PALS
MANUAL

Play and Life Skills
Handbook for students, teachers,
lecturers and trainers

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Introduction

"The child is free to determine his own actions according to the laws and demands of the play he is involved in. Through and in his play he is able to feel himself to be independent and autonomous…"

(Friedrich Froebel (1782 – 1852), pioneering educator who recognised the importance of play when he opened the first kindergarten for children under the age of 7 in 1836)

Children in kindergarten and lower primary school settings learn through many different situations. The younger the children are, the more implicitly learning takes place and the more unconsciously learning processes happen. Children are constantly learning, no matter where they are – in family life, when playing with other children, at school and in childcare structures. Family and school represent both living and learning spaces for the child. Everyday situations and opportunities that are closely oriented to needs and interests provide a scenario to experience, discover, play and learn (Lieger, 2020). In particular, play and the associated experience-oriented play projects with a strong participatory character prove to be age-appropriate and meaningful at the elementary level (Lieger, 2014). Play is the 'profession' of every child (Krenz, 2004).
The central mode of learning for children in the elementary sector is therefore *incidental learning* – children at this age experience play and learning as one. Especially in free play, children are actively engaged and motivated to test and expand their own abilities. In doing so, they learn through feeling and experiencing with all their senses. Play as a form of learning runs parallel to a child's development in this age group and is associated with positive emotions. With increasing age, incidental learning gradually progresses into *conscious learning* (Lieger, 2014).

In play situations, children do not just learn subject-specific content or acquire competencies specifically related to processes they need to solve maths problems, formulate sentences, acquire knowledge about grammar or words or specific concepts about nature and society. They also learn how to interact with others, solve a problem alone or in a group, analyse situations critically, deal with their emotions and use their creativity in different situations. In short, they acquire the necessary skills that will serve as a foundation for not only subject-related questions, but also for various life situations in kindergarten and school as well as in their

future careers: it is in play situations, therefore, that children acquire future life skills. The period in which children not only master most of their skills (movement activities, motor skills, creative thinking, social skills, emotions and how to express/master them, etc.), but also acquire basic knowledge, is the time up to the age of twelve. The easiest way to achieve this is for children to learn through play, because play is the most natural way of learning for them. It is also necessary to adapt the educational and teaching process to children's development and to base it on experiential learning, i.e. to connect play and learning in a meaningful way.

This manual deals with the enormous potential of combining these two learning areas: using opportunities for play as an impulse for acquiring and training life skills. The following questions are at the heart of this manual:

→ When can learning be effective?

→ How can learning in kindergarten children be supported?

→ How can play situations support the acquisition of transversal or life skills?

→ Which life skills can be influenced positively through play opportunities?

→ Which factors influence the acquisition of life skills in play situations?

→ In which way does the family background, the individual child's situation and other societal factors influence this development?

1.1 Play as a prerequisite for successful learning

For a child, play represents creative processing: it is both imagination in action and a form of research. The main determinant of the game is flexibility: it is voluntary and an end in itself. The basic characteristic of the game is not the activity or the content of the game, but the specificity of the approach. The game is always more than just an activity: it is the way in which the child approaches the activity and is emphasised in the new Basics of the preschool Education and Care programme entitled "Godine uzleta" (*Years of Ascent*, 2018). Play enables every child to "exceed his capabilities" in the game, to encourage their own development (Kamenov, 2009, p. 36). Children develop all their capacities through play. The drivers of a child's learning and development are relationships and actions: play enables children to develop relationships with others and

with their environment, and to act (both alone and with others) to manipulate, discover, experience and explore through play and with play materials. Play encourages children's initiative for original approaches to solving problems, for errors in the game to be sources of knowledge and an incentive to seek more effective solutions, to develop sensitivity to problems and the willingness to solve new problems within the framework of previously acquired experience.

Children's play can be viewed from different angles. This manual outlines the importance of free play or semi-guided play (in contrast to the widespread learning games and activities exclusively addressing cognitive areas of thinking designed to lead to an improvement in certain abilities and skills for learning). Play as an expression of children's desire to discover and explore the world is at the centre of these considerations. In the context of unfavourable interpretations of competence-oriented curricula, children's play has more and more taken a back seat in favour of other – equally important – but exclusively cognitive-promoting concerns. Children's play, when used sensibly and age-appropriately in the classroom and in childcare situations, is the child's form of learning. Play is also defined from this perspective in this manual. Particularly suited to concrete pedagogical handling, this manual uses the determinants of Einsiedler (1999), according to which "[c]hildren's play describes an action, a chain of events, or a sensation,

> →   that is intrinsically motivated or comes about through free choice;

> →   which is directed more towards the play process than towards a play outcome (means-before-purpose);

> →   which is accompanied by positive emotions and

> →   which is set apart from real life processes in the sense of doing-as-if" (Einsiedler, 1999).

In understanding the possibilities for development and design in pedagogical and didactical terms opened up by this definition, this manual borrows from Petillon and Valtin (1999), who describe more precisely this potential for children's learning in teaching and care.

It is important to make better use of this potential and to have the courage to continue to encourage children in playful activities in kindergarten lessons and day-care facilities. Especially children from educationally disadvantaged families would be given more opportunities to catch up on any deficits with their play and get a good start in their educational career in an accompanied situation and fear-free atmosphere. In order to promote free play accordingly, educators need background know-

ledge, the necessary expertise in didactic approaches and methods, and a child-oriented attitude in order to advance children through targeted and age-appropriate play and learning opportunities. One could also call this a 'return' to play or a 'revival' which is currently taking place in the discussion about pedagogical/didactical interventions in kindergarten, primary school and day-care. This is also evidenced by the study on the situation of kindergartens conducted by the Department of Education in the Canton of Zurich: the findings show a need for the further development of play as a form of learning on the part of kindergarten teachers. This concerns above all the "use of guided and open forms such as free play" (Einsiedler, 1999) in order to be able to establish a rhythm and a "meaningful alternation between phases of concentration and relaxation" (ibid).

The same study also shows that there is wide variety in the underlying teaching and learning knowledge and the perspective of the child. Free play – and with it the attitude and commitment to the claim of individual support and professional play supervision – are therefore essential fields of action for strengthening play, and thus learning, in teaching and care. The importance of professional play supervision for the development and quality of children's free play is also demonstrated by current studies such as the recently published 'ReleFant Study' from the University of Konstanz and the Thurgau University of Education. This study also shows the influence that free play or imaginative play can have on the development of children's social and emotional competencies.

This was confirmed and explicitly formulated as a concern for this manual in dialogue with teachers in the field: Not only are the necessary competences for future teachers needed, but above all the necessary background knowledge, awareness of didactic possibilities and the corresponding attitude of lecturers at university level are essential to prepare future teachers in this sense.

The discussion about a 'return to free play' is also current in the Anglo-Saxon discourse on the topic. The initiative here comes from the circle of paediatricians who, with publications such as "Let the Children Play" (Sahlberg & Doyle, 2019), call on schools to let children play more in order to do justice to the potential of cognitive, physical and psycho-emotional development, and to be able to support children in the best possible way, even in a changed society (Sahlberg & Doyle, 2019).
"Learning through Play" (https://learningthroughplay.com/) by the Lego Foundation basically focuses on the same message. All this shows that we are not making enough use of the openness to and love of learning through play that all children carry within them in the various educational offerings. This manual takes up this message and addresses the key players in children's educational biographies who can make a significant contribution to changing the status quo: all educators of children aged from 4–8.

1.2 Life skills resulting from play and learning opportunities

As described above, in addition to subject-specific experiences (linguistic, scientific, etc.), children acquire a variety of generic competencies – *life skills* – through play. The discussion regarding these generic competencies is ongoing, both nationally and internationally. Against the backdrop of rapidly changing societies from an environmental, economic and social perspective, the OECD Learning Framework 2030 supports the need for broader educational goals (OECD, 2018). Both individual and collective well-being are the focus of this vision of the future, which assigns education a critical role in moving toward these goals: "Education plays a critical role in developing the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that enable people to contribute to and benefit from an inclusive and sustainable future" (OECD, 2018). Learning to set clear and purposeful goals, collaborate with others with different perspectives, find untapped opportunities and find diverse solutions to big problems will be essential in the years ahead. Education must aim to do more than prepare young people for the world of work; "it must equip students with the skills they need to become active, responsible, and engaged citizens" (ibid.). The different frameworks for life skills are the subject of Chapter 2.

Following the statements of the OECD, there is a call for inclusive education that places children at the centre of their own learning – a personalised environment that supports and motivates each learner, makes connections between different learning experiences and allows children to shape their learning in collaboration with others (ibid.). The competencies and skills that students should acquire for the development of their personality are transversal skills or life skills that become necessary in different disciplinary and non-disciplinary learning situations. However, the concept of life skills itself is not new: as early as 1998, the World Health Organization (WHO) defined life skills as "the adaptive and positive behaviour skills that enable individuals to cope effectively with the demands and challenges of daily life" (WHO, 1998). According to the WHO, life skills cover the areas of decision making, problem solving, creative and critical thinking, communication and interpersonal skills, self-awareness, empathy, managing emotions, and coping with stress (ibid.).

The United Nations agency UNICEF defines life skills in a similar way, placing them within an A-S-K model of skills: "an approach to behaviour change or behaviour development that aims to balance the three domains of knowledge, attitude, and skills" (United Nations, 2006). Broken down into specifics, the skills described by UNICEF and the WHO are listed as the following ten core life skills strategies and techniques: Problem Solving, Critical Thinking, Effective Communication Skills, Decision Making, Creative Thinking, Interpersonal Relationship Skills, Self-Awareness Building Skills, Empathy, and Managing Stress and Emotions (ibid.).

1.3 Inclusive practice as a guiding principle

According to the current educational paradigm and the new Years of Ascent preschool concept (*Years of Ascent*, 2018), kindergarten is understood as a place of shared living, in which support for children's learning and development is achieved through the joint participation of children and adults through relationships and in situations, events and activities that make sense for them. The educational practice of kindergarten takes place as a process of joint learning of children and adults through which adults and children jointly construct (co-construct) knowledge and understanding of themselves and the world. Also it emphasises that kindergarten is a place of democratic and inclusive practice, which implies:

→ respect for every child's right to education through inclusive practice in kindergarten, which respects gender, cultural, health and any other diversity, develops sensitivity to discrimination (gender, cultural, social, national, etc.) and pays special attention to the inclusion of children from sensitive groups;

→ respecting children's rights to active participation in education through focusing on the child's well-being and supporting their potential and active participation in the life of the kindergarten;

→ partnership with the family by recognising the primary role and importance of parents and family in early childhood education and

→ connection with the local community through different modes of participation of children in the local community and local community participation in kindergarten practice.

Inclusive education represents enabling the realisation of every child's right to quality education in accordance with their abilities and possibilities (Velišek-Braško, 2015). The state (i.e. the community where the child lives) is responsible for its realisation. Inclusion is defined as the process of recognising and responding to the different needs of children through increasing participation in learning, cultural life and community life, as well as through reducing exclusion from the educational system and community. Inclusive education implies a shift from preoccupation with a certain group of children (e.g. children with disabilities or children from unstimulating environments) to a focus on overcoming obstacles in learning and the participation of all children in the life of the kindergarten, school and community (Velišek-Braško and Miražić Nemet, 2018). The inclusion of children from vulnerable groups means adapting to their educational and educational needs and opportunities, which requires educational institutions to realise this through the removal of architectural and communication barriers, individualisation of the educational process, using and applying innovative approaches and achievements in

the field of pedagogy and methodology, by differentiating learning and providing additional support to the child (Jerotijević and Mrše, 2015). This manual and the proposed concepts and activities use this notion of inclusive education as a guiding principle for kindergarten and primary school teachers.

1.4 The aims and content of this manual

This manual has been developed for students in teacher education and teachers on the job who want to train their knowledge and competencies in designing meaningful play situations for supporting life skills development in children between the ages of four and eight. The manual forms part of the PALS project.

The PALS (Play and Life Skills) project aims to determine the importance of play and learning opportunities at the basic level and demonstrate this through specific (recorded) examples of games – how to connect play and learning. The target group of the project is children of kindergarten age and in the first grades of primary school (up to the age of 8). Three institutions from three countries are involved in the project: Zurich University of Teacher Education (Switzerland), the Faculty of Philosophy "St. Cyril and Methodius" in Skopje (Northern Macedonia) and the Preschool Teacher Training College in Novi Sad (Serbia). The PALS project also includes a research study, video recordings of the play situations and the publication of this manual for university professors (translated into Serbian, Hungarian, Macedonian and Albanian), explaining the connection between play and learning. The goal of the PALS project is to serve as a basis for the training of preschool teachers and lecturers at university level, while later this approach will be used by all educators and teachers in order to apply the acquired knowledge. Apart from this manual, the short videos (which are suitable for teaching at universities) can be used as both an illustration of and a stimulus for various tasks for students and teachers (e.g. tasks involving observation and inference, evaluation of existing theories, documentation, etc.). The videos will be made available on the international website of PH Zurich and Elementary Education, as well as on the websites of the different partners (the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje and the Preschool Teacher Training College in Novi Sad).

The chapters of this manual give an introduction to both topics of play and life skills and shed light on the different specific topics that influence these learning processes, and also address questions of planning, implementing and reflecting play and life skills teaching sequences. The chapters of this manuals are as follows:

Video 1:
Introduction to the PALS project
See Chapter 1.5

CHAPTER 1	Introduction to play and life skills
CHAPTER 2	Defining, developing and training life skills
CHAPTER 3	How play is connected to life skills
CHAPTER 4	Quality Play – Criteria
CHAPTER 5	Social changes and how play is affected by these changes
CHAPTER 6	Professional Development and lifelong learning
CHAPTER 7	Examples of activities to use in classroom settings
CHAPTER 8	The importance of families for play and life skills

Each chapter in this manual is structured in a similar way. After a short introduction into the topic addressing the leading questions, important theoretical background knowledge and scientific concepts will be introduced. Following this, ideas and hints for implementation in teaching practice are detailed, followed by either examples and/or tasks for teachers and students.

The manual can therefore serve as an instrument for future teachers in their training, as well as a manual for in-service training of teachers on the job.

1.5 Video

> ▶ **Video 1:**
>
> *Introduction to the PALS project*
>
> The PALS project offers an international context to the understanding and experiencing of play and life skills. The wide experience of the Zurich University of Teacher Education in the field combined with the specificities of the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje and the Preschool Teacher Training College in Novi Sad is an opportunity to gain a deeper insight into the matter for all the partners involved.
>
> https://youtu.be/hjbdU4ktD3I

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CHAPTER 2
Defining, developing and training life skills

Wiltrud Weidinger

Introduction

Life skills include competencies that children and adolescents need for the different situations they will face throughout their schooling and adult life. Additionally, life skills will help them in their encounters and in various situations during both their present and future lives, be it on a private or more professional level. In this chapter, we present different frameworks that will serve as the background for life skills educational programmes. The following questions inform the central issues:

→ What exactly are life skills?

→ Which domains of life skills can we differentiate between?

→ How do life skills develop?

→ How do life skills contribute to successful learning and future perspectives?

→ How can the development and training of life skills be supported?

In this chapter, two major frameworks will be used as guiding concepts in the manual for categorising and defining the different life skills: the **WHO framework of life skills** and the **OECD learning framework**. Firstly, we will present the different domains of life skills and then provide a brief overview of how life skills develop in children. The focus is placed on the question of how life skills contribute to successful academic achievement and future perspectives in the light of a changing society and labour market. Concrete examples are given for how to implement life skills in a kindergarten and school context.

2.1 The WHO framework and the OECD learning framework

The WHO life skills framework

According to the World Health Organization's definition of skills, 'life skills' are those which individuals will need to succeed throughout the course of their lives (1994). These life skills can be broken down into three main dimensions: social, cognitive, and emotional competencies (WHO 2001).

EMOTIONAL

self awareness

coping with emotion

coping with stress

SOCIAL

empathy

effective communication

interpersonal relationship skills

COGNITIVE

problem solving

decision making

critical thinking

creative thinking
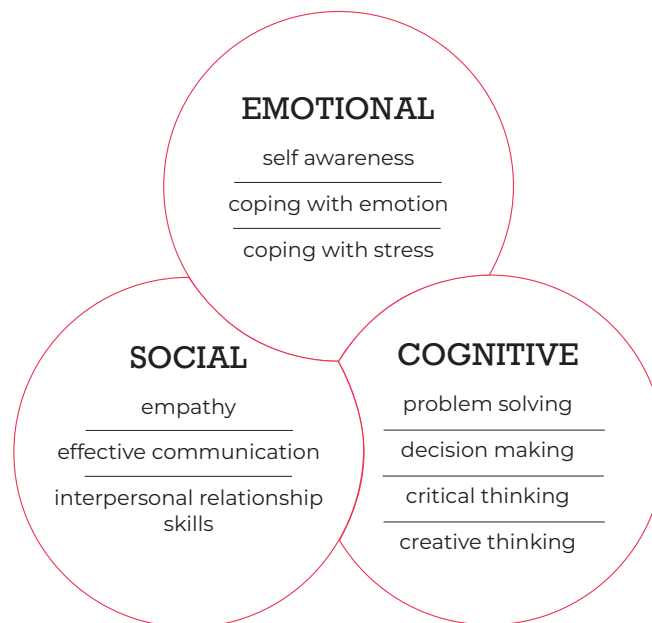
Diagram 1   The three dimensions of Life Skills (World Health Organization, 2001)

All life skills overlap and can best be supported using a holistic approach. It is impossible to train cognitive skills without focusing on social and self-awareness skills, and emotion-regulating skills cannot be trained without also taking in account social skills, and so forth. Life skills education is progressively developed from an early age onwards, starting at the entry point into the school system at kindergarten or primary school and lasting until the end of compulsory education. Life skills are taught throughout students' school lives using a 'spiral' curriculum, which means they are repeated in each school year, but at an increasingly complex level each time. Life skills are taught within specific subjects in a cross-curricular way.

The OECD Learning Framework 2030

The OECD Learning Framework (OECD, 2018a) formulates two central questions: what knowledge, skills, attitudes and values will today's students need to thrive and shape their world? and how can instructional systems develop these knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values effectively?

In the light of the overall aim of well-being, the OECD postulates the need "to be responsible and empowered, placing collaboration above division, and sustainability above short-term gain" (OECD, 2018a) for every child entering school. In the OECD Learning Framework, these skills are presented in a learning compass which places these competencies at the centre of its life skills concept. The aim of the Learning Framework is the acquisition of the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that are needed for children to embrace the challenges of an increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world. In doing so, the OECD describes three 'transformative competencies' to help shape the future: creating new value, reconciling tensions and dilemmas and taking responsibility (OECD, 2018b). The OECD also mentions three areas of 'core foundations' with "the fundamental skills, knowledge, attitudes and values that are prerequisites for further learning. They provide a basis for developing student agency and transformative competencies." (OECD, 2018c) The three areas of the core foundations comprise: cognitive foundations (which include literacy and numeracy, and upon which digital literacy and data literacy can be built), health foundations (including physical and mental health and well-being) and social and emotional foundations (including morals and ethics). Both areas (i.e. the transformative competencies and core foundations) include elements of life skills/transversal skills which are sets of competencies which are independent of specific subjects.
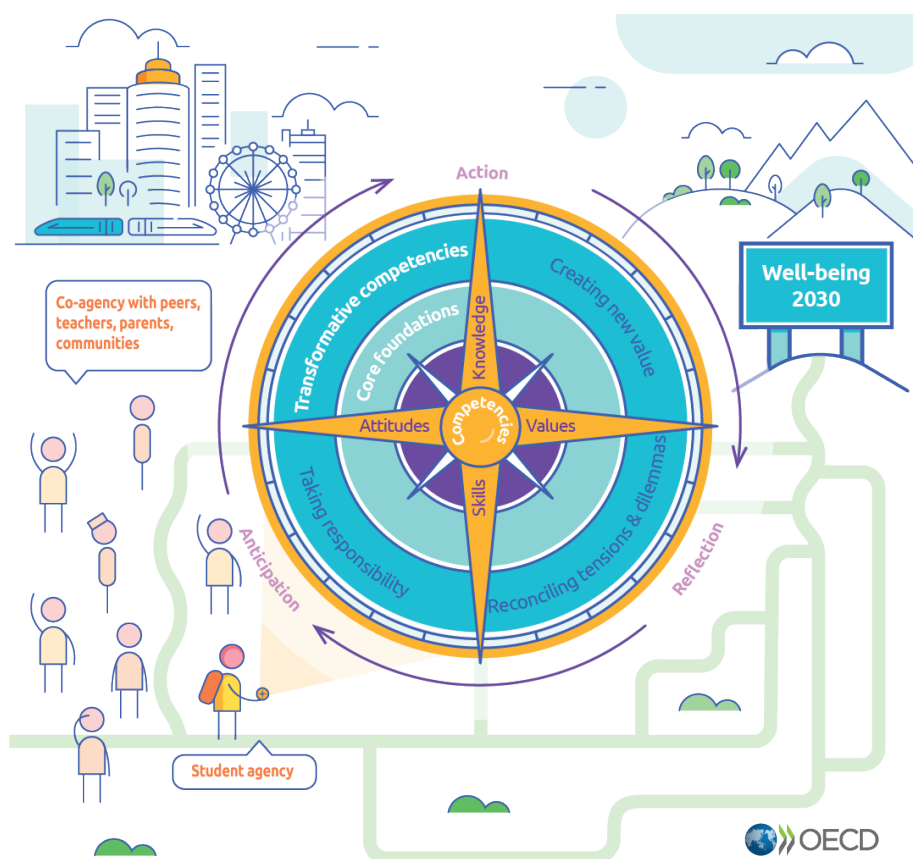
Diagram 2   **Learning Framework** (OECD, 2018)

Life skills in the Swiss curriculum

Life skills are part of a central element within the Swiss curriculum of compulsory education (known as 'LP21'). The Swiss curriculum is a competence-oriented curriculum, with life skills are positioned as necessary transversal skills in three major areas: personal competencies, social competencies and methodical competencies (EDK, 2016). All three areas are part of the general understanding of teaching and learning, aiming at a connection and interplay between subject-specific and transversal competencies.

2.2 The different domains of life skills

Different frameworks use different domains with which to classify life skills. A competence-oriented approach for the categorisation of life skills is usually selected for training life skills within school curricula for both kindergarten and primary school. Depending on the country context, an example of the different domains and their competencies might look something like this:

Domain	Skills
Cognitive competencies	→ problem-solving skills → creative thinking skills → critical thinking skills → metacognitive skills
Social competencies	→ communication skills → cooperation skills → interpersonal relationship skills → empathy
Self-awareness competencies	→ self-responsibility → decision-making skills → self-reflection skills
Emotion-regulating competencies	→ dealing with emotions → dealing with stress → conflict-solving skills

Table 1   Life skills domains and skills

Looking closer, it becomes evident that all the domains and skills mentioned above can be found in both frameworks, as well as in the Swiss curriculum (as an example).

2.3 Developing life skills – valuing pre-existing competencies

A child's life skills develop over time and depend on their developmental age, their capacities as well as to what extent they are stimulated by their environment (family, peer-group, class atmosphere, etc.). Developmental psychology offers a wide range of different developmental theories that place a special focus on different life skills domains. The following table provides a rough overview of the most prominent developmental theories.

Domain	Theory	Author
Cognitive development	→ Theory of cognitive development	Jean Piaget
Social development	→ Attachment theory	John Bowlby, Mary Ainsworth
	→ Social-constructivist learning theory	Albert Bandura
Self-awareness development	→ Socio-cultural development theory	Lev Vygotsky
	→ Psycho-social development	Erik Erikson
	→ Psycho-sexual development	Sigmund Freud
Emotion-regulating development	→ Emotional development	C.E. Izard Campos & Barrett L.A. Sroufe

Table 2 Life skills domains and important theories in developmental psychology

Although the different theories indicate milestones for the development of life skills in children, the individual levels of development in the different domains can vary greatly in a classroom of 20 or 25 children. In all cases, these strengths and skills should be identified and evaluated for each child by the teacher. As part of the vision of a life skills programme aimed at individual strengths and areas of development, students' pre-existing competencies and connecting to these competencies in school is an essential element of a social-constructive understanding of learning (Berner *et al*., 2018).

In regions with a very diverse student population with students from different ethnic, cultural and language backgrounds or with students who are disadvantaged in socio-economic terms, school curricula for life skills should focus even more on the strengths themselves and how to build on them. Children coming from minorities or vulnerable groups within a society are often disadvantaged as a result of their ethnic backgrounds and differences to the other children and because of limited access and school attendance (UNICEF, 2007a; UNICEF, 2007b; Surdu *et al.*, 2011).

However, this does not mean that these children start school as a tabula rasa with no prior acquired competencies and skills (Weidinger, 2016). On the contrary, children growing up in socio-economically vulnerable situations often have to contribute to the family's very survival, meaning they enter the school system with competencies and skills that they have acquired in non-formal educational settings, in their families, in peer groups and on the streets, etc.

It is the educational system that fails to perceive, measure, and value these pre-existing competencies (ibid.). Schools often do not offer opportunities where these pre-existing competencies and skills can be applied, tested, further developed and transferred into a way that they become useful and accepted by the institution and its requirements. These pre-existing competencies often encompass the described life skills, but also include purely subject-related competencies such as calculation, verbal communication skills (when selling things), technical skills (repairing, agricultural work, handicrafts) and knowledge about their environment and its materials (agricultural work, weather forecasts, etc.). In schools, children with such pre-existing or pre-acquired competencies cannot demonstrate and prove them as they are not asked for in school tasks, tests or other forms of summative assessment procedures (ibid.).

This is also the reason why Roma, Ashkali or Egyptian (RAE) children – when placed in mixed groups with children of the major population – can quickly become stigmatised (ibid.). Their perceived lack of cognitive skills becomes clear in the context of the classroom, including to their fellow children. School, therefore, not only serves to develop the needed cognitive life skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking or decision-making skills, but also becomes an important motor in promoting empathy and emotional awareness, and in training conflict-resolution skills. School becomes a place of inclusion and supporting everyone, regardless of their socio-economic background, academic achievements or cultural heritage.

How does the development of life skills influence learning in general, and academic achievement in particular?

2.4 How do life skills contribute towards learning and academic achievement?

It is evident that successful development of the different life skills leads not only to increased chances of bright future perspectives for young people, but also to positive learning behaviour during their time at school as well. Children with more well-developed life skills put greater trust in themselves, can adapt more easily to new situations, co-operate with others better and view their own successes and failures in a more constructive and growth-oriented way. Recent studies in North Macedonia and Kosovo have also shown that specific life skills programmes influence the way in which children view themselves and their own competencies (Gjela *et al.*, 2022; MCEC, 2022; Weidinger, 2023). The box below provides a more detailed description of these interventions.

Background information: the impact of life skills programmes on students and teachers

A teaching programme for the promotion of the life skills of students was implemented in conjunction with teacher training institutions North-Macedonia and Kosovo. The accompanying study assessed the impact of changes in the students' life skills and the teachers' perceptions of their students' life skills and attitudes.

The aim of the project was to contribute to the peaceful coexistence of different ethnic groups in Northern Macedonia and Kosovo through the targeted promotion of interdisciplinary competencies. The teaching programme, which was developed with the partners and implemented in the schools, consists of teaching materials on personal development for school grades 5–9, a handbook for teachers and training for multipliers in education and further education. The research for the baseline and endline surveys was guided by the question what the impact of the programme and the gain in competencies in life skills of the students, as well as the change in attitudes at the teacher level, would be.

