriculum and parenthood
- Develops written communication that provides exchange of information and documentation of preschool activities
- Develops a curriculum that provides space for family participation and respects parents'

Joint decision-making and readiness for compromise and change

opinions, proposals, suggestions and comments

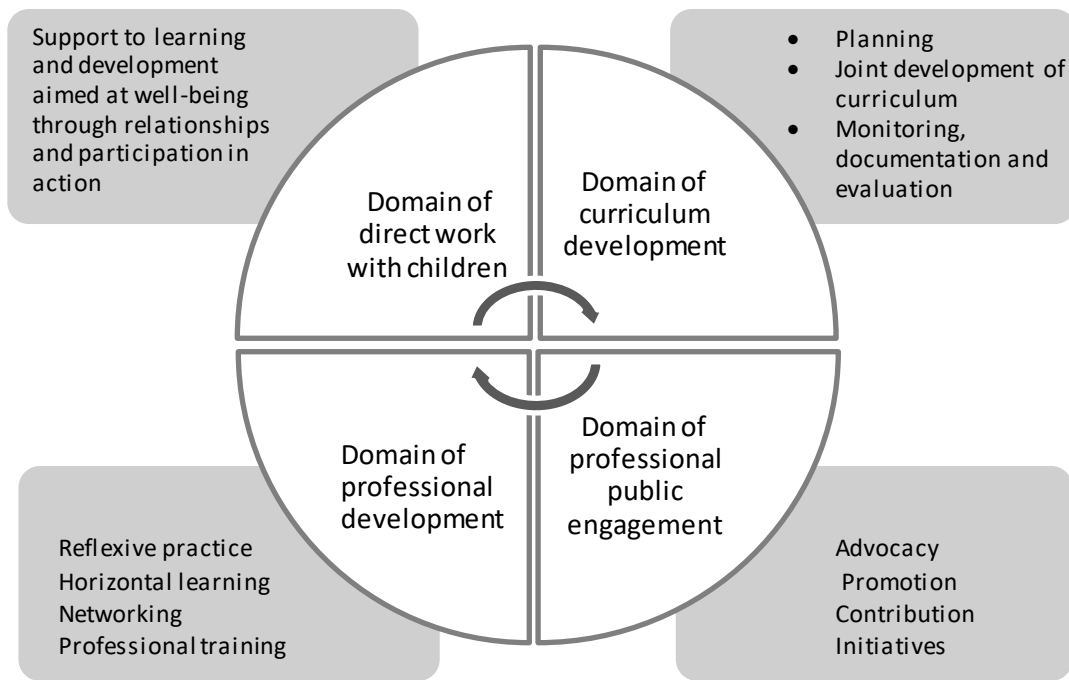
- Provides regular opportunities for direct communication with parents through individual meetings, group encounters and joint meetings
- Identifies obstacles for family participation and develops various forms of cooperation that are adjusted to and provide support to families and their participation

As a part of the curriculum, various forms of cooperation with family are developed in accordance with the needs of families and in line with the curriculum conception. The criteria for planning and implementation of cooperation is based on partnership.

## The preschool teacher

The practice of education is complex and changing and it can never be anticipated fully or planned in detail in advance. It unfolds through a dynamic interplay of relations and activities in the unique context of the group, preschool and the community in which the teacher works. No curriculum conception or theory can provide ready-made solutions in advance for such a complex and dynamic process in the specific context. The preschool teacher is constantly faced with new issues and challenges that should be addressed in accordance with beliefs, knowledge and skills, through reflexive re-thinking of theory and practice in the particular context. This reflects all the complexity and specificity of the profession of preschool teacher and the crucial importance of the teacher's role.

The professional role of a preschool teacher is realized through four domains:



**1. The domain of direct work with children** is realized through everyday work of the preschool teacher with the group by focusing on well-being, quality of relationships, and various situation and activities of joint participation.<sup>21</sup>

**2. The domain of curriculum development** is the domain in which the preschool teacher ‘brings to life’, at the level of the real curriculum, conception of the Curriculum Framework by implying principles and strategies of support to well-being, relationships and children’s participation in action. The process of curriculum development unfolds through cooperation with expert associates (pedagogues, psychologists) and colleagues, in exchanges with children and families.<sup>22</sup>

**3. The domain of professional development** is addressing the need for continual learning and approaching the question what it means to be a good teacher and what a good curriculum is. It is implemented through:

- Grounding the conception of the Curriculum Framework as personally relevant and closely related to one’s own practice through continuous re-thinking and reconsideration of curriculum conception and one’s own beliefs and practices
- Participation in development of reflective practices in the preschool through cooperation, exchange and joint research with expert associates (pedagogues, psychologists) and teacher colleagues
- Critical re-thinking of the culture and organization of the preschool with colleagues
- Networking with colleagues from other institutions for exchanging experiences and joint research

<sup>21</sup> This area has been elaborated in detail in the previous chapter.