The life skills baseline and endline study in Kosovo and Northern Macedonia consisted of a quantitative and qualitative survey at student and teacher level. A total of 1,598 students from both countries participated in the quantitative survey using the Life Skills Questionnaire for Children (LSQS). Of these, 1,076 were qualitatively observed and assessed by their teachers through the Life Skills Assessment Scale (LSAS). All participating teachers were also quantitatively interviewed about their

attitudes, experiences, and needs (n=229). In North Macedonia, focus group interviews were also conducted with 60 teachers.

When self-assessing their competencies, the students that took part saw gains primarily in communication with others, solving complex problems and working independently. They also improved in conflict resolution skills. These results correspond with the in-depth qualitative assessment of the teachers. Overall, they report improved life skills in interaction with others, problem-solving, initiative, conflict resolution and independent work. According to the teachers, when comparing the genders, girls benefited more than boys in problem-solving and taking initiative.

The North Macedonian results are consistent with those found in Kosovo. However, in the students' self-assessment, the most significant jump in the competence levels is seen in the development of problem-solving skills. These self-assessments also coincide with the qualitative observations made by the teachers, who see the improvement in their students' interaction and problem-solving skills as the most significant gain from the programme. Students are less likely to avoid conflict and show courage in order to negotiate acceptable solutions. Above all, the programme has contributed to improved communication among the students.

95% of the teachers surveyed reported enormous learning gains among their students, and 93% recommended the programme to their colleagues to facilitate inclusion and the peaceful coexistence of all ethnic groups in the two countries. In assessing their life skills, the teachers taking part saw an effect on their ability to better deal with emotions and cooperate with others. The programme has thus also contributed to their communication skills, although teachers in both countries reported the need to further improve their stress management and decision-making skills. The PEACOCK project was funded by the Public Lottery Fund of the Canton of Zurich. The partner institutions were the University of Prishtina and the Kosovo Education Center in Kosovo, and the University of Skopje and the Macedonian Civic Education Center in North Macedonia. The project's final conference was held at PH Zurich in September 2022.

According to the Harvard University Center on the Developing Child (2023), the most important skills children need to succeed in life are the life skills that span over several domains (as outlined before). These include the following skills:

→ Planning: being able to make and carry out concrete goals and plans;

→ Focus: the ability to concentrate on what's important at a given time;

→ Self-control: controlling how we respond to not just our emotions, but also in stressful situations;

→ Awareness: not just noticing the people and situations around us, but also understanding how we fit in;

→ Flexibility: the ability to adapt to changing situations (Harvard University Center on the Developing Child, 2023).

Harvard experts define: "while these are skills that children (and adults) can and do learn throughout their lifetimes, there are two time periods that are particularly important: early childhood (ages 3 to 5) and adolescence/early adulthood (ages 13 to 26). During these windows of opportunity, learning and using these skills can help set children up for success" (ibid.).

Researchers at Harvard focus on a specific area within the life skills domains: executive functions. Executive functions are defined a set of skills that relies on three types of brain function: working memory, mental flexibility and self-control (ibid.). According to the researchers, executive functions contribute to various dimensions of schooling and life perspectives in general (ibid.).

School achievement: executive function skills help children remember and follow multi-step instructions, avoid distractions, control rash responses, adjust when rules change, persist at problem solving and manage long-term assignments. For society, the outcome is a better-educated population capable of meeting the challenges of the 21st century.

Positive behaviours: executive functions help children develop skills in teamwork, leadership, decision-making, working toward goals, critical thinking, adaptability and being aware of our own emotions, as well as those of others. For society, the outcome is more stable communities, reductions in crime and greater social cohesion.

Good health: executive function skills help people make more positive choices about nutrition and exercise; to resist pressure to take risks, try drugs, or have unprotected sex; and to be more conscious of safety for ourselves and our children. Having good executive function primes our biological systems and coping skills to respond well to stress. For society, the outcome is a healthier population, a more productive workforce and reduced health care costs.

Successful work: executive function skills increase our potential for economic success because we are better organised, more able to solve problems that require planning and better prepared to adjust to changing circumstances. For society, the outcome is greater prosperity due to an innovative, competent and flexible workforce.

The Harvard Center on the Development of the Child also clearly identifies key factors for the acquisition of these executive functions: the critical factors in developing a strong foundation for these essential skills are the children's relationships, the activities they have opportunities to engage in and the places in which they live, learn, and play (ibid.).

How can life skills be implemented into teaching and learning settings? How can it be integrated into the curriculum?

2.5 Implementation in kindergarten and school curricula

Life skills education is embedded in all school subjects and is always connected to learning content relevant to the individual at their current level of development (Weidinger *et al.*, 2020): the content and tasks in any life skills programme should be targeted at the corresponding age and grade. Throughout the curriculum of compulsory schooling, teaching life skills becomes more complex, following similar topics each year and focussing on the same skills throughout the child's entire schooling (ibid.).

Thus, life skills education is built up progressively from an early age onwards, starting at the entry point into the school system at kindergarten or primary school and lasting until the end of compulsory education. During the students' school lives, personal development skills are taught with the help of a 'spiral curriculum': they are repeated each school year, but each time at a more complex level. The spiral curriculum of personal development and life skills education can be described as an approach that presents different key concepts for learning with increasing complexity levels throughout progressive school years.

Difficulty

Mastery

Revision

New content
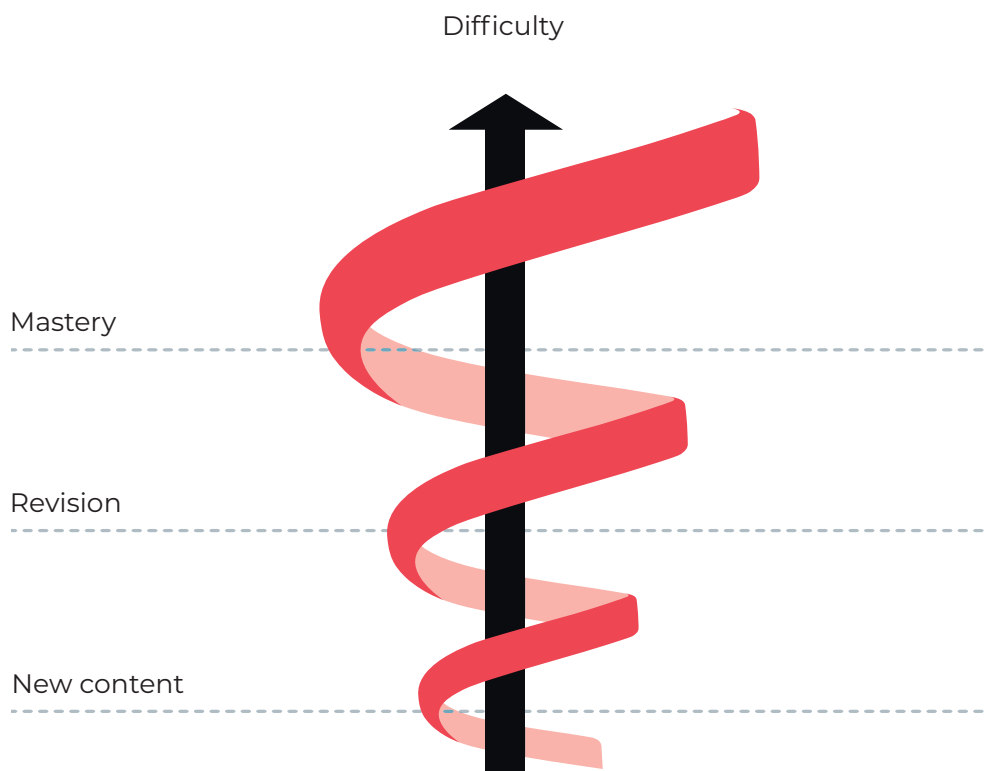
Diagram 3 **The spiral curriculum according to J. Bruner** https://www.kindpng.com/imgv/JwobJh_bruners-spiral-curriculum-diagram-hd-png-download/

Following the paradigm of the early educationalist and psychologist Jerome Bruner that "any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development" (Bruner, 1960), the spiral curriculum is the underlying pedagogical principle of life skills teaching and learning in kindergarten and school curricula. Information, topics and tasks are introduced to children at a young age and continually reintroduced, reinforced and built upon. Not only will this develop proficiency in the different life skills in an adaptive learning method, but the meaning and significance of what is taught also become an integral part of the programme. This spiral curriculum includes ideas, principles and values significant to the students as they mature, and values essential to broader society. Through the spiral curriculum, the programme also follows the approach and paradigm of life-long learning (Weidinger *et al.*, 2020).

2.6 Examples of life skills teaching and learning programmes and materials

Two specific life skills training programmes that have been developed by some of the PALS partners together in different languages are presented here. All these materials are available for free download from https://ipe-textbooks.phzh.ch.

FACE – Families and Children in Education		
Life skills focus:	all skills within	→ personal → emotional → social and → cognitive competencies
Age group:	4−12 (with a special focus on including parents into children's learning processes)	
Materials:	workbooks for students and manuals for teachers	
Available in languages:	→ Albanian → Arabic → English → Hungarian	→ Macedonian → Romanian → Serbian

Table 3   Teaching Material FACE – Families and Children in Education

The FACE life skills programme consists of booklets for children which start at kindergarten age and go up to the age of 12. The booklets are designed for the children to work in, but also include short instructions for teachers. The book belongs to both the child and the teacher – it is a workbook for children to improve their strengths and feelings about themselves, and a planning and preparation tool for teachers. Teachers can find seven chapters which deal with different aspects of self-competences and life skills for children between the ages of 4 and 12. One task in each chapter is dedicated to inviting the parents into the school and working together with the children. Each task also includes games to be played or to complete in school. The list and description of all the games can be downloaded separately in a specific booklet. At the end of the school year, each FACE booklet foresees either a game party (FACE 1), a performance by the children (FACE 2) or an exhibition of all the work produced (FACE 3) that will be organised together with the children and parents. The final chapter of each FACE booklet is an opportunity to reflect on the learning processes and provides a space for feedback from parents and teachers. Tasks vary in their pedagogical methods and include task-based learning, co-operative learning or other participatory methods. They can also be adapted by the teacher according to the needs of the group.

The following is an example from FACE 1, Topic 2 My class

(Weidinger *et al.*, 2021)

Instructions for teachers:

STEPS

1. The children sit in a circle. The teacher shows the picture of the kindergarten again. He asks the children again to look at the picture and find out what they like in particular.

2. The teacher tells the children what Anca and Catalin are playing today. Find the story on the next page.

3. He explains that the children will "make" their own kindergarten. The children can play what they like. They are allowed to move the tables and chairs. Blankets and pegs can be used to build something. The teacher always assigns two or maximum four children to one spot.

60'

The task:
You "build" your fantasy kinder-garten by rearranging the tables and chairs. You play in the "new" kindergarten.

How you work:
With the whole class and in groups

Material:
- music
- old bed sheets, blankets, pegs etc.
- boxes

• **THE MUSICAL SNAKE**
All the children queue up to form a long "snake". As soon as the music starts, the snake starts moving. The child at the front of the snake makes movements such as hopping, crawling, tiptoeing etc. The other children all imitate the movements. When the music stops, the child in front goes to the rear of the snake and it is the next child's turn.

• **CAR WASH**
This game is played without talking, very quietly. The class lines up, shoulder to shoulder. The child at the end of the line is the "car" that needs to be cleaned. She moves down the line with the back to the line. The other children are the brushes. They massage, stroke, pat etc. the back of the child. Hitting, tickling or any violent movements are not allowed. When the other end is reached, the "car" is clean and it is the next child's turn.

Story to be read aloud (ibid.):

STORY:

Anca and Catalin
play at kindergarten

Today, after the big break the children at Anca and Catalin's kindergarten can choose what they want to play. Anca is playing shop with her friends Elena, Jonela and Constantin. The shop counter is new. Some of the children at kindergarten made it out of old cardboard boxes. They are very proud of it because they made it all by themselves.

Elena is the shopkeeper and Anca is the client. She plays a mother who needs some baby food. Jonela is playing the baby daughter. She is crying all the time and Anca tries to calm her. This takes a lot of time and Constantin, who is playing another client in the shop, is getting impatient. He would like to pay and leave. They are all having great fun.

Catalin is building something with Daniela, Marian and Traian. They have not agreed yet on what they want to construct with the toy blocks. Daniela and Marian want to build a fortress and stage a battle with knights and horses. But Catalin and Traian would prefer to build a racing circuit for cars.

Another example from FACE 2, Topic 2 My feelings – Home task (Weidinger *et al.*, 2021)

2 – Home Task 5
My family is happy when…

The task:

Make a table about what your family feels in different situations.

How you work:

At home or in a quiet place

Material:

- booklet
- pencils

Steps:

1. Look at the table. Ask different family members.

2. Record the answers on the answer sheet.

3. Thank the people for their answers.

Worksheet for children:

My family is … when …

My _____ is happy when…

_____

My _____ is sad when…

_____

My _____ is angry when…

_____

Personal Development series	
Life skills focus:	→ self-awareness → emotional and social competencies → problem solving → life quality assurance → developing future perspectives → personal safety → healthy lifestyles
Age group:	6 – 18
Materials:	teaching manuals for teachers
Available in languages:	→ Albanian → English → Macedonian → Romanian → Serbian

Table 4 Teaching materials Personal Development

How are the different skills organised?

In this personal development programme, life skills are taught in a sequence of five modules that comprise key concepts. These are:

Module 1	"Self-knowledge and knowledge of others" emphasizes self-knowledge and self-esteem, exploration and self-evaluation of personal resources, the family as a value, responsibilities, gender roles, stereotypes, volunteering and assertive, non-conflictual and non-violent communication, etc.
Module 2	"Ensuring quality of life" emphasizes integrity, efficient resource management, responsibility for sustainable development, effective self-management, etc.
Module 3	"Healthy lifestyles" guides students on issues related to physical and emotional health, healthy nutrition, gender influences and counteracting vices such as drugs, alcohol and smoking, etc.
Module 4	"Designing personal careers and developing entrepreneurial mindsets" focuses on understanding career prospects from a labour market perspective, career planning and career decision making, entrepreneurship as a career option, etc.
Module 5	"Personal safety" equips students with the attitudes and behaviours necessary to ensure their own safety and the safety of others.

Table 5 Five modules in the Personal Development programme

Following the spiral curriculum, each manual in this series uses the same structure of modules and key concepts. The tasks are spread out over the whole school year, with four tasks to be completed per module: in short, each manual consists of a total of 20 tasks. The topics and tasks for the students will often overlap: a task about a healthy lifestyle might also touch on ensuring quality of life and the art of self-knowledge; a task for older children centred on career options will also touch on self-knowledge and ensuring quality of life, and so forth. So even though the tasks are organised into five modules, they should not be viewed as being completely separate. The modular approach requires an educational intervention characterised by the integration of knowledge, skills and attitudes specific to the development of competencies. The integrative approach is applied within each module, capitalising on gains made in other school subjects or the student's social and familiar environment. In this way, the Personal Development course is centred on developing competencies with a specific focus on values, attitudes and dispositions.

The different modules and tasks in this manual are laid out chronologically and we advise adhering to this order when teaching them as it builds up the different life skills incrementally through the key concepts in a carefully designed process.

The teaching and learning methods used in this programme include both task-based and co-operative learning methods. Both are grounded in a cognitive-constructivist view of learning where learners construct their knowledge through self-engagement with a given task on an individual level, exchange their insights in dialogue with a partner or small group and then share their results with the class. This principle of "think – pair – share" can be found in a number of tasks, and itself contributes to the development of social and co-operative skills. Self-reflection on learning processes and reflection together with others is an important part of personal development and can be found within the different tasks.

Here is an example of a task for Grade 1, Module 1:
Self-awareness and awareness of others

IPE Textbooks (Weidinger (2021): A teacher's guide to Personal Development for Grade 1. Online: https://ipe-textbooks.phzh.ch/de/english/

TASK 3
I AM ME
YOU ARE YOU

Goal
The students understand that they are unique and that their friends are unique.

🕐
Time needed
45 minutes

👥
Social settings
- Individual work
- Group work
- Plenary session

📄
Preparation
Paints or inkpad; White sheets of paper

🧩
Module 1
Self-knowledge and knowledge of others

LESSON DESCRIPTION

1. Activating game "Be My Mirror": Two children stand facing each other. One child starts to make a move (e.g. claps her hands or stamps his feet). The other child has to be the mirror and does the same thing. Then the first child makes a different move. The "mirror" has to do the same. After a few turns, the teacher tells the children to switch roles. Now the other child is the mirror.
2. The teacher starts the introduction: "Anca and Catalin are very special children. They can do a lot of things. They like animals, they like school, they like playing with other children. But they also want to be unique. Do you know what unique means?"
   The class discusses what makes a person unique. The teacher explains why fingerprints are unique.
3. The children sit in groups of four and make handprints in the middle of a white page.
4. When the sheets have dried, the children go back to their desks and create a flower out of their handprint.
5. The children hang their flowers around the room. Everyone looks at them. Do they look the same? Are they different? The teacher guides the discussion.
6. Calming game "Back Writing": Two children play together. One of them sits in front of the other. The first child starts to draw something on the back of the other child (a heart, circle, triangle, etc.). The other child has to guess what she drew. Then they switch roles.

2.7 Activities for students and teachers

Reflect your life skills

Go back to the list of life skills domains and competencies. Which life skills are you best at? Where would you like to invest in training for yourself? Put them in rank order (with 10 being the highest). Compare your ideas with a colleague who knows you and who you know. Listen to their perceptions of your life skills and share your perceptions of their life skills strengths. Remember to be kind and respectful. Do your self-perception and the perception by your colleague match? Where do they differ from each other?

Think of your teaching

Of the life skills you have looked at, which ones have you already focused on in your teaching? Which ones would you like to focus on in the future? Complete the table with the life skills and the associated activity or your idea of how you could teach it. Exchange your ideas with another person.

Life skills focus:	Activity in teaching / New idea

What about the children you teach?

Think about the children you are currently teaching or the class you have taught during your last practice session. Where would you see the children's strengths? Can you remember concrete examples? Where could you see areas of improvement? Complete the table and discuss it with a partner.

Domain	Skills	Strengths	Areas of improvement
Cognitive competencies	→ problem-solving skills → creative thinking skills → critical thinking skills → metacognitive skills		
Social competencies	→ communication skills → cooperation skills → interpersonal relationship skills → empathy		
Self-awareness competencies	→ self-responsibility → decision-making skills → self-reflection skills		
Emotion-regulating competencies	→ dealing with emotions → dealing with stress → conflict-solving skills		

Table 6 **Children strengths and concrete examples**

Discover the potential of life skills in play situations.

Watch the two videos of the Swiss project 'Play Plus' at the end of this chapter. Write down all the life skills that can be promoted during free and cooperative play in the examples shown.

Video 1:
Forest Playground Adventure
See Chapter 2.8

Video 2:
Playfully Exploring Surroundings
See Chapter 2.8

2.8 Videos

▶ **Video 1:**

Forest Playground Adventure

Playing outside has been proven to strengthen physical, mental, emotional and intellectual health, and helps children develop several important skills for life, such as curiosity, creativity or critical thinking.

https://www.spielenplus.ch/english#Forest-Playground-Adventure

Avantura na šumskom igralištu

https://www.spielenplus.ch/bosn-serb-kroat#Abenteuer-Spielplatz-Wald

▶ **Video 2:**

Playfully Exploring Surroundings

While playing, children learn to express wishes and perceive the needs of others: What is good for me? What do others need? Without knowing it, children learn skills that are important when coping with life.

https://www.spielenplus.ch/english#Lebenswelten-spieleri-sch-erkunden

Istražianje okoline kroz igru

https://www.spielenplus.ch/bosn-serb-kroat#Lebenswelten-spieler-isch-erkunden

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CHAPTER 3
How play is connected to life skills

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Introduction

Aspects of learning within the context of life skills provide a link between social, emotional, cognitive and physical skills. The influence of all of them is important in every developmental stage of children. Modern pedagogy follows children's needs for developmentally appropriate practice and different forms of play to increase different skills. It appears that the treatment of different skills in kindergarten has an impact on different aspects of learning, but also on the different aspects of the personality of every child. The efforts of kindergarten teachers should provide a stimulative environment and always follow the concept of a holistic pedagogical approach.

The main questions in this chapter intended to inspire kindergarten teachers are:

→ Why are socio-emotional skills important for children?

→ How can we increase cognitive skills for every child?

→ How do physical skills have a benefit on the holistic development of the children?

The content of this chapter is written on a theoretical basis and is designed to provide practical approaches for implementing it into kindergartens and direct work with children. It also provides support to the WHO framework of life skills and the OECD learning framework in processing awareness of the meaning of life skills. Presented aspects of learning are closely connected with three categories of competencies, the 'transformative competencies' that, when looked at together, address the growing need for young people to be innovative, responsible and aware:

→ Creating new value;

→ Reconciling tensions and dilemmas;

→ Taking responsibility.

One key point is how to bring life skills and aspects of learning together in everyday children's lives. The key link between life skills and learning for children between 4 and 8 years old is certainly play. Open play and guided play (with special emphasis on dramatic play) – all of these types of play empower children to communicate effectively. In addition, games encourage them to think creatively and critically in order to make decisions that lead to solving certain problems, thereby developing interpersonal relational skills. When we talk about role-playing games or dramatic games, in addition to all of the above, they are found to be particularly suitable for the development of both motor skills and a sense of spatial relations, as well as for the development of self-awareness and empathy in the participants (team spirit is important because a goal that benefits everyone can only be achieved when everyone plays together, without competition). A child who is self-aware and empathetic is one who has control over their emotions and potential stress. In this way, good foundations are laid for the future development of a democratically conscious individual.

Video 1:
We are building a castle
See Chapter 3.4

3.1 Socio-emotional skills

Why are social-emotional skills important for children?

From a very young age, children are socially competent beings, ready to respond to touch, the voice and sound or another person near them. The quality of socio-emotional contacts in early childhood affects the ability to establish quality communication and social interaction with other people throughout life. Acquiring quality skills and abilities for the development and encouragement of socio-emotional learning in early childhood means having the opportunity to create a positive self-image, develop pro-social behaviour and empathy, strengthen self-confidence and social skills, but also to possess competencies and abilities for recognising and naming emotions and feelings in oneself and in others, understanding them and distinguishing between them.

A positive self-concept

The development and strengthening of a positive self-concept is an important goal of education. Self-concept or 'self-image' implies a perception that the child creates about themselves, about their own abilities and personal characteristics, about their own value and relationships with others. It is formed through mutual experiences and interaction with others, first of all in the environment in which the child lives, grows and develops, i.e. the parents, and later the peers, educators, teachers, etc. The development of the self-concept is largely conditioned by the influence

of all other persons and objects with which the child will have the opportunity to come into contact during their lifetime.

Self-concept implies the possession of information that relates to us personally, situations that occur in the immediate environment and are related to us, a changing perception of ourselves. It depends on age and is an unstable, changing category that generally refers to the 'physical self' – so the physical representation of ourselves (how our body moves and interacts with other objects) – and the 'psychological self' – or psychological representation of us (our emotions and behaviours).

> → Physical self – the physical representation of oneself, one's own body, and how it moves and interacts with other objects;

> → Psychological self – our emotions and behaviours.

Self-awareness about the 'physical self' begins from an early age with research activities, first of all, by discovering our own body, the possibilities we have and what can do with our hands, feet and fingers to discover the space in which we are to reveal the limits of our 'physical selves'. At the earliest age, in the sensorimotor stage of development, children use their own bodies to learn more about the 'physical self'. How children are perceived and how much they are stimulated to build a positive attitude towards themselves will depend on the personalities and the space in which the child will have the opportunity to stand and move and interact with others (in the broadest sense of the word) on a daily basis. Differentiating oneself from others is the first stage of noticing one's existence as a distinct individual. Gradually, a child begins to distinguish between objects and the differences between the people around it. This allows the child to more easily notice and experience their own 'I' as something real, separated from everything else around it.

A clearly formed self-image also implies awareness of one's own gender identity and the gradual formation of a clear image of the world and acceptance of values that also refer to the gender of the child. The environment in which the child grows and develops will have a decisive role in the formation of these values.

The development of emotions in children takes place gradually, and these emotions always leave a deep impression on the relationships with other people around them and on the socio-cultural environment in which a child moves, grows and develops. By the age of two, every child is expected to recognise fear, anger, pleasure, jealousy and attachment. The strength and depth of emotions and how they are expressed (positively or negatively) is different. Children will react differently, from delight to indifference to exactly the same phenomenon or situation. However hey manifest it, they are still behaving completely honestly and openly.

▶

Video 2:
Joy with the mirror
See Chapter 3.4

Just like adults, children also deal with and express their feelings and emotions in different ways.

Every child has their own way of expressing emotions and personal experiences. The ability to understand one's own emotions presupposes the development of a basic emotional culture, recognising and dealing with one's emotions, sharing them with people close and developing a sense of responsibility for one's own emotions and experiences, above all the development of a positive attitude towards life – the gradual building of an authentic criterion for assessing and facing the emotions of others around us.

The constructive approach in understanding and accepting children's emotions, developing a sense of dealing with them and gradually developing self-control and respecting their emotions or the way of experiencing them is a significant assumption for the correct socio-emotional development of the child and their personality.

In addition to emotions, a child's behaviour and values are a significant part of the psychological self. Early childhood education should encourage the creation of new democratic values among children. Our behaviour usually indicates how we experience things (how we feel something) and how we react. Our attitudes and opinions are, above all, a verbal expression of our beliefs. The child realises themselves as a person by acquiring knowledge, adopting attitudes and adopting values. At an early age, the child is a value-unformed person, open to various possibilities in the education process.

The set programme goals in all domains of development are actually values, consisting of the desire, effort and action to be realised. Early childhood pedagogy is aimed at building and changing value ideals, goals and models among children. From an early age, children should have a clear picture of their values and what they want to achieve.

What values do we adopt in early childhood? Who influences us? How do we build our own value systems? How acceptable is it for the environment in which we live, grow and develop? Do we accept and respect the values of other people around us?

The answers to these questions do not lead to the realisation of the need to constantly strengthen the knowledge, skills and abilities of children to respect other children and their values, i.e. to strengthen their intercultural competences. Children who have a strong sense of self are ready to learn and live with other children.

The ability to communicate in early childhood is the starting point for socialising, playing and learning with 'other' children.

Important social skills, in addition to communication (verbal and non-verbal), are the ability to share, to cooperate and to participate in a democratic environment, which will generate the creation of new democratic values for children at an early age. The quality of social interaction in a classroom will prepare children for active participation in a democratic society.

The ability to be responsible for one's own behaviour and to participate in the creation of common values is a characteristic of every democratic

society. This is why preparing children to be productive citizens in a new democratic society is a significant task of early childhood education. The behaviour of adults and their feedback in daily activities with children send a clear message about acceptable ways of behaviour in an educational environment, i.e. the promotion of new models of educators and teachers for children who will live and work in the second half of the 21st century.

Self-confidence in early childhood is only one aspect of the 'self-concept'. It represents an affective reaction, an evaluation of one's own value as a person. Self-esteem usually refers to the way we evaluate and judge ourselves as human beings. Synonyms of self-esteem are self-perception, self-acceptance, self-respect and awareness of one's own worth: self-concept is a cognitive structure, a belief about 'who you are'.

Sometimes self-belief refers to an aspect of self-concept (when we value ourselves). It is largely conditioned by the socio-cultural environment, by the values that are nurtured in it and by the personal characteristics of the children and their competences, abilities and skills. As children grow older, the self-concept is constantly supplemented with new events and activities, developing in different situations.
Over time, children strengthen their self-confidence based on personal assessment of their own achievements in everyday activities at home, in kindergarten or at school – this is how they create a positive image of themselves. The models that have the power of influence continue to be significant for them, but with the passage of time and the development of the children's identity, self-respect and a positive attitude towards oneself as a person – separate and different from others – is strengthened. Children gradually take responsibility for their own actions and behaviours and become aware of how others treat them and the way they see themselves.