<sup>22</sup> This area will be elaborated in detail in the following chapter.

- Participation in development of various projects at the local and national level
- Selection of professional development seminars relevant for development of reflexive practices and professional empowerment
- Participation at professional events and presentation of their work
- Keeping up with contemporary professional literature and trends for the development of preschool education
- Analysis and critical re-thinking of social and cultural factors and trends in which they develop and shape the practice of preschool education and developing trends

**4. The area of professional public engagement** is implemented through:

- Advocacy for the interests of children and families in all issues of public policy, social life and public affairs that concern children
- Engagement in the local community and promotion of the rights of the child and family and preschool education and care
- Argumentative presentation of problems in the practice of preschool education and care, taking initiatives and actions
- Engagement in professional associations and expert bodies
- Initiation of, and participation in activities that concerns children and families
- Promotion of preschool education and care, and the profession of preschool teacher by participation in professional events, in media, publishing papers
- Professional actions and behaviour in everyday practice in accordance with the professional code of ethics

### 3. Preschool teacher strategies in developing the curriculum

In the development of a curriculum aimed at supporting the wellbeing of children, the preschool teacher is guided by principles stemming from the conception of the Curriculum Framework and aspects of the real curriculum (relationships, actions and preschool context).

#### **Principles for development of the real curriculum**

##### **The relationship-centred principle**

In the development of a curriculum, the preschool teacher focuses on creation of a supportive social and physical environment that ensures safety and continuity, children's participation and teachers' involvement; and nurtures relationships of respect, cooperation, responsibility and togetherness.



<b>The vitality principle</b>	The preschool teacher's focus is on development of a community of children and adults, peer community and partnerships with the family and local community; creating opportunities for joint learning through meaningful activities that emerge from experiences, authentic interests and relations, needs and initiatives, problems and issues, events and occurrences in the group and in the community.
<b>The integration principle</b>	The preschool teacher focuses on creation of learning opportunities as integrated experiences of children, through their actions and relationships, and not on pre-planned individual activities based on different aspects of development, educational areas or separated content of teaching.
<b>The authenticity principle</b>	<p>The preschool teacher's focus is on recognition and respect for integrity, diversity and individuality of every child; for developmental, cultural, social and other specific characteristics of children and their families; for the strengths and potential of every child, particularly taking into account the needs of and support to children with disabilities and children from other vulnerable groups.</p> <p>The principle of authenticity involves an individualized approach to every child with a simultaneous focus on support to the child's inclusion in the peer community and joint activities.</p>
<b>The engagement principle</b>	<p>The preschool teacher's focus in development of the curriculum is on situations and activities that support: children's learning through their own activity, engagement, initiative and choice; various ways of approaching certain issues, problems and content; creative reworking of experience; and creative expression of one's ideas, experiences, thoughts and knowledge.</p> <p>The principle of engagement includes active involvement of the preschool teacher and joint participation with children, instead of direct teaching.</p>
<b>The partnership principle</b>	In the development of a curriculum, the preschool teacher respects and takes into account the perspectives of children and families – their opinions, ideas, initiatives and decisions; involves the family; and creates networks with the local community in various ways.

Based on the above principles, the preschool teacher develops the curriculum through the following strategies: planning, joint curriculum development, and monitoring and evaluation through documentation.

## Planning

### **Development of an integrated approach through thematic and project-based planning**

By using an integrated approach, the preschool teacher enables children to learn what they feel, think and do. Integrated approach to planning can be by themes or projects. Ideas for themes and projects can emerge from everyday experiences, children's play, dilemmas, expressed interests, needs and inquiries of children and teachers, various events in preschool and local surroundings.

Following the choice of a theme or initial idea for the project, the preschool teacher explores various sources of knowledge, culture and domain of activity, finds ideas and considers how they could be engaged in initial exploration, by relying on professional knowledge of age characteristics and characteristics of every child, considering which equipment and materials would be needed to encourage children to try out their ideas. Development of a theme or project should be a creative process, equally challenging for the children and the teacher, with joint discovery, play and creation.