Empathy

Along with experiencing their own emotions, children also become sensitive to the feelings of other people around them. The ability to detect different emotions in other people, to accept a different emotional perspective and to empathise with 'others' is a characteristic of an empathic child. Empathy is observed from an early age, and it implies the ability to: understand another's point of view, be sensitive to others' emotions, be open and ready to hear other people's opinions and have an increased tolerance for things. Empathy does not mean expressing sympathy, concern or pity for the other individual. In early childhood, it is recognised in the emotional contact the child enjoys with the people closest to it, first of all the mother and then later with the educator and with the teacher. The first positive contacts with other children are the basis for develop-

ing empathy and concern for others. Children at the age of three or four, in an educational setting in the kindergarten, are always the biggest support for themselves. The quality of the established child-child inter-action simultaneously benefits all children in overcoming stress or re-ducing aggressiveness. At the same time, the possibility of choosing and making decisions strengthens their socio-emotional sensitivity, i.e. the understanding of one's own behaviour and having different beliefs about things.

Empathy in early childhood can also be interpreted as a motivation for prosocial behaviour. Adults should enable children to learn from their own experiences and deal with the consequences of their own choices. With increasing age, the opportunities for developing empathy and altru-istic behaviour in life increase in general.

3.2   Cognitive skills

Many studies over many decades have shown that cognitive skills – per-ception, attention, memory and logical reasoning – determine an individ-ual's learning ability; according to Canadian tutoring company Oxford-learning.com, they are the skills that "separate the good learners from the so-so learners". In essence, when cognitive skills are strong, learning is fast and easy. Conversely, when cognitive skills are weak, learning becomes a challenge. Since cognitive abilities are crucial to reading, writing, maths and learning, they are typically impaired in development-al disorders of attention, language, reading, and mathematics, such as ADHD, dyslexia, dyscalculia and dysgraphia.

The core cognitive skills are:

Perception:	Attention:	Memory:	Logical reasoning:
→ Visual perception; → Auditory perception; → Phonological awareness; → Processing speed	→ Focused attention; → Sustained attention; → Divided atten-tion.	→ Sensory memory; → Short-term memory; → Working memory; → Long-term memory; → Visual memory; → Auditory memory; → Sequential memory.	→ Deductive reasoning; → Inductive reasoning.

Table 1   **Core cognitive skills**

The core cognitive skills have been defined through a large amount of research and theories. It is also possible to match the theory and practices, with the main aspects shown in the table below.

Theory and research	Developmental approach
Theory of cognitive development Jean Piaget	→ Sensorimotor stage (birth to 2 years) → Preoperational stage (2 to 7 years) → Concrete operational stage (7 to 11 years) → Formal operational stage (12 years & up)
Theory of cognitive development Vygotsky	Influence that culture and language has on the cognitive development of children.
Students with special educational needs	→ Students with disabilities (students with intellectual disabilities, → students with autism, students with visual impairment, → students with hearing impairment, students with motor disorders and severe chronic diseases, → students with speech and language problems).
	Students with difficulties: → students with behavioural or emotional problems, → students with specific learning difficulties (dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia).
	→ Students coming from a socially, culturally and materially deprived environment, → students without parental guardianship, victims of domestic violence, refugees.
	→ Talented students also singled out as a separate group.
Classification according to the risk of exclusion from regular schools	→ With special needs/disability (specific challenges in development); → 'Different' (by religion, ethnicity, age, gender, social class, etc.); → Gifted, above average intelligence; → Chronically ill; → Homeless, educationally neglected;

	→ With emotional and behavioural problems; → From marginalised families/communities; → Who do not speak/understand the language of instruction.
Type and degree of disability of persons in mental or physical development	→ Persons with visual impairment (visually impaired and blind); → Persons with hearing impairment (hard of hearing and deaf); → People with voice, speech and language disabilities; → Persons with disabilities in physical development; → Persons with disabilities in mental development (mild, moderate, severe and profound); → Persons with autism spectrum disorder; → Persons with chronic illnesses; and → Persons with multiple types of disabilities – persons with combined developmental disabilities.
Students with developmental disabilities of school age can be divided into two large groups	Influence that culture and language has on the cognitive development of children.
	Students with developmental disabilities with a high incidence rate: → speech and language disorders; → learning difficulties; → emotional imbalance; → mild intellectual disability.
	Students with low-incidence disabilities: → hearing disorders; → orthopaedic disorders; → vision disorders, including blindness; → deafness – blindness; → deafness; → other health disorders; → regression; → traumatic brain injuries; → autistic spectrum disorder; → moderate to severe intellectual disability; → combined obstacles.

Table 2   **Review of theory and research for cognitive skills** (comparative approach) (Tasevska, 2023)

Articulation disorders show variability in relation to the degree of intellectual disability, that is, if the degree of intellectual disability is higher, the frequency of articulation disorders among children with intellectual disability is also higher. Concrete examples and suggestions for strengthening different cognitive skills from an inclusive education point of view are given in Chapter 7 of this manual.

3.3 Physical skills (gross motor skills [coordination], fine motor skills)

The development of a child, especially up to the age of three, fully corresponds to the biological impulses that are relevant for a certain age, but also to the interaction that exists between the adults who take care of the child. Receiving impressions from the environment through the senses, their processing and organisation form a complex psychological function known as perception, which unites feelings and experience (Vojvodić, 2016). Perception is the starting point on which the manipulation of objects is built in order to learn about sounds, movements, smells, tastes, the behaviour of objects and numerous other characteristics.

In the context of the reflection that is the subject of this chapter, it is important to distinguish between growth and development. Growth refers to a change in quantity and represents a physically noticeable change in the size and appearance of the child, whereas development has a qualitative component to it and is not visible but can be observed in the child's behaviour, abilities and the complexity of the movements they are able to perform. Since the critical periods for the emergence of an ability largely coincide with the stimulation that comes from the environment, it can be said that growth and development are interdependent. This corresponds to the conclusions of developmental neurologists that the brain is a social organ that develops throughout life (Siegel & Payne-Bryston, 2014). The development of gross motor skills over the first two years of a child's life means that during this time, the child struggles with numerous challenges of growth and development, falls, stands up, crawls, stands on their feet and continues tirelessly and with joy (Secret Life of Babies, 2014). An important turning point in a child's life and existence is mastering an upright posture and walking. Before learning to walk, the child's entire life takes place within its physicality. "Mastering walking enables the discovery of the objective space and the relationships that rule in it. The child begins to perceive himself/herself, that is, his/her body as an 'object among other objects', which leads to further liberation of thought processes and further decentralisation of thinking" (Išpanović-Radojković, 1986, p. 75). Although it appears as one and the same, development is a multi-layered and complex process. It encompasses physical, motor, sensorimotor (psychic) and (socio-)emotional development (Čuturić, 1993).

Each expresses its specificities, so in the explanation of the child's overall development, it is necessary to show individual aspects, characteristics, assessments and deviations.

Title		
Aspect	**Features and assessment**	**Deviations**
Physical development	Reflected in the degree of development of the body and organism. Subject to ranges suitable for children of a certain age. Shows deviations in a positive and negative direction. **Assessment of physical development:** → Physical development corresponds to the child's age; → Newborns, infants and children perform actions based on which physical maturity is assessed; → External signs indicating that the child is healthy.	→ Decreased or increased physical development with a tendency towards advanced or slowed development; → Delay in movements that are common for a child of a certain age; → External signs indicating that the child is not feeling well.
Motor development	Reflected in the mobility of the body. Associated with gross motor skills (walking, running, sitting, turning, catching, throwing, etc.) Closely related to the child's psychological development, especially in the first two years. Subject to ranges suitable for children of a certain age. Shows deviations in the ascending and descending direction. In order for the movement performed by the child to occur, sensorimotor nerve stimuli must first occur which are responded to by the action of the central nervous system receiving the stimuli. **Assessment of motor development:** → Holding the head firmly without nodding (after the third month); → Symmetrical movements of arms and legs, liveliness of movements during periods of wakefulness; → Independent sitting (after the seventh month); → Walking without support (after 15 months).	→ Sluggish head posture; → Asymmetry in movements and/or lack of liveliness; → Slowness in the development of sitting; → Inability to walk or difficulty in walking.

Sensorimotor (mental) development	Represents all the intellectual and cognitive development that occurs in the first three years of life. Closely related to physical and motor development and indicates a close connection between senses and movement, especially sight and hand (sensorimotor development). Due to the abundance of information that a child of an early age receives through vision, as well as due to the importance that the sense of sight has on the overall development of the child, it is considered that it performs the function of sensory intelligence. **Assessment of sensorimotor development:** → After birth, the child reacts to light and changes in lighting. Child smiles when the light of lamps warms it; → Briefly follows standing and moving objects (in the first month of life); → Visual perception affects the skill of handling objects, so often referred to as visual-motor perception; → Learning through random activities and then practicing them (mental development); → Existence of a mental image of the subject (mental development); → Generalization of action and development of learning through insight (psychic development).	→ Insufficient eye development (low vision or blindness); → Slow motor development, i.e. handling; → Slower psychological development and action with the aim of mastering the environment where located; → Longer presence of reflexes (grasping reflex, hugging reflex, Babinski reflex).

Socio-emotional development	Occurs solely due to the human need for communication and exchange. Reflected through speech and sociability because the child indicates their needs through the ability to communicate and realises the need for sociability. The richness of speech is closely related to intelligence and hearing development. Sociability is closely related to the development of emotions that appear in the relationship with the surrounding environment, but also with sensory development. **Assessment of socioemotional development:** → Visual and sound stimuli are combined into one stimulus to which the child reacts by turning their head towards the source; → Use of speech in order to communicate in accordance with age; → Expression of emotions in accordance with the situation and based on sensory receptivity.	→ Insufficient development of hearing (hard of hearing or deafness); → Absence of the appearance of sentences after the age of 3; → Disturbances in pronunciation (which should be checked immediately, with the aim of finding the cause); → Child on the autism spectrum (context of sociability); → An environment that does not sufficiently encourage emotional and sensory-perceptual development.

Table 3   **Child's overall development**

3.3.1 Motor development

Reflex maturation and establishment of balance reactions "enable the child to master more complex motor activities and skills, with a significant increase in balance and coordination during their performance" (Nikolić, 2012). Motor development is largely spontaneous. However, the environment has a significant influence on encouraging its practice and training with the aim of more successful, complete and independent execution.

Video 3:
Football
See Chapter 3.4

3.3.2 The benefits of dramatic art on the child's motor and social development

By using drama in children's learning, including them in the process of creating play or just using that form as a game – in addition to enabling children to gain self-knowledge by getting to know the world around them and their position in it – we enable them to accept responsibility for their actions.

The first form of children's communication with the environment is the game itself. Through play, the child engages all their abilities. While playing, they explore, discover and get to know the world around themselves, communicate and solve possible problems. Therefore, play has a "specific role in human ontogenesis" (Duran, 2003, p. 23). And if we give the game a more serious form, it becomes a dramatic game that we can consider a reflection:

"the entire human repertoire for conveying messages: words, gestures, facial expressions, body posture, fast, heavy and light breathing, stylised movements, prescribed silence, etc. [...] we can say that here we encounter a combination of verbal and non-verbal symbolic actions"

(Duran, 2003, p. 127).

The question is – which aspects of children's development are affected by a well-thought-out process of creating play? The answer can be found in all the verbs we use to describe the creation of a game: invent, design, make, draw, chop, glue, bring closer, move away, illuminate, raise, lower, move, compare, count, surround, pronounce, sing, listen, show, lean, help, wait, support, etc. By using and demonstrating all the above actions (and many others), children activate both their mental and their physical functions. Thus, dramatic play appears as a complex, multifunctional activity. Through this, the child's motor, sensory, affective, social, cognitive and conative abilities are engaged.

Puppet show

With the help of a doll, a child can acquire knowledge more easily, expresses and experiences his fears and dilemmas, and get to know the world around themselves. Using a doll when communicating with the environment, the child feels safer, because the doll appears as having the function of a kind of shield. With the doll, the child moves, and by gradually mastering the movements, the child gains self-confidence and becomes more independent.

In his book *Faith in a Doll* (2014), Edi Majaron – who is a puppeteer and professor at the Faculty of Pedagogy in Ljubljana - emphasises that movement games (e.g. ball games or water games) often provoke a competitive spirit among peers, which can cause stress and self-doubt due to eventual failure. On the other hand, animating a stage puppet encourages creativity and team spirit in children, because everyone has the same goal – to perform a show.

The simplest form of play in kindergarten is done with the simplest puppets – **finger** puppets. A finger becomes a character if you just draw a face on it, put a ping-pong ball on it or sew a special costume.

Picture shows puppets play (Preschool Teacher Training College, Novi Sad)

Next among the easy-to-make and simple-to-animate puppets are **table-top puppet theatres**. They can be made from collages or cardboard to which a stick is attached (which will be used to animate it) and the scene itself can be an ordinary table, a crate used to set up the scenography or any flat surface. The next step up are **dolls pulled over the hand (sock puppets/'guignols')** and dolls made by shaping an object (and often a plastic bottle that gives the doll's body a cylindrical shape). Ladle dolls can become complex to animate if hands are added to them. To animate these dolls well, the child must have good movement synchronisation, making them more suitable for the older group or for preschoolers. Several skills will help children later within free play, when for example engaging in imaginative play with a wooden farm and small figures.

Pictures show imaginative play
(Bürki, 2022)

Shadow theatre is a special form of puppetry precisely because of the beauty of the stage expression. When making the flat dolls (shadow puppets), but also when animating them (especially if some part of the figurine is made to be movable), children develop fine motor skills of the hand and also motor skills up the entire arm and to the shoulder. In shadow theatre performances, the animators are hidden behind a white screen. This is exactly the reason why this medium (as well as all forms of puppet shows where the animators are hidden by a screen) is particularly suitable for children who have a problem with public performance, are shy or have speech difficulties. The very fact that they participate in the performance, but are not exposed to the gaze of the spectators, allows them to free themselves.

Pictures show shadow theater (Preschool Teacher Training College, Novi Sad)

Classic play

The term classic play (often referred to simply as a 'school play') is used in this case to highlight a play in which child actors appear on the stage (they play the roles 'live' – E Majaron's term) compared to those in which the puppet is in the foreground. A fact well noted by Majaron is that with this form of stage expression, the ego of the individual (actor) is in the foreground. This is why he believes that the classic play favours children who need leadership in the group, while others – the more withdrawn children – are suppressed. However, in practice, it has been shown that classical plays are the general format used for 'final' performances, i.e. when children leave kindergarten and prepare for school. In such moments, every child from the group is glad to have at least some role in the play. These classic plays, due to their structure, provide a wide range of conceptual solutions that activate all the potential in children.

Seen from the perspective of the child's psycho-physical development, the classic play is ideal for: understanding the spatial relationships between the participants; movement development (especially if dance choreography is included), where the feeling for the terms left – right, forward – back, diagonal is especially developed; gesticulation and mimicry which, unlike a puppet show, come to full expression in this form.

Mime play

From the point of view of communication, what we mean by pantomime here is a form of non-verbal communication and is counted as a form of kinesics. If we look at it from an artistic point of view, it is a stylised and dramatised non-verbal communication that is most often associated with ballet. Its importance in the application in kindergarten is that it encourages children's awareness of the body. It can be used in the form of an ordinary daily game – e.g. the mirror game (when we imitate the movements of the person opposite us) or when we use pantomime to try to evoke the movements of certain animals, explain some professions, names of books or movies, indicate emotions or mental states. In order for the audience to focus only on the performance, the actors (children) are usually dressed in black leotards so that their individuality is completely subordinated to the expression through gesture and mime.

The advantages of pantomime are visible in children who find it difficult to express themselves verbally, and through pantomime they find a different way to express themselves. The general goals for the use of pantomime in kindergarten can be – as in any other form of dramatic creativity – developing imagination, getting to know one's own possibilities (what the body can do), encouraging children's creativity and encouraging the perception of details (changes in other people's movements, but also their own emotion [facial expression]).

However, perhaps the most important item that children learn indirectly through pantomime is what it is like for those who have speech difficulties caused by hearing disorders or various irregularities of the speech apparatus. Pantomime is one of the ways to accept differences and to develop tolerance towards other ways of communication, not only verbal.

Imaginative play and role play:
Through imaginative play, children use objects or toys and pretend they are something else (e.g. a cardboard box can represent a car or a wooden stick can be a phone).

In role play, social play or sociodramatic play children are pretending to be other people or have other roles than in real life. They are interacting with other children in different social contexts and demonstrating other forms of behaviour.

With the possibility to develop these types of play, children can gain competences such as imitation and imagination. By interacting with others, they can improve empathy, communication and cooperation.

Video 5:
Circus Play Project
See Chapter 3.4

The 'circus play project' video shows a practical example of how to encourage children within imaginative and role play www.spielenplus.ch/english

Forms	Target groups/age	Material needed	Effect/result	Advantages/challenges
Puppets on fingers	2–4 years Also suitable for elder children	→ Crayons → ping-pong ball → sewing materials (to make a 'costume')	Reduction of aggression Fine motor skills Creativity Solving problems	Easy to make and animate
Tabletop puppet theatre	4–10 years	→ Cardboard rolls → collage materials → crate → table → wooden stick	Fine motor skills Sense of space and mutual relationships in it Creativity Democracy	Easy to make and animate
Sock puppet	From 6 years and up	→ Socks, sewing materials (costume for a doll)	The whole arm is engaged up to the shoulder Creativity Sense of space and mutual relationships in it	Requires additional physical engagement Need for special creativity
Shadow theatre	From 6 years and up	→ Pastel paper → thinner cardboard → reflector → stick for a doll → white canvas on frame	Fine motor skills Sense of space and mutual relationships in it Creativity Democracy Sense of movement in a confined space	Requires additional physical engagement Need for special creativity Suitable for children who have a problem with public performance, are shy or have speech difficulties

Classic play	From 4 years and up	→ Costumes → sceno-graphy	Under-standing the spatial relationships between the participants Movement development Gesticulation and mimicry come to full expression in this form Creativity Democracy	Requires additional physical engagement Need for special creativity
Pantomime	From 5 years and up	→ Special costume or just black leotards	Encourages children's awareness of the body, expression through gesture and mime, developing imagination, getting to know one's own possibilities, expression of emotions, accept differences and to de-velop toler-ance towards other ways of communica-tion, not only verbal	Requires additional physical en-gagement Need for special creativity Good for children who find it difficult to express themselves verbally. Child can understand what it is like for those who have speech difficulties
Imaginative **and role play**	From 3 years and up From 4.5 years up	→ Un-structured material → Special costume	Encourages imagination Creativity Empathy for other roles, humans (also groups), communica-tion	Within free play or guided play, teachers can help children to develop their play and interaction skills within these types of play

Table 4   **Different forms of play**

As Ida Hamre points out in her book *Aesthetic and Social Aspects of Theatre Animation* (2010), "contact with artistic processes enables an individual to learn how to imagine something and to dare to experiment and use imagination" (Hamre, 2010). Therefore, when we talk about the application of dramatic art in kindergarten and its impact on children's development, it is most important to emphasise its positive effect on the spiritual and physical development of the individual. Both classical and puppet performances, as well as pantomime (used independently or integrated into a classical performance), encourage the development of aesthetic feelings, emotions, empathy and critical reasoning, as well as gross and fine motor skills. Working on the play encourages team spirit within the group, but also the self-confidence of the individual (child).

3.3.3 The role of art and music in the motor and emotional development of the child

In order to facilitate the balanced intellectual, emotional, physical and psychological development of children, as well as society as a whole, it is necessary to introduce all artistic fields into the educational process. With the help of artistic creativity, not only is cognitive development strengthened, but skills which are important for life are also acquired. Today, all forms of art, in most cultures, are becoming an integral part of life and education (UNESCO, 2012).

A child, unencumbered by different information and learned knowledge, perceives the world immersed in a wide spectrum of shades of shapes, colours, smells, tastes, tactile and all other sensory stimuli. Precisely for these reasons, a child experiences the world on a daily basis much more comprehensively, more comprehensively and richer than an adult, to the level where we can say that children 'don't actually live in the same world as us'. This richness of experience is interpreted and expressed by the child through different forms of expression and through different media (Slunjski, 2008).

Artistic, musical and dramatic expression is a child's need and a basic way of communicating with the world around him or her. Children spontaneously pick up utensils and draw, sing regardless of whether the song has lyrics or not, whether it is intended for the listener or not, dance according to a pattern known only to them, act out a play known only to them, etc. This kind of expression, without the intervention of the teacher, is a characteristic of open play. Children enjoy the process itself, unencumbered by what the ultimate product of what the game will be, and give us adults the opportunity to get to know the world the way a child sees it. Such a game contains the most original examples of artistic and dramatic expression, creative singing, results in dance improvisations,

where the movements represent an image (river flow), an idea (flying), or feelings.

Children's play with art materials is a developmental tool and a necessity, conditioned by the development of the child's entire personality, and directly affects mental, psycho-motor and socio-emotional development, development of perception and sense of beauty (Filipović & Kamenov, 2009).

Acquired experiences that are manifested through mental and physical action in art in general, and therefore also in music, strengthen the emotional reactions of the individual. Music enables, but also causes emotional reactions that affect behavioural changes (Matović *et al.*, according to Trimble & Hesdorffer). Emotions are a strong motivation for children's entry into the world of art, into the world of music and art, as well as through drama as a concrete form of artistic expression (Matović, Ulić & Galić, 2022).

Based on previous research in the work with music and movement (motor skills and coordination) within the preschool educational programme in Serbia, which showed that music is confirmed as a stimulating activity in the affirmation of more complex movements, coordination and balance (Lazić, Matović & Janković, 2022, p. 56), a new study was conducted entitled "Effects of music and visual arts on the development of preschool children".

Picture shows "work with music" (Preschool Teacher Training College, Novi Sad)

The aim of the research was to determine the assessment of the use of music and visual arts in the function of fine motor development and coordination of movements in preschool children, as well as to determine the prevalence of minimal neurological dysfunctions in the mentioned areas (by the Touwen method) conducted during May 2022. The research

included children from the *Veverica* kindergarten of the *Radosno detin-jstvo* preschool institution. The sample included 43 children, of which 21 were from the younger age group and 22 were from the older age group.

In the research carried out after a two-week workshop with children of younger and older age groups, the results obtained showed that participation in music and visual arts has a doubly stimulating effect: in the direction of continued interest in art, and in the direction of the smooth development of fine motor skills and movement coordination in preschool children.

The result of the entire research part of the project is reflected in the integrated approach of two artistic fields and their positive influence on the psychomotor development of preschool children, especially in the areas of fine motor skills and coordination and balance. Due to all of the above, the importance of early testing of children for the existence of minimal neurological dysfunctions, as well as timely and adequate stimulation of the development of preschool children, is highlighted.

3.4 Videos

▶ **Video 1:**

We are building a castle

Open play, extended play and construction play

Building from plastic blocks, joining the play through different roles, enriching the play by including another child, who brings the blocks, joint construction, partner work, upgrading, agreement on the construction process, question for opinion, using etiquette expressions "Thank you" complimenting each other "You are good". Partnership work, cooperation, agreement on the construction process can be seen.

https://youtu.be/1Fvj25xaT14

▶ **Video 2:**

Joy with the mirror

The development of emotions in children takes place gradually... Emotions always leave a deep mark on the relationships with other people around them, on the socio-cultural environment in which a child moves, grows and develops. At the age of two, every child is expected to recognize fear, anger, pleasure, jealousy, attachment. The strength and depth of emotions, the way of their expression (positive or negative) is different. Children react differently to the same things, from delight to indifference to the same phenomenon or situation. At the same time, they manifest it, very honestly and openly. Just like adults, children deal with and express their feelings and emotions in different ways.

https://youtu.be/p9ziveAV7bQ

▶ **Video 3:**

Football

Open play and play with rules

Children playing freely in the open space (kindergarten yard) reflects their spontaneity in organised play. They take care of each other and respect each other while playing - inclusion in the play, everyone is a playmate (co-player). Despite the limited movement of the disabled boy, children organise and build play quite freely. The conversation is in two languages (Serbian and Russian). A high degree of tolerance and involvement of all children is visible in this play.

https://youtu.be/5xZ3nAeiO_M

▶ **Video 4:**

Shadow theatre

Drama play

The shadow theatre performance is a fun play that children can easily create and perform for their friends. In this case, the well-known story "Grandpa and the turnip" was performed, where it is shown how the grandfather can't pick the vegetable by himself, so he calls the grandmother, then she calls the grandchildren, and there are actors who help but success is only achieved once the mouse – the smallest creature – gets involved. The beauty of this story is that we point out to children how everyone matters, no matter how small they are.

https://youtu.be/UlPpBlW5gbM

▶ **Video 5:**

Circus Play Project

Role play involves children taking on different roles and acting out scenarios. For example, pretending to be a parent or a super-hero. Children learn to understand different perspectives and develop empathy for others. They also develop social skills such as communication, cooperation and problem-solving.

https://www.spielenplus.ch/english#Circus-Play-Project

Projekt igrati se Cirkusa

https://www.spielenplus.ch/bosn-serb-kroat#Spielprojekt-Zirkus

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Introduction

Play activities can lead to successful learning in children. However, the way play is implemented in educational settings can also mean challenges, as well as potential. The question regarding when play really does contribute to a meaningful learning process in children is the central topic of this chapter. It is the teacher's role to plan, implement and reflect play in their lessons, meaning the notion and understanding of essential quality criteria is of great importance. In this chapter, we discuss the criteria for planning, implementing and professionally reflecting play activities, with the following questions as its focus:

→ What are the criteria for quality play in both kindergarten and school?

→ What needs to be taken into account when planning and implementing play opportunities?

→ How can play be viewed from an inclusive perspective, and what does this mean for teachers?

→ How does quality play contribute to a "quality childhood"?

→ How can parents be included in promoting quality play activities that support life skills?

In this chapter, we discuss play as a holistic development and as a support tool for the well-being of children and present the implications of this perspective on the planning, implementation and reflection on play activities and learning processes. The framework for reflective pedagogy that aims for inclusion of all children is used as a professional way of taking a meta-perspective of one's own teaching competencies. The chapter also provides some hints on how to integrate parents into the task of promoting quality play for the development of life skills.

4.1 Play as an opportunity for the holistic development of the child

The perception of children – from which the new education paradigm in early learning and in the preschool curriculum starts – postulates that children are unique and holistic human beings. The new approach considers that the children react holistically, with their whole being.

Play opens up space for developing competencies in preschool children in the context of a holistic approach (Velišek-Braško & Milošević, 2017) since games encourage the overall development of children. In this new approach, play is defined as a dominant practice for children. Through play, children build relationships and participate in the process of the adoption and transformation of culture. Play is a form of expression of the most significant creative potential of human beings (Marjanovic, 1979). Vygotsky says that play is a source of development because it creates a zone of further development – "For the child, play is more than we think!" (Kamenov, 2009). In the national scientific literature according to Kamenov, play is a child's basic, dominant activity.

This is particularly important, because early childhood is a sensitive period of development that carries optimal opportunities for learning from experience: social interactions play a key role in children's development. "Children are playful beings" is the main motto of the Years of Ascent (2018) programme. Play is an opportunity for the holistic development of a child, because it is an inherent way in which children relate to the world to create, broaden and process their own experiences, construct knowledge and shape their own identity and the world, thereby develop their potential for openness, flexibility and creativity as the basis for comprehensive learning and development.