The preschool teacher grounds a theme/project on the principles of development of a real programme; therefore, the teacher plans a theme/project only few steps ahead and:

- plans how to equip the space with various materials and tools which are inspiring for children for exploration within the theme/project (art objects and tools, various printed materials, devices, semi-structured and non-structured materials, etc.)
- starting from an idea for the activity, plans a way of organizing the activity in accordance with the principles of curriculum development
- based on the content that emerges from the chosen theme or project, the teacher plans the organization of the activity and modes of teacher participation (different ways of support, modelling, expansion of activity). The content introduced in the activity is in the function of exploration within the theme/project, and it shouldn't be considered as pre-given knowledge that children should obtain
- plans purchase of needed resources that can be procured, made or borrowed
- plans the possible ways of involving parents, children from other groups and individuals from the local community
- plans visit to places in the local community where they can expand their experiences related to the theme/project (e.g., visits to relevant institutions, organizations, public spaces, individuals)

The theme or the project can last from several days to several months, depending on the direction of development of ideas, proposals and interests of children, the diversity of offers and ideas introduced by the teacher and others involved in the theme/project.

	<p>The project is guided by a specific question, idea and/or intent for deeper exploration of a theme which is meaningful for children and challenging for research, and its result is an authentic solution. Seeking an authentic solution is what gives meaning to children's exploration and engagement in different activities and with various contents, but without the solution in itself being the purpose of the project. In planning, the preschool teacher does not aim at guiding children towards the quickest and most successful solution as the product of the project, but instead plans support for the process of learning based on principles for the development of a real programme.</p> <p>In nursery, the theme/project is more of an idea or a framework shaped by the preschool teacher, based on monitoring the interest and interaction of children with different materials, other children and adults in children's home and children's characteristics. Based on the idea of a theme or project, a preschool teacher first focuses on planning a large selection of sensory materials that will be readily available to children and which will encourage children to explore in an open and indoor space in a kindergarten. A nursery teacher plans more opportunities for different activities of children that are taking place simultaneously and which children choose. The teacher plans enough time for routines to help children feel safe, and to develop autonomy and closeness with the teacher and other children.</p>
<b>Flexible planning</b>	<p>In the development of the curriculum, the preschool teacher is constantly attuned to children by developing projections of opportunities for various experiences and learning. These projections serve as an overall proposal that is being revised and amended in accordance with the children's ideas and interests, and not as a finished, completed plan. Due to the dynamic and flexible approach to curriculum planning, the plan cannot be developed in advance for a longer period of time. It has been developed or, in other words, it 'emerges' during the initiated exploration of children and adults (teachers, parents and other adults in preschool) based on children's initiative and proposals; on consultation with children, teachers' insight on children's participation in various activities; and teachers' reflection on why it is important for children to engage in certain activities, and how that relates to their everyday context, previous experiences, knowledge and abilities.</p>
<b>Documenting the planning process</b>	<p>Teachers document their planning in the plan template that they build during the theme/project development process. The plan contains: theme/project title, a brief explanation of how the theme/project started and start and end dates; the sources of knowledge for teachers' use related to the specific theme/project; necessary equipment and materials; ideas for activities with the children, the necessary resources, the participation</p>

of the family and other participants and places in the local community as a place of learning.

## Joint curriculum development

### Encouragement of children's initiatives

The preschool teacher encourages children's initiative by:

- encouraging children's exchange and interaction with adults and creates situations where children have the opportunity to give proposals and express their opinions.
- enables children to try various ways of using tools, devices, and materials, and to make choices and raise awareness about the consequences of making a choice and the responsibility it raises
- encourages children to imagine, create assumptions, ask questions, express their ideas, discover their feelings and experiences in different ways.
- supports children to engage in authentic conversation that is meaningful for them, to observe what other children are doing, listen to what they are saying and together discuss their exploration.
- listens to children and pays attention to their ideas and proposals, and then finds ways to integrate them into the programme.