In this new approach, the characteristics of children's play are freely chosen, self-regulated, intrinsically motivated actions in which children feel good. 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 itself. Children in play build identity and relationships, explore and reconstruct meaning, create symbols and enjoy themselves and have fun. The play 'pulls' the children's development (Kamenov, 2009).

Children's play is an important segment of participation pedagogy, considering that the child is active with their whole being in play. Play also has its place in the concept of reflective pedagogy, because it respects the child as an active participant in their own learning and development.

Video 1:
Nest building and game in the park
See Chapter 4.6

4.1.1 Play supports all the dimensions of a child's well-being

Well-being is a multidimensional construct. In the new educational paradigm, well-being is understood as the capacity for successful personal and interpersonal functioning, expression and cultivation of human potential for development and progress. The concept of well-being includes three dimensions: the personal dimension (to be well and to function successfully), the activity dimension (to be able to, and to be willing to) and the social dimension (to belong, to accept others and to participate).

Play is the basis for the development and expression of all dimensions of a child's well-being. Support for children's well-being manifests in the real curriculum through relationships and participation in action. The relationships that support children's well-being and actions are the driving forces behind children's development and learning. Children's play includes relationships and action, which constitute a prerequisite for learning and development, which in turn includes progress in a natural way.

4.2 In planning, implementing and reflecting play activities

Reflective pedagogy – new practices in early learning

The search for new values in education refreshes the issue of creating a new didactic methodological discourse in early education. The environment in which today's children learn and acquire new knowledge, skills and abilities will seriously diversity their educational needs.

So how can we reach the real-life context of each child – to their previous experiences and knowledge and to the cultural context of the child and their family?

The essential role of the educator/teacher is to help each child find their own approach to learning and ultimately to place emphasis on how the child learns, rather than what they learn.

Reflective pedagogy promotes a pedagogical concept of constant re-examination of one's own pedagogical action in educational work with children. It implies constantly 'circling back' to the effects of learning in children, and more specifically to the output results and achievements of children – facing the reality in an educational context. The process of reflection also means constantly questioning one's own beliefs about children's learning and about the teaching process in general: reflective

practice provides a realistic screening of one's own pedagogical action and confronting oneself. The process of reflection further affects pedagogical activities, as a corrective action toward everything that is not ideal and which could be improved on.

Reflective practice also enables one's own pedagogies to have real meaning and significance for children, or pedagogical awareness for each action taken and the organisation and planning of educational work with children, as well as the choice of strategies for working with children.

This pedagogical approach includes changes in the way we generally perceive the learning process in children, promote critical opinion, encourage self-awareness and awareness of the needs of others, and self-criticism. At the same time, reflective pedagogy also contributes towards rethinking one's own role in the way children acquire all new experiences which are significant for their development and learning. Newly acquired experiences are extremely important for every educator and teacher, because they can be a powerful tool for their own pedagogical advancement and professional development.

Knowledge for new qualitative steps is constantly gained through personal experience in the educational process with children, conditioned by the decisions taken in one's own, subsequent pedagogical actions. Reflective teaching helps practitioners understand how to create good pedagogical practices, in an active process of constantly filtering out everything that is not good or not good enough for the specific group of children with whom you have the opportunity to work.

Video 2:
Children's well-being in practice
See Chapter 4.6

Reflective pedagogy respects the child as an active subject in the educational process. The child is at the centre of attention, and it is them who lead the educational process. The choice of pedagogical strategies for action arises from their interests, needs and opportunities. Constant reflection provides feedback on how to be more efficient in each subsequent pedagogical action, in creating the learning environment, in the selection of materials and means, and in accepting children as equal partners in the process of acquiring new knowledge, skills and abilities.

Feedback from children is very important. In a standards-based education environment based on children's outcomes, daily feedback on their progress is crucial for any dedicated educator or teacher. Asking the questions 'how to', 'why' and 'what' on a daily basis will give the practitioners an advantage in choosing the next pedagogical strategies in working with children. Thus, gradually, one's expertise in teaching is strengthened, greater self-confidence is gained, skills are acquired for the correct assessment of the needs of children coming from different social and cultural environments, and the best pedagogical practices are selected.

4.3 Reflective pedagogy: the meaning of participatory pedagogy – the active participation of children

Children's participation in the educational process is treated as a supreme essential value. Respecting this right means that they are competent in their own development and have the opportunity to influence the daily educational activities in which they actively participate. Participatory pedagogy refers to the participatory rights referred to in the document of the UN's Convention on the Protection of Children's Rights from 1989, specifically Article 12 which states: "States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child". United Nations, Human Rights (1989). (Convention of the Rights of the Child.)

Participatory learning is close to the socio-cultural paradigm, which treats the child as competent, as an actor and at the same time a significant factor that independently shapes their own development – through sharing and reproducing their knowledge – in the learning process. It opens new educational perspectives with a critical approach to the real didactic method discourse. The lack of personal experience in the educational process among children at an early age indicates the need to update participatory pedagogy and treat the child as a significant factor in their own development and learning. Children's participation in the educational process promotes participatory pedagogy as a modern pedagogical doctrine. The possibility of active participation of children in their own education means giving them the opportunity to influence their own learning and to respect their own personality. It allows children to be heard by adults, educators and teachers, to develop self-control and the ability to self-regulate their own behaviour. Every child in the educational process reflects certain cultural values from their own social environment, but at the same time is open to accepting new cultural values, shared in the group with other children and adults, where they learn and develop every day. Children's participation in everyday educational work means taking a role in the activities, knowing that their own (i.e. the child's) activity is recognised and valued. It means enabling all children to participate in making decisions that concern them. At the same time, it is important to recognise and support their opinions and ideas, and to boost the new thought processes of children. New understandings of the child and of childhood in general promote the concept of the whole: for perceiving the child as a whole. In doing so, the social and cultural context of each child, interaction, and ethical issues are taken into account.

Participatory pedagogy means giving the opportunity for free expression, the right to a free opinion, the right to timely information related to the learning process and the acquisition of new knowledge, skills and abilities to every child. Participation means the opportunity to influence one's own development. It strives to empower children and at the same time is directly connected to other important values in education – especially democracy – as a pedagogical right with positive educational outcomes for children, developing important life skills, sharing power, responsibility and the right to choose.

It presupposes having the responsibility to listen to the opinions of the children, to support their opinions and attitudes, to enable interaction and cooperation, and to emphasise sensitivity and responsiveness in educational work with children.

4.4 Quality play for quality childhood

Even after many years, the world's professionals in the sector are still debating the role and value of play and its influence on effective teaching and learning. Decisions for and against play in the educational context produce arguments that keep it high in the programme of educational policies, research and practice. Play continues to receive serious treatment, and this is confirmed by modern research that provides new theoretical frameworks and guidelines for practice. Scientists and practitioners look at the problem of play with interest, especially due to its ideal combination of theory and practice, as well as ensuring quality childhood in the process of learning and teaching. The interpretation of the role and meaning of play in early childhood starts from the traditional approach as a free, spontaneous activity that takes place without any external necessity. It represents an activity that is natural and basic, but still specific and – in the process – expresses desires, striving, noticing, thinking and a need for active action. Play is considered to differ from all other activities due to some of its features: because it arises from internal needs and has its own logic that differs from the logic of external reality. The logic of play, on the other hand, is seen in its reality, which has been reworked and is in harmony with children's experiences. Through play, the child gets to know the world around them, and can start to recognise the relationships between people and work, and on this basis can form their own relationship to the environment in which their actions play out. Through play, children are offered the opportunity to learn about the world and their surroundings, and to acquire new ideas, concepts, knowledge, experiences and habits, to practice settling, to enrich their emotional experience, speech, etc. One of the goals that ensure a safe start but also the quality of childhood is to: "[e]nsure that children have access to high-quality play and learning opportunities, so this will support progress towards the achievement of the goals for early learning and develop-

ment" (Weinberger *et al*., 2005, p. 131) In modern theory and practice, care and education are placed in the context of the relationship between play, learning and teaching. Play is always connected with the child's internal needs, interests and desires; it represents their specific satisfaction. Therefore, children behave much differently to the tasks and rules that appear in play than to those tasks and rules that are set in a different way. In this sense, play activities contain a wide range of behaviours that can be placed in different contexts and have different meanings for children and adults. Play activities provide different opportunities for children to approach the learning process in a more motivated and helpful manner. In the professional literature, the term 'can-do orientations' is often used – this aims to define play activities as a promoter and support in the development of positive dispositions for learning. The tendency is not to prove that children learn only through play, or that a curriculum based on play is the best or unique approach that supports early learning. On the contrary, the goal is to position play as an opportunity for the development of different activities with different models of action, interaction and communication between subjects to ensure a quality childhood.

According to Wood & Attfield (2005), a modern framework of play should display the following characteristics:

Play → Chosen by the children

Play → Created by children

Play → Focus on work and process, not on the product

Play → Active inclusion is assumed

Play → It provides individual motivation through the satisfaction from the activities

Play → It provides interest and fun
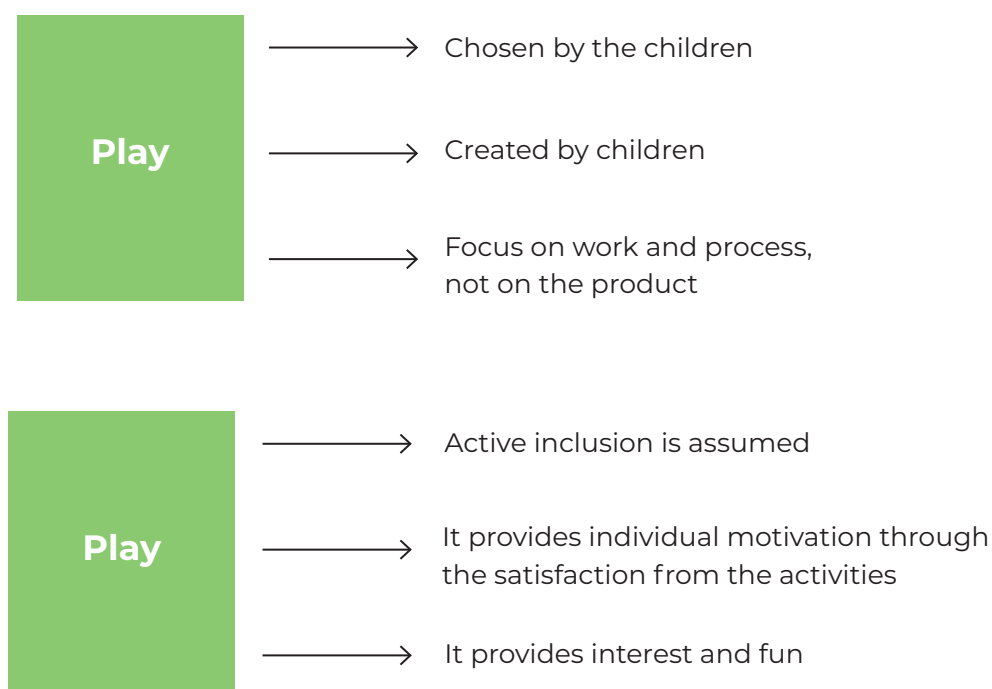
Figure 1   **Modern framework of play**

Every attempt to define or categorise play encounters a number of difficulties, mainly arising from the context in which it is realised, making the solution different every time. This is the main basis for the appearance of the paradoxical nature of play: children play to 'escape' from reality, but at the same time to get closer to reality. Play enables cognitive, cultural, historical, social and physical interconnections, including the dialogue shown here (Wood and Attfield 2005, p. 7).
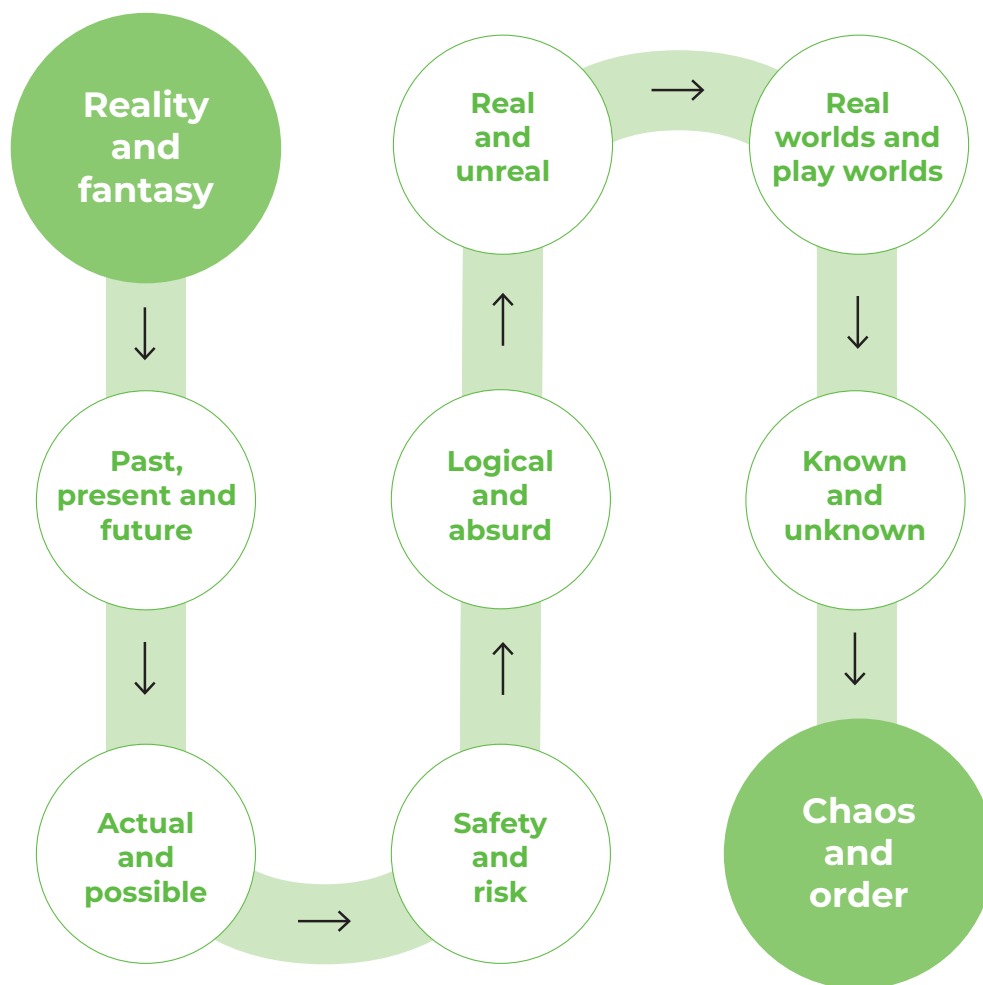
Figure 2   **Quality play elements** according to Wood & Attfield

Besides the paradoxical nature of play, there is one more obstacle or danger in every attempt to define or categorise it, and that is the fact that children have their own definition of what constitutes play. In each step, children establish the possibilities, methods and rules of the game and play situations, independently creating symbols, redefining their goals, transforming their ideas and determining their actions through mutual negotiations and shared thinking. Basically, they experience and create

the game for themselves: they are continuously transferring the real world of knowledge, skills and understanding from other areas of their lives.

In the literature, play is often defined as an 'exclusive method' as children learn to concentrate and achieve the desired goal. One of the main qualities of play as a method of education is that it offers opportunities for overcoming opposition: the accepted goal of play means the child's obedience to certain rules and discipline. All this has a stimulating effect. From this point of view, we can talk about another dimension of play: play and learning as complementary processes. On the one hand, learning contributes to changing behaviours and enriching experiences and, on the other hand, play enriches the child with new experiences. The specific pedagogical and psychological characteristics of children indicate the need for the application of games and play activities not just in the pre-school period, but also in the first years of primary education. The organisation and realisation of play activities can successfully achieve the goals and tasks of intellectual, moral, aesthetic and physical education, creating the basis for primary socialisation and proper socio-emotional development as the main factors that provide the quality of childhood.

There are three stages which are specific for intellectual structural changes in childhood from the aspect of play applications, namely: practice, symbol and rules.

Age (approximate)	Characteristics
Early to late childhood	→ Non-symbolic play for practice
Early childhood (up to age 6 years)	→ Fantasy play and symbolic play
Late childhood (up to age 12 years)	→ Play with rules

Table 1   **Stages of play** according to Piaget (Scarlett *et al.*, 2005, p. 9)

Teachers are in the best position to create play that is based on educational practices and theories, because they are at the heart of improving the quality of childhood through teaching and learning in schools (see video below https://spielenplus.webflow.io/english#Forest-Playground-Adventure). The quality of teaching and learning through play can be ensured if the teachers consider their own and the students' perspectives, striking the right balance between:

Video 3:
Forest Playground Adventure
See Chapter 4.6

Activities initiated by children	and	Adult-initiated activities
Play	and	Work
A child's intention	and	Adults' intentions
Children's knowledge	and	Adults' interpretations
Potential educational outcomes	and	Planning educational outcomes
Individual needs	and	The needs of the whole group
Freedom and security	and	The challenges and risks
Flexibility and spontaneity	and	Structure and routine

Table 2   **Types of activities for children and adults**

The prerequisites are given in the professional literature for the environment in which harmony is created between play, quality childhood, teaching and learning. These are as follows:

→ A learning environment that offers high-quality, diverse resources as didactic, creative, natural, materials or materials created by the kindergarten teacher and the children, that lead to progress and retention;

→ A large selection of materials and sources that will support creativity, inventiveness and originality;

→ Experience that promotes self-reliance, cooperation and inter-dependency, and in that way, you learn to get involved in your own learning;

→ Teachers who have expertise and have time to play the role of teammates;

→ Teachers who constantly share ideas and constantly share games and can recognise teaching moments;

→ Teachers who help the students make contact between the areas of learning and experience and support the independence, inter-dependence, choices and decisions of the students;

→ Managerial and organisational strategies that encourage students and develop their self-confidence as skilled participants;

→ Possibilities for students to play alone, in pairs, in small and large groups;

→   Play activities that are rich in content, relevant and significant;

→   Teachers who value and encourage children's way of knowing, thinking, reasoning and understanding;

→   Teachers who help students to master learning and playing techniques and enable them to be skilled participants and successful students;

→   A curriculum that is clear, that includes and reflects the language, tradition, culture and lifestyle of different ethnic groups;

→   A curriculum suitable for students and teachers and

→   A curriculum that includes parents and other adult subjects in the play, teaching and learning (Wood & Attfield, 2005, p. 231)

4.5 Play and life skills in quality parenting context

Over the past decade, much has been said and understood about the parental context and the pedagogical aspects that should ensure a child enjoys a quality childhood. Parents today have numerous opportunities to find out what the prerequisites for the complementary psychological, emotional, social and intellectual development of the child are. The latest scientific research from neuroscience and developmental psychology provides us with insights into the importance of early experiences, as well as a child's functioning throughout life. In this sense, parenting assumes developing a context of mutual relationship with these experiences to ensure a quality childhood.

The issue of parental context and its impact on children's development through literature and practical situations has been considered through several concepts. Many authors offer their thoughts, ideas and programmes aimed at what constitutes good parenting. We will look into some of these theories now in order to enable an overview of the different methods of parenting that influence the quality of childhood... as the beginning of the path to the discovery of (one's own) parenting.

Author Tomislav Kuljiš, creator of the Parenting programme[1] from 0 to 6 and founder of the Natural Parenting Centre, believes that it is not necessary for parents to be perfect to be good parents. He believes that the child's brain and philosophy of life need the satisfaction of basic needs that are not tangible or visible, because they are about situations and relationships; insufficiency or lack of results will result in the child's potential not being fully realised. Natural parenting is simply normal parenting so that all natural developmental processes can take place in the child, especially in early childhood development. According to Kuljiš, achieving natural parenting is not a matter of educational methods and techniques, as parents have been doing throughout history. At its core, natural parenting presupposes the creation of preconditions for the natural development of all the child's potential. It is important here to make a distinction between natural parenting and permissive parenting: they are not one and the same thing, because this is part of qualitative differences in childhood. The lack of parental personal boundaries that place the child in a space of disorientation, insecurity and disconnection, and without a sense of their own and others' boundaries and without good social and life skills is a characteristic of permissive parenting, but not natural parenting.

Dr Robert Shaw (child and family psychiatrist), who authored *The Epidemic: Raising Secure, Loving, Happy, and Responsible Children in an*

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1   https://ipd-center.eu/cpr/ (Accessed: 21/09/2023)

Era of Absentee and Permissive Parenting (Shaw & Wood, 2013) believes that the quality of childhood lies in the absence/presence of parents from their children's lives and the application of (in)appropriate educational methods.

On the other side, the concept of simple parenting is explained in the study entitled *Simplicity Parenting: Using the Extraordinary Power of Less to Raise Calmer, Happier and More Secure Kids* (Payne & Ross, 2009) where modern authors talk about parental, child and life context. They reveal 4 categories of 'excess' (so-called new standards in modern living) that we have to deal with, which are:

→ too many things;

→ too much information;

→ too much choice and

→ too fast a way of living.

According to the authors, when children are too satisfied, they do not have time to think, explore and relax. They do not have the opportunity to organise their thoughts and impressions or to enter their world of fantasy and imagination (especially important for the preschool period of the child), which all leads to them feeling unhappy and dissatisfied again.

One of the more developed concepts is positive parenting, which has found great understanding and acceptance not only by the professional public but also by parents. When we talk about positive parenting, in fact, we are talking about an understanding or vision of parenting that is based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, but also on scientific knowledge in this field. This is scientific knowledge about the characteristics of the parental context that assume the satisfaction of the basic psychological needs of the child for connection, play, competence and autonomy, and it refers to personal parental involvement, creating structure and supporting the child's autonomy.

These are insights into the quality of parental guidance, which is based on the equal dignity of parents and children, as well as the features of empathic interactions between parents and children. The concept of positive parenting is implemented through the positive parenting programme developed by the author Matt Sanders. Within the framework of this programme, approaches, educational concepts and specific strategies are provided that will help parents in developing their own skills and abilities for positive interaction with their children as a function of quality childhood.

The idea of this programme is to create a holistic approach in the treatment of parenting that assumes the merging of three interdependent aspects:

Video 7:
Quality Play Environments: Were Fun Meets Responsibility
See Chapter 4.6

→ children's developmental needs;

→ the parents' ability to respond to their children's needs and

→ a situational parenting context.

In the context of this problem, it is necessary to provide an answer to the following question: how important is parenting and to what extent can it have a strong and positive influence on the child? In this sense, it is especially important for each parent to create a family environment, parenting style and approach that will be supportive and have a strong and positive influence on the entire process of interaction, growth and development of the child.

The relationships that parents have with their children as they grow and develop are particularly significant and the stimulating family environment that surrounds them has a major influence on their growth and development, but the parenting style that is applied also leaves a deep impression on the quality of childhood. In the literature, parenting styles are divided according to how warm the parent is and how much they expect or demand from the child. One or more different parenting styles may be used at a given time, but there is always one dominant parenting style that is used most often.

When it comes to parenting styles, it is especially important to recognise which is the dominant parenting style that is most often applied and to develop an awareness of how parenting affects child development and childhood quality. Parenting styles are the subject of many analyses and consideration from different aspects, and are mainly focused on the generally accepted classification of four types, namely:

Permissive

They do set boundaries for their children, they show their love by giving permission for everything the children want.

Authoritative

It is characterized by warmth, attention, but also provides structure and boundaries that are based much more on guidance than punishment.

Indifferent

Children who grow up with these parents develop a negative or absent relationship with their parent, and because of this, they have difficulty forming social relationships, especially with peers.

Authoritarian

The style attempts to shape, control and evaluate the child's behaviour and attitudes in accordance with his own personal parenting standard.

Figure 3   **Parenting styles**

The aspects shown above give a picture of the positions of the parents and their connection with their own children, and at the same time answer two questions: *how* and *in what way* do parents act? In this context, the dilemmas about the self-perception of the parents related to their competences, needs and opportunities for raising their children are opened. For those reasons, the programme for positive parenting is aimed at developing parental competencies related to knowledge of the child's developmental characteristics, knowledge of what is best for one's child within one's family (but also outside it) and knowledge, abilities and skills to apply educational procedures in a diverse parental context. In this sense, parental competencies presuppose the development of values, the development of parents' responsibility towards their children, respect for children's rights, respect for autonomy and authenticity, and equal treatment of children, as well as respect for the child's personality as a whole. The modern parental context sets expectations for parents: to work on themselves and to develop in their parental role, but also to discover their parental potential and opportunities, with the aim of providing a quality childhood for their children.

4.6 Videos

▶ Video 1:

Nest building and game in the park

Creative play and constructive play (project play)

The project "Who is hiding in the egg?" – by exploring the concept of an egg and the different animal species that hatch from an egg, the children deepen that concept through different types and models of play. Making a nest is a construction game expanded with materials and contents collected together by the children, parents and kindergarten teacher. We can see teamwork, cooperation, ecology and empathy.
As a symbol of life, the egg itself has been an inspiration for generations and spawned many traditional games. The children played the traditional game "Coloured Eggs", organized an egg race, egg rolling, a mobile game of "Ringe Ringe Raja" and a 'hot egg' game in a nearby park.

https://youtu.be/XmspOD5PNSE

▶ Video 2:

Children's well-being in practice

Free play as an expression of children's desire to discover and explore the world is at the center of these considerations. Creating the possibility for free play, in which children's intrinsic motivation will dominate and which is a manifestation of everything that happens in the child's inner world, is very important for every child's well-being.

https://youtu.be/SyZkUBpli_Y

▶ Video 3:

Forest Playground Adventure

Playing outside has been proven to strengthen physical, mental, emotional and intellectual health, and helps children develop several important skills for life, such as curiosity, creativity or critical thinking.

https://www.spielenplus.ch/english#Forest-Playground-Adventure

Avantura na šumskom igralištu

https://www.spielenplus.ch/bosn-serb-kroat#Abenteuer-Spielplatz-Wald

▶ Video 4:

Playfully Exploring Surroundings

While playing, children learn to express wishes and perceive the needs of others: What is good for me? What do others need? Without knowing it, children learn skills that are important when coping with life.

https://www.spielenplus.ch/english#Lebenswelten-spielerisch-erkunden

Istražianje okoline kroz igru

https://www.spielenplus.ch/bosn-serb-kroat#Lebenswelten-spie-lerisch-erkunden

▶ Video 5:

Building with Blocks, LEGO® and Magnets

Unstructured materials and toys can have multiple functions. Through play, children can develop organisational skills, cognitive skills and many more life skills.

https://www.spielenplus.ch/english#Building-with-Blocks-Lego-and-Magnets

Grandnja s kockama, legom i magnetima

https://www.spielenplus.ch/bosn-serb-kroat#Bauen-mit-Kl-tzen-Lego-Co

▶ Video 6:

Playing Along with Children

Functional play is an excellent way for adults to engage with children. You can encourage children to explore and experiment with different objects and toys, and provide them with opportunities to develop their fine motor skills, cognitive abilities and social skills.

https://www.spielenplus.ch/english#Playing-Along-With-Children

Igranje sa djecom

https://www.spielenplus.ch/bosn-serb-kroat#Kinder-im-Spiel-begleiten

> ▶ **Video 7:**

Quality Play Environments: Were Fun Meets Responsibility

The idea behind Where Fun Meets Responsibility is to create play environments that not only provide immediate enjoyment but also leave a lasting positive impact on children's development and their sense of responsibility toward the world around them. Creating quality play environments that integrate fun with responsibility can help shape responsible and conscientious individuals while allowing children to enjoy their formative years to the fullest. These spaces offer valuable life lessons, foster a love for the environment and encourage a sense of community and collaboration among children.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4RtkGQxoDDs

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CHAPTER 5
Social changes and how they affect play

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Introduction

Childhood and play have changed over the past decades as a result of various social phenomena such as changing family forms, digitalisation, climate change and sustainability, etc. Play happens in different contexts in the European world than it did twenty years ago, with children growing up with different lifestyles than their parents and play and meeting spaces having changed continuously since then. The entry of digital media into schools, classrooms and childcare facilities – as well as into children's bedrooms – is also shaping play and learning environments. The importance of education and the demands of parents and guardians to offer their children conditions that are as conducive to learning as possible are also modifying play habits and opportunities. At the same time, demands from other sides are coming to the fore, including the importance of children's health or appeals to sustainable lifestyles: play as the main activity and learning opportunity for children is thus becoming more important. The process of development of life skills through play is affected by several different areas of development: social changes, digitalisation, ecological issues – climate change, migration and the impact of fear for life. This chapter will provide a different point of view and will try to provide paradigms about play, life skills and different influences affecting the current way of life for children.

This chapter deals with the questions of how childhood and play develop in today's society. Play is considered against the backdrop of these various social dynamics, and the associated consequences for adequate implementation in kindergarten, school and care are highlighted:

→ How do social changes in general and in families influence children's play activities?

→ What role do phenomena such as digitalisation, migration and ecological issues play in childhood?

→ How does a situation of tension, crisis and general fear for life impact children's play?

5.1   Social changes[1]

"Play is the decisive motor for child development and therefore the most important early intervention. When children play, they learn for life. The more playful learning is, the more sustainable it is for intelligence development and mental well-being. Physical activities also have an important impact on physical health," writes Swiss educational researcher Margrit Stamm in her blog (Stamm, 2016). In the same blog, Stamm also describes another phenomenon in our society: children are seen less and less frequently in playgrounds that are designed with children in mind, even though playing is still a top priority for children in their ranking. Children prefer to have places to play that have not been defined as playgrounds by adults: natural landscapes, backyards, unsecured swings, sandboxes or climbing frames. Stamm sees the reason as based on two fundamental societal problems: our culture of fear and safety, and the hype surrounding remedial courses – both have an impact on children's free play. Parents are much more concerned about children's safety than they used to be, ranging from questions about traffic or issues such as playground safety and moving on to fear of sunburn or dangers such as paedophiles.

What Margrit Stamm describes is not only a change in children's play habits and spaces, but a changed childhood in general. This change in childhood is defined in the literature by several characteristics, some of which paint a bleak picture of the situation of play today (Zimmer, 2014, p. 12ff):

→   A decline in the culture of playing in the street and the increasing domestication of children's play (Zinnecker, 2001).

→   The loss of natural play and exercise spaces and the replacement with man-made places that children often cannot reach on their own. Playing without adult supervision is hardly possible anymore.

→   The outsourcing of movement games from children's everyday lives to institutionalised and organised forms (sports clubs, afternoon classes, etc.).

→   The separation of children's living spaces, whereby children are taken from one leisure activity to the next or to distant friends.

→   The shift of the daily living environment to all-day, institutional care and learning settings, increasing the importance of children's needs for relaxation, security and play in the home.

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1   Parts of this text have been translated and adapted from Lieger, C. & Weidinger, W. (Hg.) (2021): Spielen Plus. Chapter 8.

→ The discovery of children as a target group for the consumer goods industry, which does not stop at the 'pedagogisation' of toys.

→ The mono-functionality of the play material, which is usually intended only for specific purposes and leaves little room for children to change.

→ The increase in media consumption and the influence of digitalised forms of play already in early childhood and thus the displacement of free play opportunities.

→ Socio-cultural changes in the composition of families. Fewer large families, but different family forms (Grieper, 2012).

One might think that these phenomena exclusively affect children from educationally advantaged families. However, children from educationally disadvantaged families are just as affected by these societal changes, although socio-economic circumstances limit the resources available for remedial activities in their free time. Changed play spaces, institutionalised places of care and learning, and the tendency – also reinforced by the toy industry and the digital revolution – to 'head off' and intellectualise play also affects educationally disadvantaged families. Games are only considered valuable when they seem to support cognitive learning. But are these phenomena purely negative, or do they also open up new opportunities for children's playing and learning?

As we have seen, childhood and play have changed over recent decades: compared to the past, children nowadays experience the world 'second-hand', instead of discovering it through their own actions and trying things out and experimenting (Zimmer, 2014, p. 13). In this context, Margrit Stamm speaks of the phenomenon of "children incapable of playing" (Stamm, 2016). They lack experience in discovery, in motor skills, and in exploring boundaries in play spaces that are protected (but not overprotected) and that promote the fear culture of adults rather than the play and learning behaviour of children. In other words, the most essential change in childhood conditions can also be described as a loss of autonomy and the 'mediatisation' of experiences (Rolff & Zimmermann, 2001). In an empirical study on the situation at kindergarten level in the canton of Zurich from 2018, these phenomena are also reflected in the assessment by kindergarten teachers who were interviewed as part of the study: "While the high relevance of free play was emphasised by all the kindergarten teachers interviewed, they are at the same time aware of certain challenges that can be associated with it. The biggest difficulty they say is that nowadays children might not play anymore […]. At the same time, this tendency seems to have increased over recent years […]" (Edelmann, Wannack & Schneider, 2018). Socio-cultural changes, as reflected in different forms of life and families, also influence the development of children's play. These individual social phenomena will be considered in more detail in the following section.

Play and changing family forms and values

Family structures and forms that have become more diverse and have changed due to other circumstances also have a huge effect on child-hood: parents today no longer have children mainly to provide for them later on in life, but for emotional reasons (Bründel & Hurrelmann, 1996; Conrad, 1998). The number of families with a large number of children (more than three) has decreased gradually over time. The average family in the German-speaking world consists of the parent(s) plus one to two children, and more and more women and men are remaining childless (in Switzerland this figure is about one quarter) (Bundesamt für Statis-tik, 2018, p. 10ff). Among other things, this development is also due to increased expectations regarding parental roles, existential uncertainties and the need for individual life planning (Conrad, 1998). The role of par-ents is changing as a result, as is the form of interaction and the quality of social bonding within the family (ibid.). Relationships are becoming more intense and emotional.

Families can also take different forms: single-parent families, non-marital unions, patchwork families, families with same-sex parents, transgender families, stepfamilies, adoptive families, foster families, etc. The idealised image of the nuclear family is increasingly losing its importance. Parents or guardians are also much more likely to be employed, leading to a decrease in family time and an increase in the need for institutionalised forms of childcare. As a result, daycare institutions must also take on increasingly complex tasks: first and foremost, childcare institutions must now provide spaces for children to act in ways they no longer have the opportunity to outside these institutions, due to a lack of family time (e.g. play opportunities, experiences in nature, cooking, experimenting, role-playing, etc.) (Roßbach, 1996).

As family structures and forms have changed, so have the ideas and values regarding parenting. Since the 1950s, society has evolved from a strongly needs-oriented society to a "consumption-oriented abundance society" that is more oriented toward the private sphere and places em-phasis on partnership values (Büchner, 1985). The child has moved there-fore from a material value to an immaterial value with which meaning, happiness and life fulfilment are associated. This has also led to increased expectations of parenting and the role of parents: parents are afraid of failing in raising their children and are thus under huge social pressure. Often, socialisation deficits are also blamed on the parents (Conrad, 1998). The idea of 'good' upbringing in the present day is characterised by centring on the child. The German educational researcher Susanna Roux writes this aptly: "The goal of education is a partnership relationship with the child. The family is seen as the equal companionship of its members" (ibid., p. 2). This is accompanied by overprotection of the children with the simultaneous danger of placing excessive demands on performance,

both of the child and of the parents. The incredible number of parenting guidebooks on the shelves, as well as online forums for exchanging tips on the best possible ways to promote children, leisure activities, schools, etc., is testimony to this educational pressure to perform. However, in a society where the best interests of the child are paramount, parents or guardians must also be provided with the framework conditions that will relieve them of this pressure (Borchard, 2008, p. 82). Improving the compatibility of family and work, better childcare situations (especially in rural areas) and low-threshold and easily accessible counselling services are central to this (ibid.). The return to free play could also be a relief for parents and families in view of the focus on primarily cognitive best possible support opportunities here. The certainty that the simplest play opportunities can also generate important interactions, fruitful insights and sustainable learning processes must be part of comprehensive information to parents from all socio-economic strata.

5.2 Digitalisation

The availability of information (or the rapid flow of a huge volume of information) has helped us to enjoy closer contact with different regions across the world, easier understanding and creation of common values, ideas, interests, beliefs and convictions: a new reality, a new global civilisation. This, in turn, has encouraged the global competition for knowledge, technological development, communications and lifelong learning. This interdependence in the world has resulted in changes to children's education: "Today's generation of children are consumers of the fourth industrial revolution. It has already started, and the new changes that we feel every day refer to the accelerated application of the Internet in all spheres of life, automation, artificial intelligence, digitalization, and robotization" (Damovska, 2021). The creation of educational goals and their implementation has meant a serious change in the technology of teaching and learning among children and students: children now have access to a variety of tools every day, which allow them daily contact with new information. Which information is necessary for them? How can we prepare them to develop criteria for selection? How can we strengthen children – through the process of their education – to select, recognise and accept precise information which is in line with their holistic development? What new knowledge, skills and abilities do they need? Why are transversal skills or soft skills (which enable easier acquisition and applicability of knowledge among children and students) so important? Some of the answers to these important questions, related to the quality of children's education, mean a serious need for changes in the initial education of all future educators, teachers and employees in the educational system today. This means strengthening their IT competencies and preparing for all the challenges faced by the new generations of children who will live

and work in the second half of the new millennium. Global development imposes the application of new learning and teaching strategies, and this means constant updating of critical opinion, creativity, logical thinking, active learning and problem-solving approaches to acquiring new knowledge at all levels of education. Only this approach will enable us to create a new quality human potential which is competitive in the global labour market. How much of the acquired knowledge, skills and abilities of the children in our current educational system can be applied in other regions of the world? Does our system prepare children to be citizens of the world in which they can easily apply this acquired knowledge?

5.2.1 Educational changes and digital literacy

Digital literacy implies the development of children's skills for life, learning and work in the new digital age, in our new reality or digital society. Digital literacy is based on knowledge, skills and behaviours that enable children and students to develop in the global digital world and be safe and empowered in a way that is appropriate to their age, local culture and context. The vision for the digital literacy of children and students means an integrated approach in supporting successful initiatives for the development of all skills related to digitalisation such as:

→ basic literacy (language and mathematics);

→ life skills and

→ necessary work skills.

Over the coming decades of this second millennium, children will spend more and more time with digital tools, connected to each other.

→ The question is: what are the benefits and what are the risks of everything that will follow in their education for the needs of this new digital reality?

Investing in digital literacy today means building responsibility and empowering children to be citizens of the world. "Digital literacy means awareness, the ability of the individual to use digital tools appropriately and the ability to identify input, research, analyse and synthesise digital sources, construct new knowledge, create media and communicate with others, in the context of specific life situations, in order to enable action and offer a reflection on these processes" (Stergionals, 2006).

According to Jisc (2018), digital literacy means the "[d]evelopment of abilities that enable an individual to live, learn and work in a digital society". Quality education must not avoid the key challenges of global development. "Education must anticipate the needs of children at least two decades ahead, in the future" (Damovska, 2021). In the coming period, educational systems should be prepared to create a holistic vision for children's digital literacy. Definitions of digital literacy focused on children generally indicate that "digital literacy itself represents a significant contribution to all specific challenges and opportunities for them in the digital space and how these are properly understood and addressed" (UNESCO, 2021). Access to information and new technology in the learning process means empowering children for the future and sensitising them to the new reality – we are already witnessing great achievements in science, accelerated development of artificial intelligence, automation, robotics, genetics and genetic engineering.

→ What are the challenges for a child to live and work well in the 21st century?

→ What knowledge, skills and abilities should a child develop to be able to respond to digital competitiveness and what is the child expecting?

A broader understanding of these points is what it means to be a digitally literate person. Children should be well-prepared for whatever the future holds. They will actively participate in the digital era and will become the future creators of digital content. Due to these reasons, they need to develop criticality and digital creativity, while at the same time remaining safe from all possible risks and being capable of recognising them in time.

5.2.2 EU documents – digitisation and education

The European Educational Action Plan 2021 – 2027, which envisages reaching a global consensus by 2027 for the design and implementation of effective educational initiatives for the development of digital literacy among children and students, was adopted last year.

What is the Digital Education Action Plan?

Above all, the plan carries a message of "support for sustainable and effective adaptation of the education and training system in the EU countries, in the new digital age".[2]

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2   https://education.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document-library-docs/deap-communication-sept2020_en.pdf (Accessed: 03/10/2023)

There are two priority objectives, which relate to:

1.   Accelerating the development of the digital educational eco-system, including:

→ Infrastructure, connectivity and digital equipment;

→ Effective digital capacity for planning and development, strengthening organisational capacities;

→ Digital competence and confidence among teachers and trainers and

→ Quality learning content, safe learning platforms, with privacy, rules and a code of ethics.

2.   Strengthening digital skills and competencies for digital transformation, including:

→ Basic digital skills and competencies from an early age;

→ Digital literacy, dealing with misinformation;

→ Good knowledge and working with data and technologies such as artificial intelligence,

→ Advanced digital skills and

→ Ensuring equal access to acquiring digital literacy, knowledge and skills for both girls and women.[3]

OECD research on the European continent indicated that less than 40% of educators/teachers in EU countries feel ready to use digital tools in their daily work with children (OEC Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2018). Also, EUROSTAT research indicates that 1/3 of 13 to 14-year-old children in EU countries have not achieved a basic level of digital skills (Eurostat, 2019).

Digital literacy as a key skill in the 21st century implies:

→ the creation of new programmes for educational work with children/students;

→ new concepts of learning and evaluating children's achievements;

→ new national policies on digital literacy and logistics;

→ a new set of competencies for teachers;

→ a new set of competencies for children and students;

→ the development of transversal skills and problem-solving;

→ the development of critical mind and

→ digital literacy for children with specific educational needs, providing access to certain rights for play and development.

3   https://www.oecd.org/sti/education-and-skills-in-bridging-the-digital-gender-divide-evidence-from-apec.pdf (Accessed: 03/10/2023)
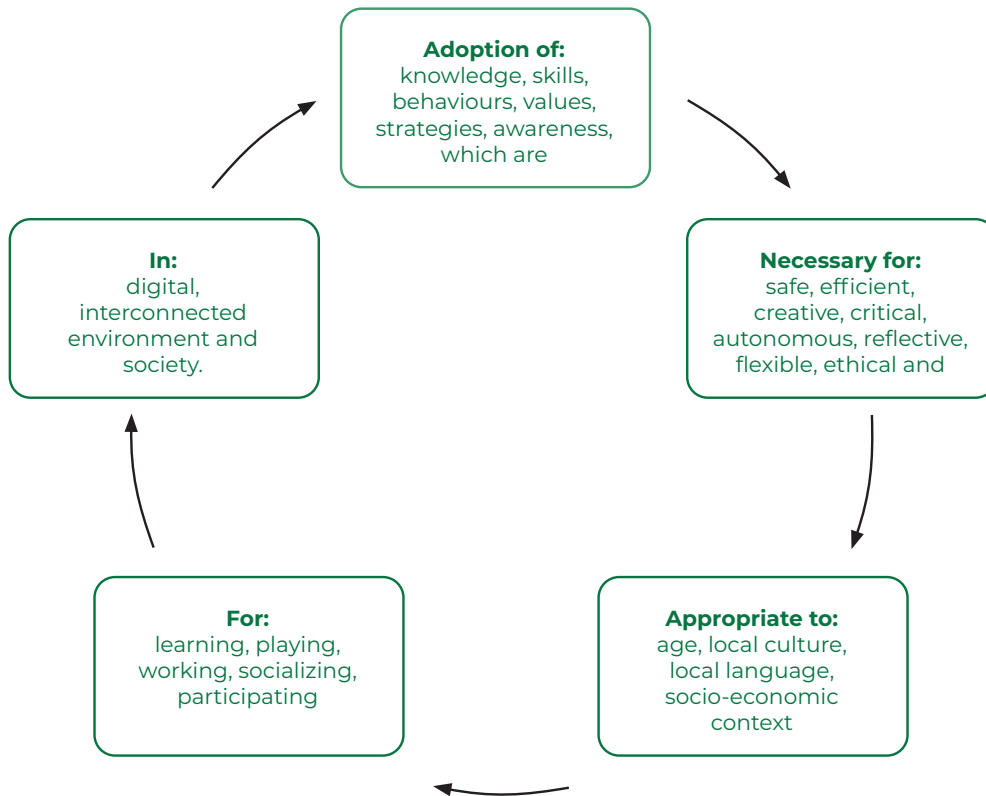
5.2.3 Curriculum adaptation – creating new content for development and learning

Adapting the curriculum in conditions of accelerated digitisation in education means creating new approaches and opportunities for using digital devices and software in teaching and daily educational activities with children and students. At the same time, it also means the opportunity to both consume and create digital content or – more importantly – to participate in digital communication.

Many children today may have the digital skills to complete the task, but a lack of knowledge of the context or a critical approach to the realisation of set tasks. Children use digital devices, but can they be described as being digitally literate? In education at any age, children need support and guidance to develop critical skills for evaluating learning outcomes and for constant self-reflection in the process of learning and acquiring new knowledge. As a result, it is necessary to adapt the curriculum, the strategies for learning and development, the environment and space for learning, and the necessary logistics to enable a holistic approach to children's digital literacy in the educational process. What does this mean in practice? The curriculum must no longer be solely based on the offer of knowledge to be reproduced and which encourages the development of acceptable child behaviours. It needs to extend beyond this frame and must not 'limit children's minds': even at an early age, the curriculum should develop a set of universal moral values that will enable the individual to face the challenges of the digital world and adapt them according to their own needs. And this means the development of basic digital literacy, a broader view of the discourse of children's rights in the digital world, or a direct connection with their potential for constant research and re-construction of their own knowledge. At the same time, a balanced approach is necessary regarding the negative and positive aspects of using digital tools in the education of children from the youngest ages. It means the adequate protection of children – or how to protect children from possible risks and anticipation of positive opportunities in children's development, access to new information, freedom of expression and participation, etc. Back in 2014, the Committee on the Rights of the Child advised member states to include digital literacy as part of national curricula (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2014).

One of the more widespread definitions of digital literacy is the one from UNICEF based on the real needs of children in our time, and according to which: "Digital literacy as a set of knowledge, skills, behaviours and values, which should enable children to confidently and autonomously play, learn, socialise, prepare for work, participate in activities in the digital environment. Children should be able to use and understand technology, research and manage information, communicate, collaborate, create and share content, build knowledge, solve problems, safely, critically, ethically in an appropriate way that responds to the age, the local language and the local environment" (UNICEF, 2020).

According to this definition, digital literacy for children means:

Adoption of:
knowledge, skills, behaviours, values, strategies, awareness, which are

Necessary for:
safe, efficient, creative, critical, autonomous, reflective, flexible, ethical and

Appropriate to:
age, local culture, local language, socio-economic context

For:
learning, playing, working, socializing, participating

In:
digital, interconnected environment and society.

Diagram 1 **The meaning of digital literacy for children** according to UNICEF 2022

There are numerous challenges that directly condition the realisation of the goals of digital literacy for children, all over the world. First of all, the development of digital skills among children is directly conditioned by:

→ their social environment;

→ daily issues faced by the child;

→ technical conditions;

→ poor internet connections;

→ the lack of a computer or

→ limitations with the local language spoken by the children.

This is the reason why – in many regions of the world – digital skills growth is going slowly and there is quiet resistance to the benefits of its application in education.

The development of digital literacy among children also depends on the conditions within the family environment. The socioeconomic status of the family, the recognition of the advantages of digital tools, the dangers of their daily use and owning a computer or smartphone is also significant assumption about how much a child will be supported in the process of education and acquisition of basic digital knowledge, skills and abilities. According to Livingstone and Byrne (2015), the role of parents as digital mediators is highly dependent on the local context in different regions of the world, in developed and less developed countries. Schools play a significant role in the adoption of digital competencies if they creatively use digital tools as a means of active learning. Schools should be involved in strengthening public awareness of the importance of children's digital literacy. The process of realisation of the activities and the acquisition of new knowledge should be in a way that will encourage children's critical opinion, recognition and development of resistance to misinformation. Schools should provide training for teachers, and their technical support, strengthen the logistics in the school and provide fast and easy access to the internet, etc. School should also be an open forum for educating parents and should provide direct support for the application of digital tools in children's home learning environment. Of course, this requires support from the wider community and the private sector, which is expected to recognise the needs of these generations of children who will live and work in the second half of the 21st century. Possible problems in the adoption of digital literacy among children in different regions of the world (but also in our country) are: teachers who are not trained and have not undergone any training, poor IT infrastructure, poor internet connection of the school, digital literacy is not recognised as part of the curriculum, lack of quality digital content for learning, inappropriate language in which the digital materials are created, resistance from school management and resistance from teachers, etc.
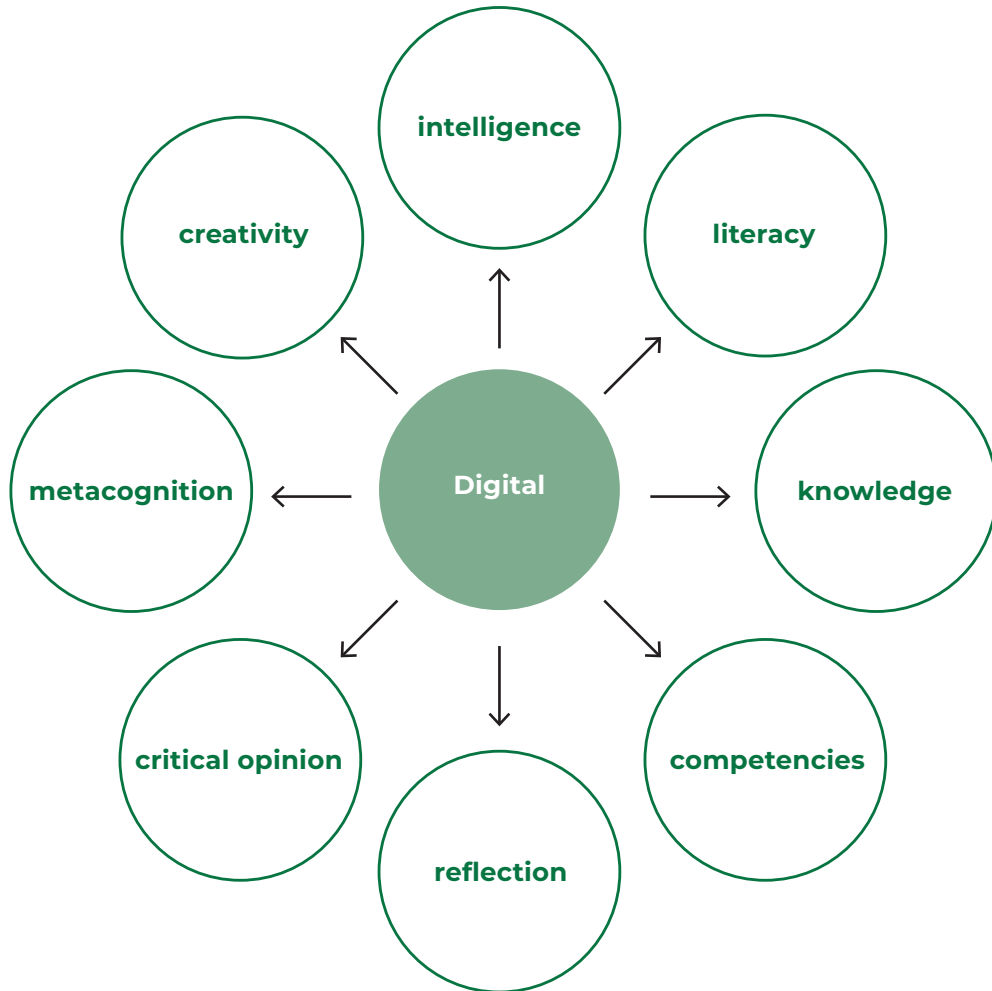
Diagram 2 **Elements of digital literacy for children** according to UNICEF 2022

5.2.4   Digital literacy and learning skills

According to the UNICEF Digital Literacy for Children paper from 2019, the broader pedagogical approach, which refers to learning skills, means accepting a holistic vision of learning and development of children and students.

In theory and practice, there are four distinct, interrelated, interdependent skill sets that will enhance the long-term development and learning of children and students everywhere in the world:

Basic skills	→	essential for development and learning, refer to skills for acquiring basic literacy, language and mathematics) which further allow us to acquire new knowledge, skills and abilities;
Transversal skills	→	soft skills, skills for the 21st century, socio-emotional skills, which allow us to be agile and adaptable, to manage in everyday life, in the environment, in kindergarten, in school and in the workplace. They include problem-solving, negotiation, empathy, management, communication;
Specific skills	→	skills oriented towards performing specific tasks, related to certain professions, e.g. baker, doctor;
Digital skills	→	refers to skills and knowledge that support children's digital literacy.

Types of skills, according to the UNICEF framework:

Basic skills	→	linguistic and mathematical
Transversal skills	→	soft skills, 21st century skills
Specific skills	→	oriented towards performing work tasks
Digital skills	→	help with digital literacy

Table 1   **Types of skills** according to the UNICEF framework

Digital literacy and children's development

Today's generations of children recognise IT devices in their own home and recognise simple IT devices (computer, phone, tablet) from a very early age. They acquire specific skills daily in the handling of IT devices, which helps their digital literacy.

Children know how to recognise the Enter, Space and Del[ete] keys and knows how to use them correctly. Children from the age of 2–3 recognise applications from their icons (symbols representing the application) and can control the movements of their palms and fingers. Already by the age of 3–4, the child has the ability to create and edit images and videos through applications/platforms and has the ability to work with set options and to forward videos and images to other users. Every child of preschool age knows how to distinguish the sounds of different animals, but also to draw on a tablet with a special pen or know how to edit and modify photos. This further implies the ability to independently download applications onto smartphones, recognise certain thumbnails and correctly select illustrations, sounds, etc. Today's children easily manage to illustrate Lego blocks on a laptop, or successfully construct a factory by adding images to a laptop, and can correctly open the appropriate application and search for what specifically they want to open in a specific application. All children of preschool and early school age are hungry for new experiences directly related to the acquisition of new digital skills. Educators and teachers should encourage children to learn how to create pictures and short videos with music and how to forward them to their friends, while being guided by a video demonstration on the screen, through an appropriate learning platform for preschool and early school age. Appropriate use of digital devices from an early age provides countless opportunities for further upgrading of children's digital skills, even before the start of formal education. It also means strengthening their basic and transfer skills, and of course acquiring specific skills necessary for gleaning new knowledge from all domains of children's development. It also means the daily, continuous application of educational technology and consistency in achieving curriculum goals.

5.3 Ecological issues – climate change

The concept of sustainable development through its agenda until 2030 is expected to introduce major changes in the creation of policies and good practices in the European area. In the context of sustainable development, it should be mentioned that this topic was already discussed back in 1987, when UNESCO began to set goals for development that meet the needs of current generations without jeopardising the needs of future generations. In 1992, the Declaration of Rio de Janeiro also talks about topics related to the development of the environment presented through principles that aim to support societies to be more sustainable places to live.