The teacher especially takes into account that the initiative of children of this age is supported, first and foremost, by the construction of close relationships with children through physical contact and intimate verbal and facial expression and by providing flexible routines that are in line with the rhythm of children's lives and an individually dedicated attention to the child during routine (e.g., when changing the baby). It organizes the physical environment as predictable and safe for the child, which at the same time offers different possibilities for research and movement, for frequent change of activity and interaction of children. The teacher encourages and inspires children from the earliest age to research behaviour by involving new objects, unstructured and challenging materials. Playing with children, with their non-verbal and verbal messages, encourages the curiosity of children and their active research, relying on the fact that children learn with their whole body and focus on 'here' and 'now'.

<p><b>Consultations</b></p>	<p>Consultations with children create possibilities for curriculum development in accordance with the children's perspectives – consulting means having a conversation with child about certain questions – e.g., how children feel in the group, what interests them and what they like in the preschool, how they would like to arrange the space, where they like to play, what materials they find challenging, what makes them particularly happy, whom they would like to meet, what scares them, etc. In consultations, the preschool teacher applies techniques close to the child's mode of expression, through which the conversation is deepened. These techniques are used as a starting point in conversation with children.</p> <p><i>Photography.</i> Children photograph places, activities, events that they like or would like to change, persons that are important for them in the preschool, etc.</p> <p><i>Mapping.</i> Based on the schematic representation of the given space (e.g., floor plan of the room, yard or preschool) made by the preschool teacher and explained to the children, the children themselves, or with the support of the teacher, draws their movements on the map, marking the places where they spend time and telling the teacher what they are doing in those places.</p> <p><i>Tours.</i> In the tour children take adults through the environment that they are familiar with (e.g., preschool, park, library, museum, etc.). The children are the 'tour guides' who decide how to move in the space and what to photograph or record in some other way. The preschool teacher makes notes during the tour.</p> <p><i>Art (expressive) techniques and activities,</i> such as drawing and painting, expression through movement and sound, enable children to express their feelings and perspectives in a visual or kinesthetic way.</p>
<p><b>Modelling</b></p>	<p>The preschool teacher models, through own behaviour and actions, verbal and nonverbal messages, ways of establishing and fostering relationships with others, ways of understanding the world and relationship towards learning and play-based creative approach to activities. The example given by the preschool teacher is what the children directly and spontaneously take on and adopt. For children, example is not only what the teacher says, but primarily what the teacher does and what kind of relationships he or she establishes. Through their behaviour teachers model a play-based creative approach towards an individual and the world, and through participation in play and exploration of a theme/project they model openness towards novelty, a willingness to take risks, the joy of discovery and exploration, relationships of respect, understanding and cooperation with others.</p>

<p><b>Scaffolding</b></p>	<p>The preschool teacher is a careful observer of children who encourages them to move beyond their current level of knowledge and skills. Teachers scaffold children's activities by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ providing assistance when needed</li> <li>▪ helping children to focus on activities that have meaning and make sense to them by paying attention to their interests, protecting them from overstimulation and by their own unimposing and reliable presence and participation</li> <li>▪ encourages children's activities, not through direct leading or 'cheering', but by sending a message that they believe in the child's capabilities</li> <li>▪ providing instructions useful for children in using devices, machines, tools and doing different activities (e.g., riding a tricycle or bicycle, sleigh, moving outside of the preschool, planting, using technology, etc.)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Expanding</b></p>	<p>The preschool teacher expands children's activities and learning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Through communication, by: using various ways of expression as functional, integral parts of preschool; commenting, retelling, interpreting, verbally describing child activities, encouraging the use of language and various forms of literacy in situations meaningful for children; problematizing a given situation, continuously asking questions of oneself and of the children; leading the dialog on play and other child activities; noting and collecting children's verbal and non-verbal statements and products; and having conversations with children and families about experience;</li> <li>▪ Through activities, by: participating in play, activities that enable them to get involved in social happenings in preschool and local community; providing inspiring and provocative environment, materials and tools and including various stimuli – to encourage their wonder; involving children in adult activities; involving other adults in the learning process; creating different opportunities for joint participation by children of different ages; using digital technologies in motoring one's own learnings; and creating various symbolic materials together with children.</li> </ul> <p>In expanding the activities of children, the teacher relies on a joint game with children, verbalizing the shared experience of children and adults in various situations in kindergarten and ensuring the continued availability of various materials for children's research, bearing in mind that children learn and know more than they can verbally express. The nursery teacher continually allows children to join other children in kindergarten, thus learning, observing and imitating, and cooperating in various activities.</p>

## Monitoring, documentation and evaluation

### Monitoring and evaluation through documentation

Monitoring through documentation includes following children's learning and progress and monitoring the process of curriculum development. The visibility of the programme and learning and development of children is clearly seen with documentation. Evaluation is an integral part of monitoring the curriculum.