The concept of sustainable development is also based on the United Nations' basic values, which refer to human dignity, basic freedoms, human rights, equality and care for the environment. In this respect, sustainable development has been developed into a concept based on change aimed at values and respect for others, diversity, the environment and the resources of our planet, keeping in mind both current and future generations. The perspective of sustainable development comes closer to the global vision, it comes closer to the way people should relate to the world from various angles significant for global progress. In an attempt to classify the differences in approach, the concept establishes three pillars of sustainable development, namely environmental, economic and social, of course set through the principle of mutual balance. It is this approach that provides the basis for further development of this concept, which goes in the direction of setting an Agenda for sustainable development (The Sustainable Development Agenda, 2019). The document contains a total of 17 goals with an agenda which should be implemented over a period called the Decade of Action (Decade of Action, 2019). Change is a key element of linking sustainable development and education: if education is a process of acquiring knowledge, abilities and skills through which children and adults are encouraged to become active participants in a changing society, it perfectly complements the concept of sustainable development based on change. The possibility of acquiring values, attitudes, behaviours, knowledge and skills and applying them in order to promote change seems to be a determinant of both education and sustainable development, hence the need to talk about education for sustainable development, which is part of the fourth goal (entitled "Quality education") of the Sustainable Development Agenda. If quality education is meant to enable an integrated influence of educational institutions and parents, in this case there is a legitimate justification for education for sustainable development to incorporate the aspects of quality education, quality parenting and quality childhood. Early childhood education is treated as a major component in achieving the goals of sustainable development, as children are seen as active citizens who will bring change, values, competence, culture and appropriate behaviour.

Education for sustainable development tends to build on or improve institutions and services that will be adapted to the needs of children and students; ensuring a safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environment; increasing the number of scholarships, especially in developing and underdeveloped countries, intended for enrolment in higher education institutions; professional and technical training for information and communication technology, engineering; increasing the supply of qualified professional staff and international cooperation for the training of educators and teachers in developing and underdeveloped countries (Tasevska, 2022). In order to ensure these conditions, it will be necessary to approach the reorientation of education towards sustainable development and the promotion of education that tends towards sustainability and improving the capacity of children and adults to be able to make positive changes in environmental and developmental problems; achieving environmental and ethical awareness, values and behaviour, skills and attitudes based on the concept of sustainable development, as well as effective public participation in the decision-making process.

Based on these aspects, the Agenda for Education for Sustainable Development as created by the UN aims to:

→ ensure that policies, legislation and their implementation support education for sustainable development;

→ promote sustainable development through formal and informal learning;

→ develop competencies among educators and teachers for the inclusion of sustainable development in the implementation of educational activities and teaching;

→ ensure that appropriate tools and materials will be available to support education for sustainable development and

→ promote research and development of the concept of education for sustainable development (The Sustainable Development Agenda, 2019).

According to UNESCO documents, the Agenda for Education for Sustainable Development creates the key concept for education in the new millennium. For this purpose, it is necessary to intervene in:

→ "Improving access to and maintaining the quality of primary education;

→ Reorientation of existing educational programmes that point towards sustainability;

→ Increasing public understanding and awareness of sustainable development and

→ Providing training in all sectors of the workforce" (The Sustainable Development Agenda, 2019).

Quality primary education for all boys and girls is particularly important for their well-being, while also enabling them to acquire knowledge, skills, values and perspectives set in the context of a sustainable way of life. The need for the reorientation of education and programmes is particularly significant for this monograph. This requirement is set across all subsystems, starting from early childhood all the way to higher education. Reorientation is not just about systemic, conceptual and structural reorientation. This concept goes a step further and foresees a reorientation of the education process, a constant questioning of everything that has been learned, in terms of how it was learned and why it was learned.

The natural orientation of this concept towards the future naturally sets a benchmark for the development of the futuristic views of children and students through the entire education system, which will be based on creativity, analytical, problem-solving and encouraging a divergent way of thinking. Conceptually, education for sustainable development is further directed toward staff and children. In this context, it is considered particularly important for children to get to know their environment, to try to understand the challenges of sustainable development and to develop empathy and respect for diversity in the world. Since it may be difficult for children to immediately understand the concept of sustainability at first, great emphasis is placed on the help and guidance provided by educators, which are extremely important. To achieve this, a document called "Learning for the Future" has been developed and is dedicated to the Competencies for Education for Sustainable Development (UN, 2012).

We believe that these particular competencies have an important role in combining the theoretical paradigms and the practical implementation of the concept of sustainable development; a combination that skilfully creates conditions for children not only to understand this concept but

also to be able to apply it in their everyday lives. It is considered the key to success that brings change, and change is the main driver of this whole movement, process, concept, strategy, action plan, implementation and effects... of sustainability!

5.3.1 Sustainable development through play and life skills

Play, life skills and sustainable development are a matter of reorienting programmes at all levels of the educational system, starting from kindergartens to universities. In this sense, the reorientation of the programmes in itself includes the selection of appropriate knowledge, skills, problems, perspectives and values for the ecological, social and economic spheres of sustainability. In terms of knowledge, it is emphasised that people should possess basic knowledge in the field of natural and social sciences in order to understand the principles of sustainable development and the way they can be implemented, the included values of sustainable development and the consequences of their application. (UNESCO, 2012a, p. 11) In terms of skills, Education for Sustainable Development should equip people with the practical skills that will motivate them to continue learning after school, encourage them to find a sustainable place to live and live a more sustainable life (ibid., p. 11). In terms of real problems related to sustainable development, mention is made of: agriculture, atmosphere, biodiversity, climate change, deforestation, freshwater, drought, gender equality, human settlement, indigenous peoples, land use, oceans, population growth, poverty, preservation and promotion of human health, solid and hazardous waste and sanitation (ibid., p. 12)

In addition to the principles, perspectives and characteristics of Education for Sustainable Development, it is significant to mention the values of the individual, the values of the society where the individual lives, as well as the values of citizens from all over the world. Understanding values is necessary for understanding one's own opinions and the opinions of others (Tasevska, 2022).

The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, supported by the United Nations, affirms that all children have the right to education (1989, Article 28).

Agenda 2030 sets basic primary education as a priority, but it must be noted that even in early education, children feel environmental challenges, because this is the time when the foundations of a series of fundamental behaviours and values are formed. Through research, but also from experience, we know that young children are capable of sophisticated opinions regarding socio-ecological problems and that the earlier ideas are introduced, the greater effect and impact they will have (OMEP, 2010, p. 6).

In 2009, the UN General Assembly indicated and highlighted the fact how important it is for children to be heard and, confirming the general principle of participation, it inserted this into the framework for the interpretation and implementation of all the other rights incorporated in the Convention. In short, the General Assembly called on States to promise that all children will have the opportunity to be heard in all matters that concern them, without discrimination on any basis. It also called for adapting and/or continuing the implementation of regulations and agreements that encourage children's participation in all their environments: family, school and community. (ibid., p. 7)
Children start building their character from an early age. Apart from having an awareness of their own existence, once they enter preschool centres and kindergartens, they socialise and build social relationships with other friends, educators and parents. It is important during this period to implement practices that introduce, i.e. promote sustainable development.

Such actions can be observed all over the world.

Kindergartens in **Slovenia** practice ways of incorporating elements of environmental education and education for sustainable development into early learning programmes. So, for example, when it comes to satisfying the need for physical development, the curriculum includes physical activities that are performed in the forest or in the fields, etc. Language activities are introduced through stories about environmental problems, and thus children develop sensitivity to the environment through discussion. In terms of art, children often use waste and natural materials to understand the benefits of reusing things. (Vodopivec, 2011, pp. 970–971).

In a kindergarten in **Sweden**, an example was shown that promoted sustainable early childhood development: due to the need to design a new outdoor playground in a kindergarten, a project was realised in which an architect was called who involved the children in designing the outdoor space. The aim of the project was to encourage children to be active participants in the design of their own environment but also to encourage their awareness of the local environment as a whole (OMEP, 2010, p. 9)

In a Parisian amusement park in **France**, children between the ages of 4 and 6 made animated films on topics related to the environment, climate change, water, biodiversity, natural resource management, sustainable production and consumption, and sustainable urban development. Within the project, aids such as a camera, personal computer and necessary material for films, were procured (UNESCO, 2012b, pp. 21–23)

In **Portugal**, a project was implemented that included children from 3 to 4 years old. The children managed to realise several activities such as: collecting bottle caps and collecting used batteries, and edible oils, creating a space for collecting and sorting waste, collecting computer consumables, creating a garden, etc. (UNESCO, 2012b, pp. 33–37)

In a children's centre in **the UK**, parents and children were invited to work together on a project. They were asked, together as a team, to make toys out of wood, plastic, metal and cloth (OMEP, 2010, p. 11)

In a village in **Croatia**, a preschool was renovated using environmentally friendly, energy-efficient materials. Thanks to this renovation process, it became possible to start using renewable energy sources. (European Commission, 2017)

The picture shows children playing with corn flour, beans and seeds (Ivanov, 2023)

In September 2021, a manual entitled *"Flourish Model"* was shared for free. This handbook presents a framework for understanding, promoting and mapping well-being in the world. The handbook emphasises the importance of early human development, promotes the child's full development (physical, emotional, mental and spiritual), explains the thorough shaping of values, beliefs and behaviours, promotes environments with compassionate practice and optimises the conditions for the child to be able to 'flourish'.

This model provides an ecological underpinning of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and examines how they relate to the lives of children and the well-being of future generations. The model reveals the national educational priorities: safety, connection, independence, engagement, fulfilment, contribution and development.

At the same time, it shows that children and families are embedded in larger cultural and political systems, and that their values and well-being are linked to those of others and the planet as a whole. Children are recognised as active and global citizens, but also as rights holders who are strong, powerful and have rich potential to become positive drivers of change. (Flourish Model, 2021)

5.4 Migration

Addressing the Importance of Inclusive Education for Child Migrants

Introduction:

In recent years, the world has witnessed a significant increase in the number of child migrants, a vulnerable group forced to leave their home countries due to myriad reasons such as armed conflict, persecution, poverty, or natural disasters. As these children embark on new journeys and seek safety and stability, it is crucial to recognise the profound impact their migration experiences have on their educational prospects. This paper aims to shed light on the challenges faced by child migrants within the education system and emphasise the importance of inclusive education in fostering their holistic development and successful integration.

Relevant data:

→ **Global migration trends:**
according to the United Nations, as of 2021, there were an estimated 31 million child migrants worldwide, constituting nearly one in every eight international migrants. This statistic underscores the urgent need to address the specific needs and rights of these children within the educational landscape.

→ **Access to education:**
child migrants often face numerous barriers when accessing quality education. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) reports that only 63% of refugee children attend primary school, compared to a global average of 91%. Additionally, only 23% of refugee adolescents enrol in secondary school, compared to the global average of 84%. These disparities highlight the pressing need to ensure equal access to education for child migrants.

→ **Language and cultural barriers:**
language and cultural differences present significant challenges for child migrants when entering a new education system. Adjusting to a new language of instruction can hinder their educational progress and social integration. UNESCO estimates that approximately 40% of refugee children lack access to education in languages they understand, exacerbating their already vulnerable position.

→ **Trauma and psychosocial support:**
child migrants often carry with them the emotional burden of traumatic experiences. Studies have shown that exposure to violence, displacement and separation from family members can have long-lasting effects on their mental well-being. Inclusive education systems can provide critical psychosocial support, helping child migrants cope with their experiences and promoting their overall well-being.

Importance of inclusion:

→ **Human rights perspective:**
inclusive education is not only a matter of equality but also a fundamental human right. The Convention on the Rights of the Child emphasises that every child has the right to education without discrimination, regardless of their migration status. Ensuring the inclusion of child migrants in the education system is crucial for upholding their rights and fostering their overall development.

→ **Social cohesion and integration:**
inclusive education plays a vital role in promoting social cohesion and fostering the integration of child migrants into their host communities. By creating inclusive learning environments that embrace diversity, schools can facilitate meaningful interactions among students of different backgrounds, fostering empathy, understanding and tolerance.

→ **Educational attainment and future opportunities:**
inclusive education for child migrants equips them with the necessary skills, knowledge and qualifications to thrive academically and pursue higher education or vocational training. By ensuring their educational attainment, we enhance their future opportunities, enabling them to contribute positively to society and break the cycle of poverty.

→ **Long-term benefits for societies:**
investing in inclusive education for child migrants is not only a matter of social justice, but also a wise investment for societies. When given the opportunity to reach their full potential, child migrants can become productive members of society, bringing diverse perspectives, talents and skills that enrich their communities and contribute to economic growth.

Conclusion:

the inclusion of child migrants in the education system is a matter of utmost importance. By acknowledging their unique challenges, providing equal access to quality education and offering the necessary support, we can empower these young individuals to rebuild their lives, transcend adversity, and realise their full potential. An inclusive education system not only benefits child migrants themselves but also contributes to building more inclusive, equitable and compassionate societies for all.

More than three million people have fled Ukraine since Russia launched its invasion in February 2022. Queues extending over several kilometres continue to be formed at the border crossings with neighbouring Poland, Moldova, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia. However, not everyone is allowed to leave the country. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky ordered a general military mobilisation imposing a temporary travel ban on men between the ages of 18 and 60. As a result, most of the people leaving the country are women with children.
Following this humanitarian crisis, the European Commission adopted a Temporary Protection Directive for Ukrainian refugees, enabling them to access residence permits, the right to work, social and health care and education. This directive applies to all citizens of Ukraine, as well as their family members, for the next three years.

As for the Republic of North Macedonia, it is estimated that between February – April 26 2022, 1,000 arrived and stayed in the country. A number of them have been welcomed by the Ukrainian diaspora and many more are being hosted by Macedonian families. Some of them reside in private accommodation. The number of Ukrainian citizens arriving in North Macedonia increases on weekly basis.

Still, the Government has not yet come up with a direction what legal status they can be assigned. Currently, the Law on Foreigners allows them to stay on humanitarian grounds for a period of one year. It should be noted that, under this status, they cannot enjoy the protection they would receive if they had temporary protection or international protection in accordance with the Law on International Protection. We expect the Government to come up with clear guidelines on their position as soon as possible.

At the same time, the government is assessing potential accommodation capacities in case of a large influx of refugees from Ukraine. During the month of March 2022, the Government instructed the Ministry of Finance to provide 120 million denars (approximately €2.0 m) for organising and providing accommodation and additional services to Ukrainian citizens arriving in our country as refugees from a war zone.
Also, national institutions, CSOs, the UN and other international organisations are working closely on planning for providing multisectoral relief across to the targeted population. For this purpose, it is crucial to conduct a rights-based rapid needs assessment for better understanding the priority needs, vulnerabilities and barriers to accessing information, services and humanitarian support, including mapping of the challenges experienced by groups with heightened vulnerability.

It is vital that after the initial shock of fleeing from one country to another, and after the stabilisation period, people must start functioning normally, with children going to kindergarten and having access to education and people having sources of funding or employment, because no-one knows how long this war will last. In order to contribute to this process and to give first-hand information to organise adequate support, our country will provide assessment in order to:

1. Understand the self-prioritised needs of persons displaced into North Macedonia as a result of the conflict in Ukraine.

2. (Recognising a large population has been affected by the conflict) understand who amongst them (profiles), and by assessment locate, those particularly vulnerable to increased suffering due to the crisis; understand what their vulnerabilities are and how they might be addressed.

3. Investigate what forms and modalities of assistance persons of concern believe would best help them to meet their current needs.

4. Understand the current movement patterns of displaced persons, as well as their intentions for future movement.

5. Map out gaps and opportunities for humanitarian actors to integrate within existing service provision structures.

With the status they currently have in our country, people do not have the opportunity to access the labour market, i.e. they are unable to find and take up employment. As three months have already passed since refugees from Ukraine started arriving in Macedonia, the state should approach this issue seriously and not just go for the option of visiting Kyiv and taking pictures. If these refugees need health care, regardless of whether they are small children or adults, they are forced to pay for the service and, as we mentioned, a large number of these people do not even have basic means of survival.

Since the beginning of the war, there have been 300 Ukrainian refugees with official certificates of residence in the country, but the unofficial number is over 1,000. The Ukrainian embassy in Macedonia says that almost all of them are staying with friends or relatives, but that, as they add, is not a permanent solution for a worthy and a peaceful life. Several hundred Ukrainian refugees have been staying in Macedonia for months, but none of them has recognised refugee status. And while the Russian military invasion of Ukraine has entered its fifth month, the Ukrainians in Macedonia have no health insurance, no employment opportunities and no education for their children.

The access to certain rights of foreigners in the Republic of North Macedonia is closely related to the respective status they have in the country and the way they have regulated their stay. According to the legal provisions, persons from Ukraine are able to receive the status of a refugee or the status of a person under subsidiary protection, depending on the assessment after the conducted interview, but there have been no such requests, i.e. the only requests have been withdrawn.

However, for things like access to kindergarten or health insurance, it is enough to make only a decision of the Government, which will significantly ease the life of many Ukrainians, whose number is only expected to grow in the country. Such announcements are based on the decision of neighbouring Bulgaria, where almost 300,000 Ukrainians have arrived since the beginning of the Russian invasion, one third of whom received temporary protection and accommodation from the state. However, due to the beginning of the tourist season, a large part of the people located on the coast these days will be moved inland. According to the conversations during the polls, it would not come as a surprise if some of them decided to come to Macedonia.

In the meantime, the people of Ukraine are dependent on the humanity of Macedonian citizens and organisations.
A Macedonian language course for Ukrainian refugees, which started on June 1, has also been launched recently. According to information from the Red Cross, so far 37 people have been registered on the course, of which 20 are children and 17 are adults in Skopje. The idea is to later include online Ukrainian refugees who are located outside the capital. Learning the language is necessary if we want these people to function fully in Macedonian society.

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CHAPTER 6
Professional Development and lifelong learning

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Introduction

Lifelong learning covers the entire period of human life all the way from birth to death. As its name suggests, lifelong learning demonstrates that there is no time in a person's life that is unsuitable for learning. A person's lifetime is accompanied by forms of education and learning that differ from one another and which appear at a certain time and with a certain goal, i.e. they are not by chance. Apart from the form of education and learning, the changes that result from the process of lifelong learning depend greatly on the age of the person learning. Approaches to learning, teaching and learning methods and ways of perceiving reality are more prone to change in relation to the age of the subject who is learning. This means they are actually more prone to change than the content itself that is being learned.

If teaching is understood as the basic unit of formal education, we know that its goal is to enable the learners to learn and work independently with the content and methods of work used by the teacher in their teaching. Taking this idea further, it means that the aim of the school is actually to abolish (the need for) itself. In the context of professional development – which is seen as an integral part of lifelong learning – it can be said that teaching in formal education has achieved its goal, meaning that it has prepared young professionals to be able to organise the process of their own advancement independently, without organised learning and a work plan made by someone else.

The topic of this chapter are competences, and they are classified according to the principle of deductive reasoning, so more general overviews of competences in Europe are listed first. Later, they are classified into national frameworks for the education of preschool teachers and related professions working in education in North Macedonia and Serbia.

6.1 Eight key competences for lifelong learning

Introduction

It is not new to talk about key competences for lifelong learning and their importance for a person living in the 21st century. Learning is a process that never ends, and covers a significantly longer period of life compared to formal education, through which subjects (and the corresponding official diplomas) are taught and guided for subsequent use in jobs and status in the world of work. According to Lazić & Popov (2022), three basic forms of education make up this context: formal, informal and non-formal. These categories are basically differentiated by the method used to supply (or adopt) the learning.

Formal Education is associated with the national system of institutional education, i.e. the type of education/learning that takes place in **schools and colleges**. It is most often associated with a degree of expertise and a title or qualification at an official level. **It results in the issuing of certificates and/or diplomas upon the completion of a certain level of education and is recognised in law.**

Informal Education permeates organised bodies in society and is **most often associated with organised forms of education** but which do not imply an extremely high degree of obligation, **are short-lived, provide opportunities to acquire and/or improve certain knowledge, expertise or competences** and as a result provide assurances in the form of certificates (e.g. passing a foreign language course, a course of certain skills or developing certain hobbies, etc.) **It sequentially fills the gaps** arising from the disproportionate growth of progress and the impossibility of monitoring it in institutional frameworks, by providing an additional step 'forward' into the current frameworks. Considering the organisation and method of implementation, this form of education provides good insights, after which there still remains the need to renew and upgrade what has been learned in relation to newly emerging changes.

Non-Formal Learning is any other learning – a wide field of natural phenomena in everyday life that not only carry educational potential, but also the individual is often not even aware of the fact they are learning while they are learning (Lazić & Saveski, 2015). It is a process that does not enter the domain of form, is realised without any specific intention and is deeply dependent on relationships. In this form of learning, there is a strong concept of individuality, the existence of intrinsic motivation and influence on the content, since it is "voluntary, self-directed, lifelong, intrinsically motivated by curiosity, research, fantasy, discovery, the desire to complete the task and social interactions" (Milutinović, 2003). It represents a thoughtful and purposeful process that can take place

in different environments, most of which are not educational in nature, during which people are driven by the need for knowledge and the desire for knowledge and discovery and in which they fully realise participatory epistemology. **It successfully fills the gaps** created by the insufficient possibility of formal education to provide insight into all the nuanced views of the given, **since it places special emphasis on learning activities in everyday life**. As such, it combines life and learning, and relies on systematic and cumulative aspects of experiential learning.

It represents a natural phenomenon of everyday life by occurring outside the school environment because it is not part of the curriculum (Boileau, 2018).

Learning Spectrum

Formal Learning   **Informal Learning**

Spending / Outcome Paradox

Classes
Courses
Curriculum
Assessments
Training programmes
Certificates
School
Grades

No classes, attendance or grades.
Never ends (lifetime learning).
Observation and discovery.
Ask a peer, mentor, or expert.
Trial and error.
Read an article, blog or discussion.

Spending   **Return on Learning**

Figure 1   **Formal and informal learning**
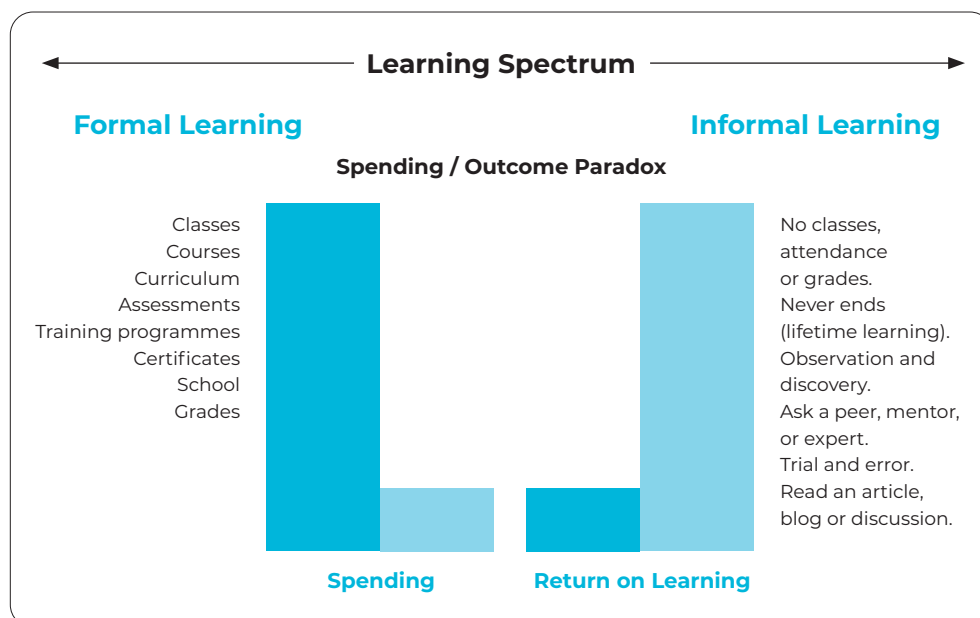
The potential and importance of informal learning are also recognized in the EU, especially in the area of learning methods and employability (Kaučić, 2016).
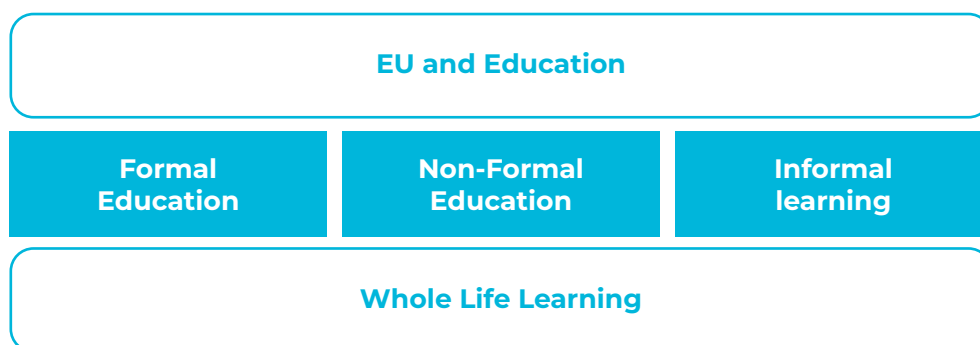
EU and Education

| **Formal Education** | **Non-Formal Education** | **Informal learning** |

Whole Life Learning

Figure 2   **Potentials and importance of informal learning in lifelong learning**

6.1.1 Contemporary life

The role of lifelong learning is recognised in European educational policies and defined by the Lisbon process (European Parliament, 2000). It establishes the development strategy of the European Union until 2010 with the aim of building the most dynamic and competitive economic space in the world based on knowledge and in which employment and living standards increase. During this process, we have gone through different denominators of the same structure, with expressions such as lifelong education, return education, knowledge society and learning society appearing, culminating in 'lifelong learning', which is considered the most complete term today.

6.1.2 Key competences

The basis of progress and development is found in competences, which represent a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes and values, as well as abilities, dispositions to learn and resourcefulness. Together, they form the backbone of progress and growth in an individual's personal career and professional development and are conducive to the context of lifelong learning. Competences represent ways of obtaining qualitative and valuable information and knowledge that can be useful and usable. They represent a departure from mechanical learning and point to the development of the ability to search for sources of information and knowledge. In order to see more clearly the difference in approach and their nuances, the key competences are presented side by side in this text based on two strategic documents from 2019 and 2006.

2019	2006
Key competences for lifelong learning EUROPEAN COMMISSION (2019)	Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning Official Journal of the European Union L394/10 (2006)
1. Literacy as a competence	1. Communication in the mother tongue
2. Communication in foreign languages	2. Communication in foreign languages
3. Mathematical competence and competences in natural sciences, technology and engineering	3. Mathematical competence and basic competences in natural sciences and technology
4. Digital competence	4. IT competence
5. Personal, social competence and learning how to learn	5. Ability to learn
6. Civic competence	6. Interpersonal, intercultural, social and civic competence
7. Competence of entrepreneurship	7. Entrepreneurship
8. Competence of cultural awareness and expression	8. Cultural awareness and expression

Table 1   **The key competences for lifelong learning** according to the EC (2019) and the Official Journal of the European Parliament (2006).

The 2019 document entails the following:

1. **Literacy as a competence** carries the ability to identify, understand, express, create and interpret ideas, feelings, facts and opinions, both orally and in writing. For this purpose, visual, audio and digital materials are used through various disciplines and contexts. Literacy as a competence indicates the ability to effectively communicate and connect with others in an appropriate and creative way.

2. **Communication in foreign languages** means the ability to effectively use different languages. It is highly associated with literacy and the skills that make it up. It relies on a person's ability to switch from one language to another, including the development of the mother tongue and the official language in use in the particular country.

3. **Mathematical competence and competence in natural sciences, technology and engineering is divided into two large units:**

   a) *Mathematical competence* is summarised in the ability to develop and apply mathematical thinking and insight in order to solve a wide range of problems in everyday situations.

   b) *Competences in natural sciences, technology and engineering* means understanding the natural world with the help of know ledge and applied methodology. Technology and engineering are the application of the aforementioned knowledge and methodo-logy in order to better understand human desires or needs.

4. **Digital competence** includes the reliable, critical and responsible use and connection with digital technologies for learning, both at work and in participation in community life. It comprises information, knowledge and use of data, communication and collaboration, media literacy, creation of digital content, etc.

5. **Personal, and social competence and learning how to learn** is the ability for personal reflection, effective and rational use of time and in-formation, and working with others in a constructive way. It also refers to the ability to cooperate regardless of complexity and uncertainty, learning how to learn, and achieving well-being in order to support mental and emotional health.

6. **Civic competence** is the ability to act as a responsible citizen and actively participate in civic and social life, which is based on under-standing the concepts of society, economy, law and politics, as well as global development and sustainability.

7. **Entrepreneurial competence** refers to the capacity to act on ideas at every opportunity, in order to transform them into value for others. It is based on creativity, critical thinking and the ability to solve prob-lems and take initiative, which together bring cultural, social or finan-cial value.

8. **The competence of cultural awareness and self-expression** includes an understanding of ideas and creativity and how they are expressed differently in different cultures through a wide range of settings and cultural forms. It refers to the connection in the understanding, de-velopment and manifestation of ideas and meaning through different ways and contexts.

   It is clear from these competences that knowledge and development are inseparable from one another and that knowledge that can be applied becomes a key personal and economic resource, as well as

a condition for achieving and realising the quality of life of a worthy person in the democratic environment of contemporary society. The new economy is more and more a knowledge-based economy, which means that education is accepted as a driver of social change, and their realisation has confirmed the importance of the potential of educational activity. The contemporary world is a world of scientific breakthroughs, fast communication and technical improvement to the limit of human potential.

6.2 Key OECD and WHO competences for the initial education of future preschool teachers and special educators in North Macedonia

The professional values on which the competences for the profiles of kindergarten employees are based define their personal and professional culture. They are guidelines that oblige kindergarten employees to display professional behaviour and actions on a daily basis. These values manifest in daily cooperation and communication with fellow practitioners and other employees, attitude towards all users of the services and other stakeholders in the professional environment. Professional values are acquired during education and are developed in everyday work. Every employee in the kindergarten bases their professional work on the following professional values:

→   Professional integrity and commitment to the profession

→   Commitment to the best interest of professional communities

→   A professional approach that values, respects and accepts diversity

→   Parents are equal partners in a child's early learning

Every kindergarten employee is dedicated to the profession and develops professional integrity. In their daily work, they manifest a professional approach in cooperation with other practitioners, parents and the wider community. At every opportunity, they perceive personal and common professional learning needs and actively participate in professional development. Through their example, they encourage professional integrity in the environment and contribute to motivation and a positive work climate. They believe that they promote their profession and contribute to the formation of a positive attitude among the public towards it through their professional and personal integrity, high ethical values and behaviour. Every kindergarten employee knows the value of collegial cooper-

ation and commitment to the best interests of professional communities and believes that practitioners should develop in their work for the benefit of every child. They perceive the community in which they work as an environment in which all possible methods and resources for personal and collegial professional progress should be found. Every kindergarten employee experiences the environment as a professional community in which they use systems to monitor the needs of employees and take advantage of all the opportunities for continuous professional advancement. Kindergarten employees establish cooperation with other professional communities in order to share mutual good practices and experiences. They also exhaust all the possibilities provided by the institution, available platforms, funds and other tools through which the professional community is able to constantly upgrade its capacities.

When working on the personal and professional development of other practitioner profiles in the kindergarten, an attempt is made to be more focused on the vision of a modern educational process and learning in the 21st century, advocating for the continuous improvement of both life and work in the kindergarten. A professional approach that values, respects and accepts differences means that every employee working in a kindergarten is aware of the differences between individuals that exist and accepts, respects and values them. It creates conditions in which differences are an advantage, not a disadvantage. It understands differences as an opportunity for mutual improvement and puts professional, socio-economic, cultural and educational differences in the function of enriching the community in which everyone works with one goal: the best interest of each child. For every kindergarten employee, every child is a unique and valuable person, and their professional obligation is dedicated to working in the interest of children and putting their development, learning, behaviour and mental health first. They believe that creating a stimulating environment will ensure that every child learns and develops and shows their potential to the maximum. A kindergarten teacher believes in the importance of respecting conventions and other documents on human rights and children's rights and on non-discrimination, as well as the principles of social justice and adherence to them, seeing them as a way to transform the kindergarten into a better place for children's development and learning. Every kindergarten employee believes that parents are equal partners in a child's early learning, so builds partnership relations with parents. Parents are key collaborators who have an essential role to play in joint efforts for the optimal care, care, growth, development and learning of each child. The partnership between kindergarten teachers and parents is re-established on a daily basis, on the one hand strengthening the parental competences and on the other hand providing the parents with open access and a chance to follow the daily work with their children and participate with their own capacities, thereby enabling continuity in stimulating the environment and within the family itself.

6.2.1 Basic professional competences of professional profiles employed in kindergartens

Over the past years, discussions between educational policymakers and the professional and scientific community on the most efficient strategies for education and the improvement of professional profiles employed in education have become more and more frequent. Leading European institutions dealing with competences and qualifications point out that the challenges of modern dynamic society can be answered only by employing highly qualified professionals who are trained for lifelong learning, reflection and research approaches in educational practice. They say it is important to ensure continuous improvement of practitioners in the following three areas of competence:

1. working with other people (children, colleagues, parents and other partners);

2. the application of knowledge, technology and information; and

3. working in the environment (at local, regional, national, European and wider global level) (European Commission, 2005).

Through working with other people, practitioners need to demonstrate the professionalism that is based on the values of social inclusion that nurture the potential of each child, and for that the person needs to have acquired knowledge about children's growth and development, as well as the possibility of individual work with children in cooperation with other professionals from different profiles. In the domain of applying knowledge and technology, the education and professional development of practitioners needs to ensure the strengthening of different approaches, quality analysis, validation of knowledge, feedback, transfer of knowledge and the use of technology. Their pedagogical skills should enable them to effectively manage the environment for learning and development and to choose the form and content of work accordingly. Practitioners should support children in the search for new knowledge with the help of modern technologies, enabling them to consider information and integrate it into their personal knowledge by developing an attitude towards learning as a lifelong challenge. Working with and in the environment, practitioners should contribute to developing children's readiness and responsibility as European citizens, by promoting mobility, cooperation, intercultural respect and understanding, all while identifying common values. They should also be aware of the factors that contribute to social cohesion in society and be aware of the ethical dimensions of a knowledge-based society. It is essential practitioners work with the local community, as well as with partners and other stakeholders in education – parents, teacher education institutions and repre-

sentative groups. Their experience and expertise should enable them to contribute to the development of a quality system.

Practitioners in preschool well-being and education should acquire competences in the aforementioned areas by developing general or generic competences, as well as within the framework of narrow professional knowledge and skills, specific to each profession or area, also referred to as 'special competences'. The generic competences include the following:

→ knowledge of the characteristics and developmental needs of children;

→ group management skills;

→ ability to monitor and evaluate development and learning processes;

→ knowledge of the content of current programmes and programming processes of educational work;

→ ability to teamwork and cooperation with different target groups within and outside the preschool institution;

→ ability for a research relationship and a reflexive approach to practice and one's own work;

→ developed sensitivity to the social and cultural dimensions of education.

All the recommendations listed above for the development of competence among practitioners employed in preschool nurture, education and care are integrated into educational practice in different ways. As the analysis of national documents from this area in 15 European countries (Belgium, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Germany, Holland, Croatia, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the UK) showed, "the different profiles and their competence in different national contexts across countries are almost impossible to compare" (Van Laere *et al.*, 2011). However, wider areas of competence have been identified which relate to the readiness of practitioners to work with children and parents, colleagues and the wider educational and social system and those related to personal professional development. It is emphasised that defining broad areas that include knowledge, skills and values are of particular benefit and that it is important that competences are the result of joint conversations between practitioners from different profiles with experts and policy makers.

Job title Job profile	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main position	Main age range focus of IPS	Minimum qualification requirement and ECTS points MQF & EQF level ISCED level
ECEC Teacher Profile: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional	ECEC institutions 3 – 6 years ECEC institutions 3 – 6 years	Core practitioner with group responsibility	3 – 6 years 3 – 6 years	Bachelor's degree, 4 years university ECTS points: 240 MQF/EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 7
Caregiver, Child-care Worker Nurse Profile: Social Care/Health Care Professional	Infant/toddler childcare in ECEC institutions 0 – 3 years ECEC institutions 3 – 6 years ECEC institutions 3 – 6 years	Core practitioner with group responsibility Supporting core practitioner	0 – 3 years 3 – 6 years	4-year upper secondary vocational school ECTS points: n/a MQF/EQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 3
Professional workers **Pedagogue; Psychologist** **Speech Therapy Teacher; Special Needs Teacher and Re-habilitator** Profile: Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional with specialist qualifi-cation **Social worker; Doctor of Medicine; Doctor in Dentistry** Profile: Social Care/Health Care Professional	ECEC institutions 0 – 3 years ECEC institutions 3 – 6 years	Specialist support staff Main responsible person who works with children with speech and other problems Person who works with children with social or health problems	Broad focus (children and adults)	Bachelor's degree, 4 years university ECTS points: 240 MQF/EQF Level: 6 ISCED 2011: 7 ECTS points: 240 MQF/EQF Level: 6 ISCED 2011: 7

Professional co-workers **Music Teacher; Art Teacher; Sports Teacher;** *Teacher of foreign languages* Profile: Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional with specialist qualification	ECEC institutions 0 – 3 years *ECEC institutions 3 – 6 years*	Specialist support staff Directly interacts with children two times a week, organising activities and working to-wards goals in the educational area of music, art, sport, other activities	3 – 15 years	Bachelor's degree, 4 years university ECTS points: 240 MQF/EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6
Medical Nurse Profile: Social/Health Care Professional		Qualified co-worker particularly in health issues	Broad focus (children and adults)	Bachelor's degree 3 years university ECTS points: 180 MQF/EQF: Level 6 ISCED 2011: 6

Table 2   SEEPRO professional profile categories for core practitioners
adapted from Oberhuemer, P., I. Schreyer, and M.J. Neuman, 2010

→ **Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional**
(specialist focus, 0–6/7 years)

→ **Pre-primary Education Professional**
(exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)

→ **Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional**
(focus on pre-primary and primary education 3/4–10/11 years)

→ **Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional**
(mainly broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but some-times including adults)

→ **Social Care/Health Care Professional**
(sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

→ **Social Care/Health Care Professional**
(sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

Building on the OECD Key Competences (the DeSeCo project: Definition and Selection of Competencies), the OECD Education 2030 project has identified three further categories of competences, the "Transformative Competences", that together address the growing need for young people to be innovative, responsible and aware:

→   **Creating new value**

→   **Reconciling tensions and dilemmas**

→   **Taking responsibility**

Creating new value: new sources of growth are urgently needed to achieve stronger, more inclusive and more sustainable development. Innovation can offer vital solutions – at affordable cost – to economic, social and cultural dilemmas. Innovative economies are more productive, more resilient, more adaptable and better able to support higher living standards. To prepare for 2030, people should be able to think creatively, develop new products and services, new jobs, new processes and methods, new ways of thinking and living, new enterprises, new sectors, new business models and new social models. Increasingly, innovation springs not from individuals thinking and working alone, but through cooperation and collaboration with others to draw on existing knowledge to create new knowledge. The constructs that underpin competency include adaptability, creativity, curiosity and open-mindedness.

Reconciling tensions and dilemmas: in a world characterised by inequities, the imperative to reconcile diverse perspectives and interests, in local settings with sometimes global implications, will require young people to become adept at handling tensions, dilemmas and trade-offs, for example, balancing equity and freedom, autonomy and community, innovation and continuity, and efficiency and the democratic process. Striking a balance between competing demands will rarely lead to an either/or choice or even a single solution. Individuals will need to think in a more integrated way that avoids premature conclusions and recognises interconnections. In a world of interdependency and conflict, people will successfully secure their own well-being and that of their families and their communities only by developing the capacity to understand the needs and desires of others. To be prepared for the future, individuals will have to learn to think and act in a more integrated way, taking into account the interconnections and inter-relations between contradictory or incompatible ideas, logic and positions, from both short- and long-term perspectives. In other words, they have to learn to be systems thinkers.

Taking responsibility: the third transformative competency is a prerequisite of the other two. Dealing with novelty, change, diversity and ambi-

guity assumes that individuals can think for themselves and work with others. Equally, creativity and problem-solving require the capacity to consider the future consequences of one's actions, to evaluate risk and reward, and to accept accountability for the products of one's work. This suggests a sense of responsibility, and moral and intellectual maturity, with which a person can reflect upon and evaluate his or her actions in light of his or her experiences, and personal and societal goals, what they have been taught and told, and what is right or wrong. Acting ethically implies asking questions related to norms, values, meanings and limits, such as: What should I do? Was I right to do that? Where are the limits? Knowing the consequences of what I did, should I have done it? Central to this competency is the concept of self-regulation, which involves self-control, self-efficacy, responsibility, problem-solving and adaptability. Advances in developmental neuroscience show that a second burst of brain plasticity takes place during adolescence, and that the brain regions and systems that are especially plastic are those implicated in the development of self-regulation. Adolescence can now be seen as a time not just of vulnerability but of opportunity for developing a sense of responsibility.

According to the WHO, life skills are the "Abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life" (World Health Organization WHO, 2001). In other words, life skills are skills that prepare an individual to live independently and productively within a society. Some individuals acquire life skills without even thinking about it. These skills can include knowing how to keep a job, understanding why one/others behave in a specific way, and knowing how to be a better friend. Life skills can be modelled and taught by parents and loved ones as they go about their daily routines. From this, individuals can perfect their own skills by trial and error. For some, however, life skills might not be easily understood or observed: some individuals might simply struggle to learn these skills or might feel as though no-one was ever patient enough to guide them. In order to ensure that life skills are understood by and instilled within all young people, educators can teach life skills in the classroom, thereby helping to prepare young people for success in their daily lives.

Video 1:
*Empathetic
Dialogues:
Inspiring
Kindergarten
Communication*
See Chapter 6.4

The core set of skills at the heart of skills-based initiatives that promote the health and well-being of young people include:

→　decision-making and problem-solving;

→　critical and creative thinking;

→　communication and interpersonal relationships;

→　self-awareness and empathy; and

→　coping with stress and emotion.

Structure of key competences for life skills

Key areas of basic professional competences for life skills are:

1st area:	2nd area:	3rd area:
Creating new value	Reconciling tensions and dilemmas	Taking responsibility

Area: Creating new value

Skills: Decision-making and problem-solving	
Knowledge	Professional abilities
Has knowledge of the need to make decisions independently. Has the knowledge to solve specific problems in everyday life.	Manifests the ability to independently make decisions in different life situations Takes responsibility and solves concrete problems in everyday life.
Skills: Critical and creative thinking	
Knowledge	Professional abilities
Knows how to think critically. Thinks creatively when making decisions or solving problems.	Demonstrates ability to think critically. Demonstrates creative thinking skills when making decisions or solving problems.

Area: Reconciling tensions and dilemmas

Skill: Communication	
Knowledge	Professional abilities
Knows how to communicate with individuals and groups of people.	Demonstrates social skills for communicating with individuals or groups of people.
Skill: Interpersonal relationships	
Knowledge	Professional abilities
Knows how to build interpersonal relationships.	Demonstrates interpersonal relationships skills.

Area: Taking responsibility

Skill: Self-awareness	
Knowledge	Professional abilities
Has knowledge about the meaning of self-awareness.	Manifests self-awareness in everyday life situations.
Skill: Empathy	
Knowledge	Professional abilities
Knows that empathy is an important life skill.	Develops empathy and manifests it in different life situations.
Skill: Coping with stress and emotion	
Knowledge	Professional abilities
Knows how to deal with stress and emotions.	Skilfully copes with stress and emotions in everyday life.

6.3 Key competences for the education of future preschool teachers (Serbia)

In Preschool Teachers Training College in Novi Sad, Serbia, the situation in the education of future preschool teachers is as follows:

→ Most students are educated to **work with children for 4 years before they enter primary school**.

→ Some students attend classes focused on children **aged from birth up to the age of 3 years**, infants and toddlers and (after finishing PTTC) the students will be educated to work with children from 6 months up to primary school age.

→ A special group of students attend classes in order to gain competence to **work with children in English**. They usually work with children in such a way in duration of 2, mostly 3, years before the children start attending primary school.

→ Study language in PTTC is Serbian, but students who are Hungarian **can learn some subjects and take exams in the Hungarian language**. According to this, they can gain competences to work with children in Hungarian.

Key competences of future preschool teachers:

1. Capable of analysing and assessing the possibilities and capacities of the preschool institution and developing the programme accordingly.

2. Mastered the knowledge and methods of assessment and critical review of the alignment of the real programme in relation to the conception of the fundamentals of the programme.

3. Capable of systematically monitoring children's progress through documenting activities, processes and products.

4. Capable of examining theory and practice and developing pedagogical knowledge by following, listening to children and consulting with them.

5. Capable of critically examining the culture and structure of the kindergarten independently and with colleagues.

6. Oriented to an integrated approach to learning and able to develop a programme relying on authentic experiences of children, different life situations, culture, art, science, technology, ecology, sports, focusing on key competences for lifelong learning.

7.	Capable of implementing an educational programme through two-way cooperation with the local community and to include children in local projects, events and activities.
8.	Ready to raise awareness and question their own principles and beliefs about the child, learning and their role.

6.3.1 Specific subject-oriented competences

Specific subject-oriented competences

1.	Students identify and understand the developmental characteristics of children of preschool age and recognise differences in all areas of children's development and nurture them (cultural, linguistic, health, social) and realise the right to equality.
2.	Students use different strategies for monitoring, documenting and evaluating work and apply them in dialogue with children, family and colleagues.
3.	Students listen to and support different ways of expressing children (drawing, construction in space, dance, movement, sound and voice, talking, play, etc.),
4.	Students review and build values and beliefs about the child and learning and own practice in order to change it and develop the quality of the programme.
5.	Students recognise the need for additional support for children in upbringing and education and develop strategies to support their development and inclusive practice.
6.	Students use digital technologies for work planning, observation, evaluation and documentation, as well as data records; exchange of information with family, colleagues, local community and for professional development.

6.3.2 Competences of preschool teachers in Serbia after finishing vocational studies

After graduating studies, preschool teachers are able to:

1. Create a safe environment in which the child is psychophysically protected; build relationships with children through respect for the child's feelings and initiative to develop the child's independence and self-control.

2. Set priorities in developing projects based on children's interests, applying different expressions that children use and supporting children's initiative and choices in work.

3. Use their knowledge in planning and implementing projects based on monitoring children and topics that are meaningful to children and aligned with the children's needs, opportunities and interests.

4. Explain the culture and structure of the kindergarten, understand and build pedagogical knowledge.

5. Respect the primary role and importance of parents and the family in early childhood education and foster a partnership relationship with the family and the local community.

6. Review their practice and plans and direct their professional development and identify problems in practice as learning opportunities.

6.4 Video

> ▶ **Video 1:**
>
> *Empathetic Dialogues: Inspiring Kindergarten Communication*
>
> From a very young age, children are socially competent beings, ready to respond to touch, voice, sound or another person near them. The quality of socio-emotional contacts in early childhood affects the ability to establish quality communication and social interaction with other people throughout life. Acquiring quality skills and abilities for the development and encouragement of socio-emotional learning in early childhood means the opportunity to create a positive self-image, develop pro-social behaviour, empathy, strengthen self-confidence, social skills, but also possessing competencies and abilities for recognizing and naming emotions and feelings in oneself and in others, understanding them and distinguishing between them.
>
> https://youtu.be/y_idMC2ThyA

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Introduction

Play is the learning motor of every child. Having a deeper understanding of the development, interests and needs of young children can increase the quality of learning and well-being in class. This chapter combines scientific findings with practical implementation methods for teachers. The following questions will inform the central issues:

→ How can teachers cope with high heterogeneity among children's developmental levels?

→ Which types of play are important to know when designing a diverse learning environment that meets the needs of all children?

→ What effect for learning do different ways of accompanying children within their play have?

→ Why is it useful to consider different forms of learning support?

→ Which activities and play projects help to develop children's life skills?

Video 1:
Rain
See Chapter 7.5

The ideas and materials in this chapter have been tested in practice and will help contribute to improving children's life skills through play.

7.1 Implement and encourage different types of play in a child's development

Within a class, the heterogeneity of children's levels of development can be high. As a result, an understanding of different types of play is an essential tool for teachers:
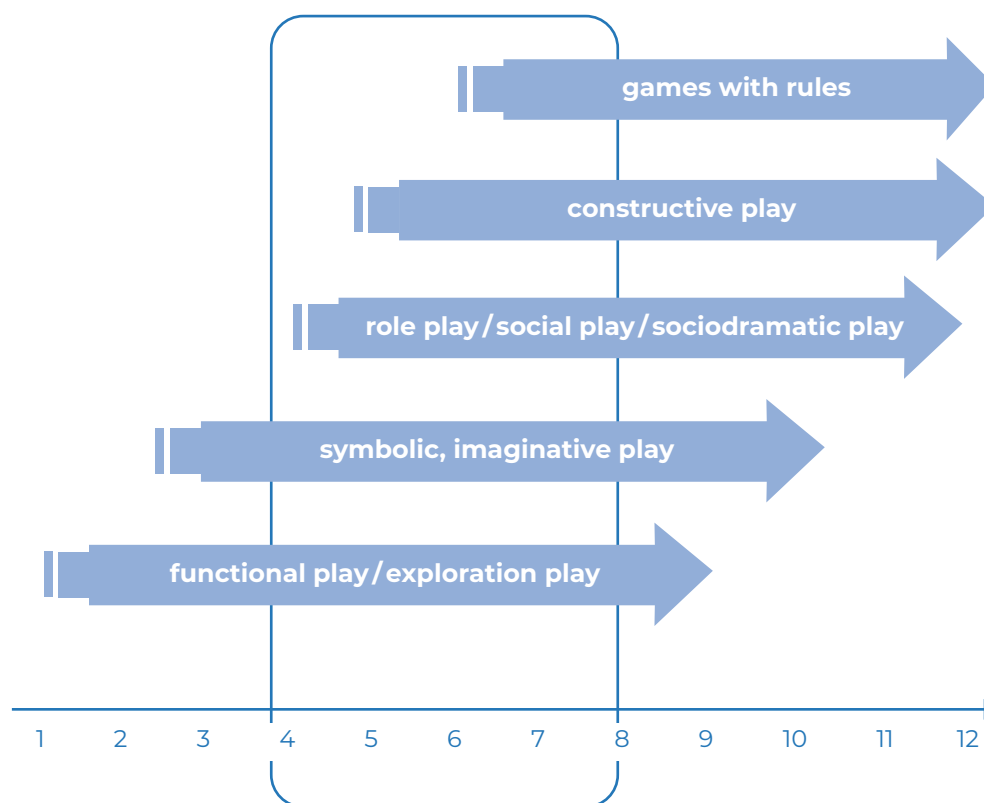
Figure 1 **Different types of play** Zürich University of Teacher Education PHZH (2023), according to Heimlich, 2015, p. 34

Figure 1 shows clearly that all the different types of play are important for the individual development of children between the ages of 4 and 8. Considering the high heterogeneity in child development within a classroom, it is essential the learning environment provides a good balance of different types and forms of play.

Functional play:

Experts often refer to functional play as 'first play' since it characterises how young children first begin to explore all the things around them and their functions. Functional play also enables children to discover new materials (such as sand, water or recycling material) and their possible uses. During this time, children also begin to experience their physical skills. Examples of competences children develop during functional play are curiosity, exploration and motoric skills. Functional play is a necessary basis upon which children can develop further forms of play.

▶

Video 2:
Children in Motion
See Chapter 7.5

Symbolic play / imaginative play / role play / sociodramatic play:

Symbolic play is a form of imaginative play and represents the ability to play in an abstract manner. This type of play involves 'playing pretend' as children start to use their imaginations. Examples might be a ball of wool which represents spaghetti or the child pretends to give medicine to a doll. Children do not necessarily need to interact with other children, which is why imaginative play can often be observed in very young children. Symbolic play strengthens such areas as cognitive skills, self-esteem, motor skills and creativity.

In role play, social play or sociodramatic play, children pretend to be another person or have other roles than in real life. They interact with other children in different social contexts and demonstrate other forms of behaviour.

This type of play requires and develops imitation, imagination, empathy and – when interacting with others in role play – also communication and cooperation.

▶

Video 3:
Seeing the World through a Child's Eyes
See Chapter 7.5

▶

Video 4:
Circus Play Project
See Chapter 7.5

Constructive play:

In constructive play, children can use different materials or objects to create or build something. It is often organised and focused on a goal, e.g. building a castle out of cardboard boxes, creating bakery products out of modelling clay or building a car with wood, nails and screws.
Through constructive play, children develop competences such as concentration, perseverance, hand-eye coordination or spatial conceptualisation.

▶

Video 5:
Children Plan and Build
See Chapter 7.5

Games with rules:

A form of play that is well established in many schools is playing games with specific rules.

In many card, board or educational games (but also a lot of group activities), largely predetermined structures and roles determine the game. Competences such as self-regulation, patience, logical thinking, cooperation and strategy are required and can be developed through this type of play. For young children, it is important to consider the individual resources, interests and needs when choosing this type of play.

→ More examples can be found in Chapter 7.2.2 Examples for learning through games

Task:

1. Think of a classroom or group of children you know. Which types of play come to your mind when you think of this group? Which types are dominant? In your opinion, which could be supported more?

2. How can you help a child who wants to play firefighters with other children, but does not fit into the game easily?

3. Think of your own childhood. Which play experiences can you remember? Which play types can you recognise?

7.2 Different ways to accompany children in play

As a teacher or school team, it can be helpful to think about different ways of accompanying children within their play. Depending on which form is chosen, either the child or the teacher will take the lead. Collaborative forms of learning include both the teachers and the children's view, so they can design the play in a participative way:

open play
free play
inquiry play

collaboratively designed play
guided play

instructional play
extended play
learning through games

child-directed   **collaborative**   **teacher-directed**
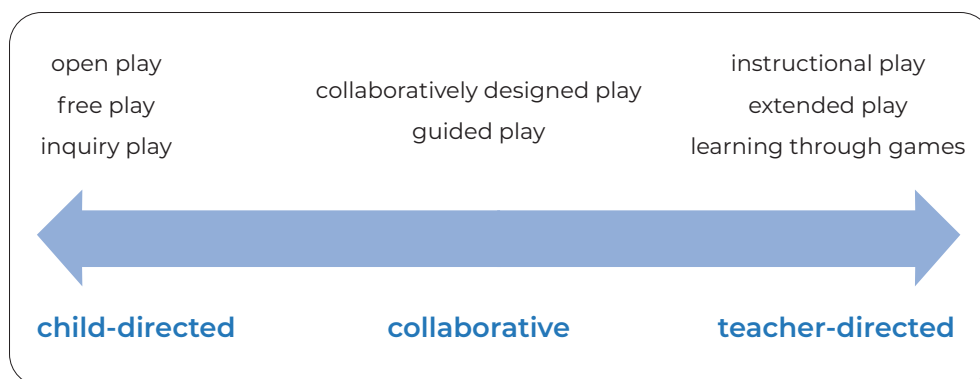
Figure 2   **Differently guided forms of play** Geiger, Natalie (2023) according to Pyle and Danniels (2016), Unicef (2023) and Kamenov (2009)

Depending on the way in which teachers support play, the new curriculum *Years of Ascent* (2018, Serbia) identifies three types of play: **open, extended and guided 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 the children play.

Extended play:

In extended play, the preschool teacher supports play by playing along with the children.