**The purpose of monitoring children** is not assessing their development capacities and achievements but obtaining a more complete understanding of children's development and learning and providing further support for their well-being. Its function is:

- to present the richness and diversity of children's ideas and the way in which children see and understand themselves and the world around them, as well as their participation in a kindergarten;
- for children to develop self-confidence, and feel accepted, respected and encouraged to further explore, when they see that they document and show what they try, create and what they are thinking about;
- to provide the opportunity for children to return to different learning situations through documented situations, to re-interpret them and listen to the observations of others;
- for the teacher to follow and explore the ways in which children's learning is supported and their participation in the development of the programme; and
- to build cooperation with the family through building trust, dialogue and joint participation.

**The purpose of monitoring the development of the programme** is the continuous construction of the quality of preschool education programmes. Its function is:

- that the teacher critically reviews the conformity of the real programme with the concept of the fundamentals of the programme and the principles given in the fundamentals;
- the teacher develops a reflexive approach to practice independently and in cooperation with colleagues through reviewing the relationship between beliefs and intentions versus practice;
- the teacher continually reviews the strategies that he or she uses in developing the real programme through the dimensions of his or her own procedures, the organization of the physical and social environment, the ways of involving children;
- to ensure continuity in developing programmes through constant linking of children's experiences and knowledge as well as procedures and insights of teachers;
- to promote the programme and enable the professional and social community to become more fully familiar with the kindergarten

	programme and thus encourage these communities to contribute and participate.
<b>Forms and methods of monitoring</b>	<p>The process of learning and developing for a child is monitored and documented through a child's portfolio. The documentation includes: the progress of a child that highlights the strengths of the child; the child's perspective of situations, activities and events; and ways to support the child, especially when it comes to children from vulnerable groups.</p> <p>For documentation through individual portfolio following can be used: different scales and other observation and monitoring techniques, group and individual learning stories; products and statements of the child in consultation with children; products of the child created in the game and within the theme/project; and photos, videos and audio recordings, created in different situations that are particularly important to the child. Developing the programme through themes/projects is documented through a thematic/project portfolio. The thematic/project portfolio includes a theme/project development plan (detailed in the planning strategy) and a story about the topic/project.</p> <p>During the development of the topic/project, the teacher:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Produces, together with children, initial and process panels. The initial panels show the starting ideas and activities of children in the theme/project and can include drawings, sketches, children's statements, parents' invitations to participate, ideas and suggestions of parents, announcement of theme/project related activities. Process panels show various activities, situations and places where children learned, developed themes/projects, children's drawings, photographs, maps, charts, notes, questions, comments, as well as the observations and participation of parents and other participants in the kindergarten and the local community.</li> <li>• Documenting photographs (or notes) of changes in the physical environment during the development of the theme/project, the individual activities of the children within the theme/project, the situations in which children are devoted to something, the situations of joint participation, the places in the community where the children were learning, the children's products.</li> </ul> <p>Other ways of documenting the theme/project development process are possible, such as creating picture books, video clips, brochures, posters, and installations in premises.</p> <p>Using the collected documentation during the theme/project development process, the educator makes a story with accompanying photographs to document the completed topic/project.</p>
<b>Participation of children, family</b>	Teachers, together with various participants in the curriculum, document situations that they see as important. In this way, preschool



<b>and other relevant actors in monitoring the curriculum</b>	teachers will ensure multiple perspectives in curriculum development, better understanding and reliance on ideas and the interests of children and other relevant actors. They will also show respect for children, by considering their ideas and contributions as important and valuable. Through consultations with children, preschool teachers enable children to document their perspectives on the curriculum. Documentation is readily available and is the basis for dialogue.
<b>Evaluation of the quality of the real curriculum</b>	Expert associates (pedagogues, psychologists) and preschool teachers jointly re-think the quality of the curriculum through the evaluation of the real curriculum according to its key dimensions: learning environment; quality of relationships; learning through participation; inclusion, diversity and democratic values; and cooperation with the family and local community. This type of self-evaluation does not serve to assess the work of the preschool teacher or expert associates, but instead the data obtained in this way are the basis for joint re-thinking and changing the practices.

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