Guided play:

In guided play, the preschool teacher initiates, participates and directs the play through discussions and agreement with the children, but is careful not to disrupt the form of play (its voluntary nature, imagination, challenge, experimentation, creativity, dynamic nature).
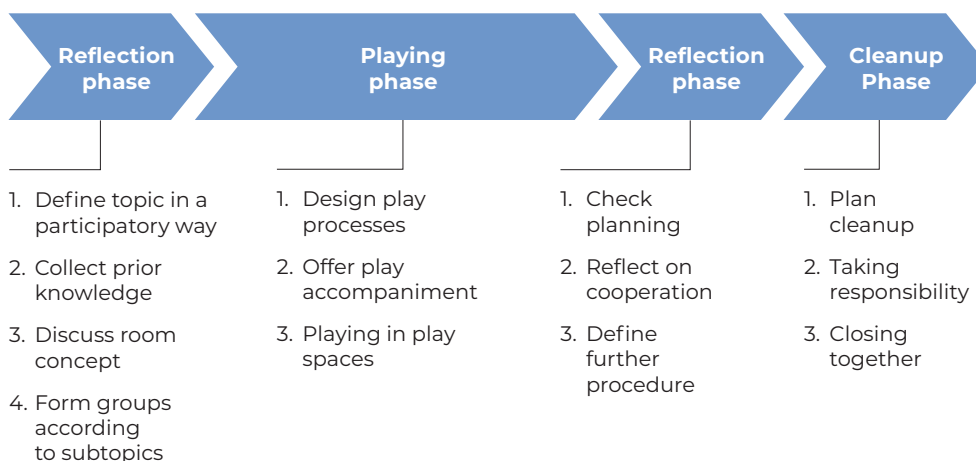
In free play, children have the freedom to decide what they play, with whom they want to play and where they play (Unicef, 2023), whereas in open play the environment is prepared through the teacher which can be helpful to give structure and inspiration through room design and material or specified play areas. A combination of free and open play can be reached if children are given the chance to create and design new ideas as a complement to the prepared learning environment set by the teacher. A fundamental question for teachers is how children learn: for children, play and learning belong together, whereas for some adults, play and learning are mutually exclusive. Guided play combines the benefits of self-directed play with the positive effects of restrained but purposeful instruction to promote cognitive, academic and socio-emotional skills through play. Adults can support children by providing a 'scaffold', but still letting the children implement their own ideas (Toub, Rajan, Golinkoff & Hirsh-Pasek, 2016).

As a teacher, it is helpful to be able to use differently guided forms of play and understand their potential for learning:

7.2.1 Example of collaboratively designed play

The example in this chapter shows how the potential of both sides (teacher and children) can be exploited. The implementation in four phases has been tested several times in practice within the Swiss "play plus" project and has proven to be helpful for children and teachers alike (Lieger, 2021) as it takes into consideration high heterogeneity of developmental learning in the classroom. The openness of the structure allows appropriate play and learning experiences for all children with different needs and interests:

Video 6:
Fortress
See Chapter 7.5

Reflection phase	Playing phase	Reflection phase	Cleanup Phase
1. Define topic in a participatory way	1. Design play processes	1. Check planning	1. Plan cleanup
2. Collect prior knowledge	2. Offer play accompaniment	2. Reflect on cooperation	2. Taking responsibility
3. Discuss room concept	3. Playing in play spaces	3. Define further procedure	3. Closing together
4. Form groups according to subtopics			

Figure 3   **Structure of collaboratively designed play** (Lieger, 2021)

The following is a practical example
(Bürki, Siggelkow, Geiger & Lieger, 2023).

It's summertime and some children are thinking about inventing their own tastes of ice cream and opening an ice cream shop. The teacher takes up this idea and initiates a collaboratively designed play project. The teacher has thought about ways to guide the children but plans the play in a way that lets the children actively participate and contribute.

In the first phase (the start-up phase), the teacher asks about previous knowledge and offers suggestions and structural support. What do we need to build up an ice cream stand? Children give their ideas and the teacher provides support with appropriate vocabulary and suggestions for appropriate materials such as a table, construction blocks, recycling material and chiffon cloths (for example):
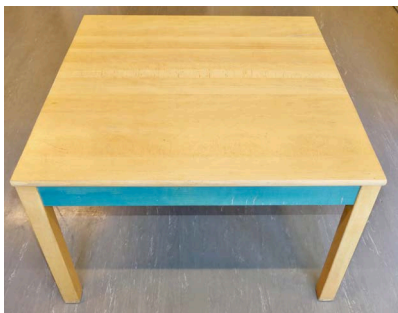
Examples of play materials (Bürki, 2022)

The children's ideas and common thoughts can be visualised on a poster. Additionally, the group discusses the room concept: where can we play best and how will the materials help us? Maybe there will be one group which makes the scoops of ice cream while another group will focus on the construction of the ice cream machine and a third group will build and decorate the table for an ice cream stand.

Teachers should keep instructions as short and clear as possible, show pictures and material to support the language and focus on the most important facts.

The start-up phase then flows smoothly into the play phase. The play process is very dynamic and so many different forms of play become visible. It is also possible to change within groups, for example when one child or group has nothing more to do, and other children still need help. Within the play, new open tasks can always arise. Teachers observe the play process attentively and support the children in finding new exciting tasks within their play activity. It is important to observe which children need additional structure and support. Where does independent play work well and where do children need more guidance? The teachers give low-threshold impulses and suggestions so that the children are cognitively stimulated, and the flow of play is maintained. In this way, didactic considerations also flow into the play. An ice cream stand in a semi-guided play project might look like this:

Play project "ice cream" (Siggelkow, 2021)

During play, the teacher plans short reflection phases. Thinking aloud and reflecting together is an important success factor in play projects. Short reflection periods can be planned before, during and after. The teacher can, for example, check the plan on the poster based on the start-up phase: Do we have an ice cream machine as planned? Which flavours of ice cream do we have in our assortment? Are there any flavours missing?

The children support each other with ideas and insights (peer learning). Elementary school teachers encourage the children to think further, for example, by asking where the opening hours can be seen, or by making the stability of building a house a topic. This can happen playfully and incidentally by playing along or consciously in the group. In the process, the interim status is discussed and insights are exchanged. The documentation of ideas from the start-up phase serves as a support and reminder throughout the entire play project.

Reflect on cooperation: what works well in interaction and where do solutions still need to be found? The promotion of collaborative learning is crucial for a good learning climate in play. Elementary teachers can support this by mediating between the children and letting the interaction flow into joint reflection.

Video 7:
Family
See Chapter 7.5

The last phase, the clean-up phase, can be scheduled before or after a final reflection phase. The teacher gives structure and helps the children with the organisation. By making sure that the materials and props are stored in places that are clearly visible to the children, tidying up is made easier for everyone. When tidying up, the children should take responsibility for the agreed materials and areas. Everyone helps. Anyone who finishes with their tidying should support other children or ask the elementary teachers where help is still needed.

The teacher plans a short close to the play session. If play is meant to continue into the afternoon or on another day, everything will be nicely prepared so that it invites the children to continue playing. Agreements or important findings are documented as a reminder and photos are taken before putting everything away. If there is not enough space, simple organisational systems such as boxes labelled according to subject areas and photo instructions for later reassembly are suitable. Experiences and ideas that children gain in collaboratively designed play projects can enrich and complement their future free and open play.

Task:

1. This collaborative play project involves different types of play forms. Go through all the different types of play in Chapter 7.1 and think of practical examples and competences.

2. Choose another topic children could be interested in. Can you make a connection to the curriculum? Which academical, socio-emotional and cognitive skills can be developed? Which materials could be used?

3. Plan the chosen topic along the four phases of play.

7.2.2 Examples for learning through games

The development of different kinds of skills in young children can be very individual and diverse. Different levels of cognitive skills might be visible in a group of children. The following part of the manual will look into areas in which difficulties occur and suggestions for solving them for children in kindergarten and in lower primary school focusing on the area of cognitive skills.

Play activity for cognitive development – 'Counter in a circle'

An active mathematical game for children in early childhood, which in a given circle has small balls of different colours and with different numbers. Below the circle there are numbers from 1 to 10. Each number from the bottom bar is stuck to the appropriate place in the circle. The game is also intended for children with special educational needs, but with prior cutting of the numbers made by the teacher.
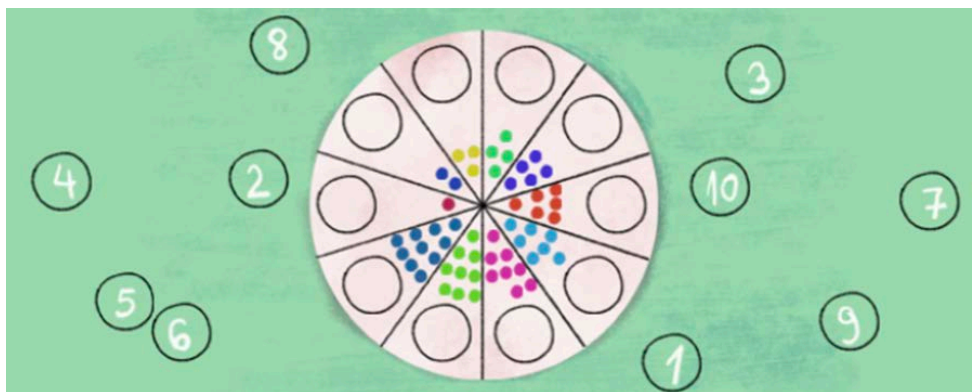
Picture from students of Faculty of Philosophy, Institute of Pedagogy, Skopje.

→ **Prior preparation for activity**

Print out the given teaching sheet and discuss with the students the numbers from 1 to 10 and start counting up to 10 and back.

→ **Game instructions/guidelines**

After handing out the printed teaching sheet, explain that the numbers that are in circles at the bottom of the sheet should be cut out and pasted in the appropriate place in the circle.

Materials needed:	white A4 sheets
Forms of work:	individual
Participants in the activity:	educator
Location:	study room (entertainment)
Preparation time:	5 minutes
Implementation time:	30 minutes
Age/development period:	4–6 years
Character values:	patience, attentiveness, perseverance, joy, concentration, self-control, patience, curiosity
Objectives:	→ to enable children to recognise numbers from 1 to 10; → to be able to determine the value of each number from 1 to 10; → to recognise colours.
Results:	→ the child already recognises numbers from 1 to 10; → knows how to determine the value of each number from 1 to 10; → recognises colours.

Play activity – "Snowman says, snowman says…"

This game activity is an enticing game that occupies the full attention of the children. The implementation activity (learning through play) can be adapted with students with special educational needs. Instead of the children, only the teacher appears in the role of snowman, who draws cards. Materials needed: hat, small pictures of the parts of a snowman: hat, gloves, scarf, eyes, nose, etc. Form of work: group.

Picture from students of Faculty of Philosophy, Institute of Pedagogy, Skopje.

→ **Prior preparation for activity**

The game cards are printed, coloured in and cut out.

→ **Play instructions/guidelines**

Variant 1

The cut cards are placed in the hat and the player chosen to be the snowman draws one card each.
They then tell the rest of the class out loud: "Snowman says, snowman says…" and reads the card.
The other players should do what the snowman tells them.

Variant 2

The children are arranged in a circle.
First, the teacher takes out a card from the snowman's hat, and says: "Snowman says, snowman says…" and reads the card.
The children should do what the teacher says, e.g. "Touch your hat", "Tap your gloves", "Touch your buttons", "Touch your hands", "Move your scarf", "Touch your nose", etc.
Then the children choose who will be the snowman.

Materials needed:	hat, small pictures of the parts of a snowman: hat, gloves, scarf, eyes, nose, etc.
Forms of work:	group
Participants in the activity:	educator
Location:	study room (entertainment)
Preparation time:	5–10 minutes
Implementation time:	20–25 minutes
Age/development period:	4–6 years
Character values:	patience, perseverance, joy
Objectives:	→ to develop the focus of auditory attention; → to encourage the development of the ability → to understand the rules of behaviour in games; → to develop the ability → to listen, understand and experience the language.
Results:	→ the child can focus listening attention; → play in a group game; → can respond appropriately to verbal instructions.

Play activity – "Bingo"

This activity improves motivation and brings fun to the participants. The activity supports the child in acquiring the skill of perseverance during the processes of learning and discovery.
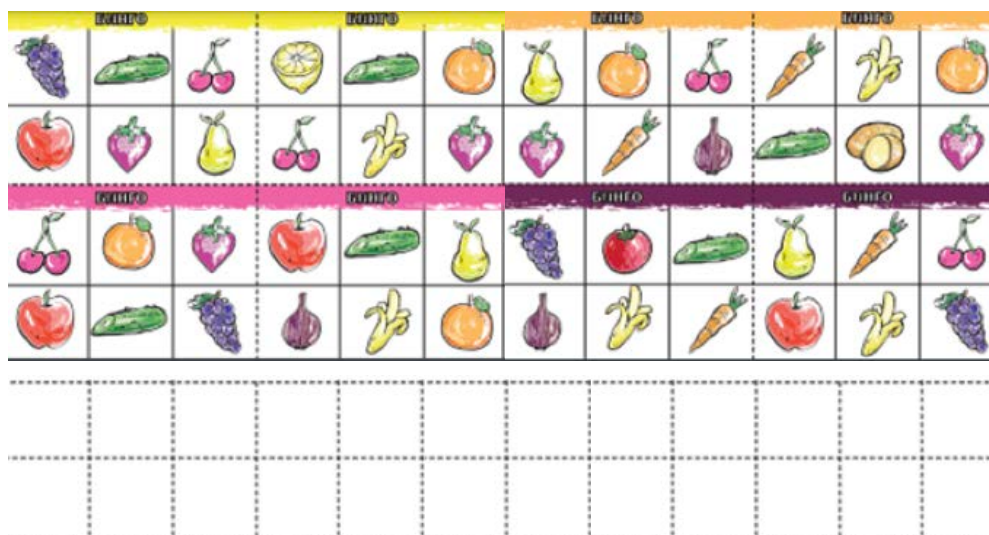
Pictures from students of Faculty of Philosophy, Institute of Pedagogy, Skopje.

→ **Prior preparation for activity**

Flash cards, cutting 24 bingo cards and cutting white squares for covering.

→ **Play instructions/guidelines**

Each child draws one bingo card. The moderator pulls a large flash card and together they name the fruit or vegetable; each child who has the corresponding named fruit or vegetable on their card should cover it with one of the white squares, calling "Bingo" when they have covered all of them.

→ **Play activity**

The way the game is played is explained to the children, and they can choose one card on which there are 6 pictures of fruits or vegetables (in 6 squares). After all the children have drawn one card, the game begins with the moderator drawing a large flash card. While this is going on, the children are encouraged to guess and name the fruit or vegetable, then each child who has it on their bingo card has to cover it with a white square The first child who manages to cover all the on their card calls "Bingo". The game can be repeated several times with child who won the previous round acting as the next moderator drawing the flash cards. After each new game, the children should exchange their cards with each other.

Materials needed:	scissors, glue, paper, pencil/crayon
Forms of work:	group
Participants in the activity:	educator
Location:	study room (entertainment)
Preparation time:	15 minutes
Implementation time:	20 minutes
Age/development period:	4–6 years
Character values:	perseverance
Objectives:	→ to support the child in persistence during the learning and discovery processes; → to support the child in adopting the correct behaviour in the group
Results:	→ the child completes the started activity to the end; → the child respects the rules of behaviour in the group.

Task:

1. Think of two other games with rules you know. Which skills do they require – as a child – to be able to play the game?

2. How can you support children who do not yet have all the skills to play the game without help?

7.2.3 Checklist for children in an integrated programme (IP)

1. Difficulty getting the student interested

→ explain to the student why it is important;

→ give specific examples, illustrated drawings, slides;

→ seat the student close to the teacher;

→ connect the lecture with examples from life;

→ (depending on the topic) ask the students to find similar examples from their environment, family

2. Start of work

→ introduce some standard characters at the beginning of each lesson;

→ divide the topic into smaller units;

→ before proceeding to the next topic, check how much the students have understood, ask them to say what they think;

→ make a sequence of activities and write them on the board;

→ (for children with developmental disabilities) choose a peer who will help, but a it look like they are working together.

3. Problems maintaining attention while the teacher is speaking

→ stick to short, clear explanations;

→ provide a written, drawn or pictorial illustration for the oral presentation;

→ use a pre-arranged sign to attract attention (for example: gesture, look, tap on the shoulder, etc.);

→ look at the students, but also notice if the students are looking at you;

→ ask the students to check the most important information;

→ (depending on age) organise the time of the lesson (for small children as well as students with intellectual disabilities of attention deficit, attention can be limited to as little as 5-10 minutes).

4. Problem with understanding the work instructions

→ give short, clear instructions;

→ repeat the instructions as many times as necessary;

→ ask the students to repeat the instruction orally and practically.

5. Difficulty following written text

→ mark the selected text;

→ mark with numbers the passages that you consider important;

→ remove unnecessary things from the surroundings.

6. The student has a problem completing the work on time

→ give him more time;

→ give him fewer tasks;

→ praise the student if he completed the task in a quick time.

7. Student has a problem with oral expression

→ accept alternative forms of response (drawing, picture, etc.);

→ gradually go through alternative answers directly with the child to provide short oral explanations.

▶

Video 8:
Football
See Chapter 7.5

8. Difficulties in group work

→ determine a task for each student as precisely as possible;

→ assign specific tasks;

→ define the phases of work;

→ occasionally give the leading role in the group to the child with IP (if possible);

→ group work can be practiced at home if the child with IP has a brother, sister or a close relative of similar age.

9. Memory problems

→ ask the students to make a reminder;

→ involve the parents to check the children's responsibilities (not to take over their roles but to help them become independent);

→ show the student how to determine important skills in the play activities. That way you will make memorisation easier by eliminating the important from the unimportant.

Task:

Think of a child in your personal circle or a child from class. Go through the checklist of supports and think about what aspects might be helpful for the child you have chosen and why.

7.3 FACE teaching and learning materials

The aim of FACE (Families and Children in Education) teaching and learning materials is to develop life skills and self-competences in students aged 4 to 12 years and making their pre-existing competences visible. There are 7 booklets (FACE 1, FACE 2, FACE 3, Games, Crafting, Photography and a teacher's booklet) in 6 languages (English, Albanian, Arabic, Macedonian, Romanian, Serbian and Hungarian).

FACE involves the parents in different tasks and helps to develop better communication between schools and parents. For children in pre-school and lower primary, FACE 1 and 2 offer a wide range of playful tasks to develop their life skills:

The materials contain a wealth of ideas for teachers on how to activate the students in class by using different teaching methods, such as task-based and cooperative learning. The tasks help teachers get to know their pupils better and from a new point of view because they involve reflection about themselves, their family and friends, their skills and feelings.

Playing games is an important part of the FACE programme because they help to develop self-awareness, social competences, group cooperation and physical well-being. In school, games not only function as gap-fillers between teaching sequences, but are used for both opening and closing a lesson. Some of the games can be used for both occasions as they work on a middle level of activation. The games presented

in FACE offer support group cooperation, partner co-operation, getting to know each other, self-awareness and physical abilities. Games are marked with a rabbit icon when they activate students, and with a snail icon when they help calm them down.[1]

Each booklet has the same structure and revolves around the same topics. As children grow older, the topics can be treated more in depth. Topic 5 is always a family task.

The table of contents of FACE 2, for example, is as follows:

→	1 About me
→	2 My feelings
→	3 What I can do
→	4 Me and my friends
→	5 My family
→	6 We celebrate together
→	7 What I have learned – what we have learned

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1   https://ipe-textbooks.phzh.ch/globalassets/ipe-textbooks.phzh.ch/english/games_en.pdf

As mentioned, play plays an important role in FACE. Here are a few examples:

FACE 1 starts with the Topic 1 "This is me". Children are encouraged to present themselves and also to get to know the others in their class. Task 2 explores (in a playful way) the fact that different people like different things, here exemplified by the choice of different animals:

1 – TASK 2
I LIKE ANIMALS

STEPS

1. The children sit on their chairs. The teacher asks "who likes cats and kittens?" The children raise their arms. The teacher finds other examples (dogs, elephants, tigers, whales, dolphins, horses etc.).

2. Introduce the worksheet: "What animals do Anca and Catalin like?" The children describe and name the animals.

3. The children colour the ones they like and work on their own.

4. When the children have finished they come into a circle with their sheets. The teacher asks: "Who likes…?" The children who coloured in this animal raise their hands. The teacher asks a few of these questions.

45'

The task:
You tell others what you like. You understand that everybody is different.

How you work:
With the whole group, alone

Material:
- worksheet → page 13
- coloured pencils

- **GREETING GAME** → page 10

- **WHO SITS NEXT TO ME?** → page 10

- **MAMA AND KITTENS**
One child is the mama cat and waits in the corner of the classroom. In the other corner the children (or the teacher) appoint(s) one child to be the kitten. All children move like cats through the room. Every now and again the kitten says "meow". The mama has to find the kitten. She tells when she has found it. Then another child can be the mama.

- **SQUEAK PIGGY SQUEAK**
The children sit in a circle again. The teacher chooses one child to be the "farmer". All the other children are the "piggies". The farmer is blindfolded and stands in the middle. Then the farmer is spun around three times and walks blindly outwards. The farmer sits on the lap of a piggy and says "Squeak piggy squeak!" When the piggy squeaks, the farmer has to guess the name of the child. If the farmer guesses correctly, the piggy becomes the farmer in the next round. If not, the farmer is spun around again and sits on another piggy's lap.

I like animals
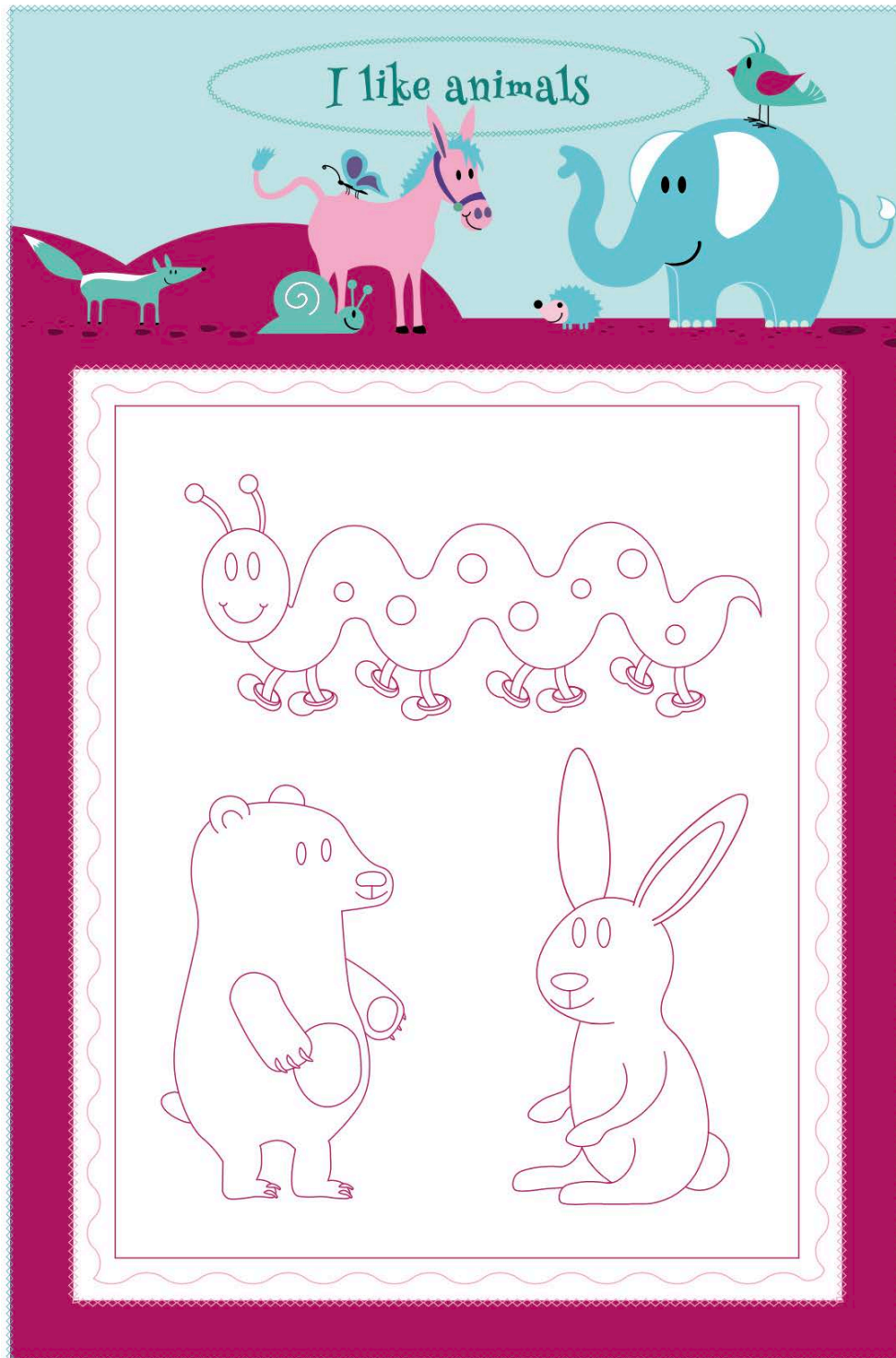
The task is also introduced by and ends with a game involving animals.

The second example is drawn from FACE 2, Topic 1, "About me" which again encourages self-reflection and the awareness of the differences and similarities between people. Starting with the drawing of a self-portrait to the contemplation of your fingerprints, the topic closes with Task

5 – the family task – in which the handprint of another family member is taken. The activity gives an idea of play involving the body, in this case the hands. The activity can be done with colours on paper, but also outside on the playground in the forest or other outside areas. Making handprints in the sand or the earth, in groups, or with family members. Not only can hands be used, but they can also be replaced by feet, arms, the whole body. In the group, children make patterns, circles, lines, trails, etc.

1 – Home Task 5
Whose hand is it?

The task:

Make a handprint of one of your family members and bring it to school.

How you work:

Together with your family

Material:

- paper
- paint

Steps:

1. Find a member of your family.

2. Take a handprint of this person. Colour the hand with paint and print it on a blank paper. If you don't have paint, you can trace the hand with a coloured pencil and colour it in.

3. Let it dry and do not forget to put it in your schoolbag!

There is a collection of games in FACE which helps teachers introduce and close a task in a playful way. Most games involve the different senses and promote cooperation between the children.

The two following games are drawn from this booklet. As we have mentioned before, there are activating games such as "Robots and mechanics", which involves a lot of sound and movement. This kind of game is suited as an icebreaker or as a change from sitting at the desk. For the calming game "Car wash", no talking is allowed and only limited movement is involved. Clear rules are set on what is allowed as a brushing movement. Children usually enjoy this game a lot, and it is a fun way to close a lesson. All the games in the booklet are cooperative games, meaning that the focus is on doing something together rather than competing against each other. Of course, this is in line with the idea of life skills education which emphasises those skills that support peaceful coexistence in class and outside.

Robots and mechanics

The teacher divides the class into many robots and only a few mechanics (e.g. 15 robots and 5 mechanics). The robots can only march straight ahead. When they hit an obstacle, they start to beep. Then the mechanics have to turn them around so they can march again. It is the mechanics' task to keep all robots moving and none beeping.
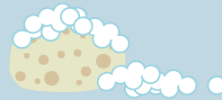
Car wash

This game is played without talking, very quietly. The class lines up, shoulder to shoulder. The child at the end of the line is the "car" that needs to be cleaned. She moves down the line with the back to the line. The other children are the brushes. They massage, stroke, pat etc. the back of the child. Hitting, tickling or any violent movements are not allowed. When the other end is reached, the "car" is clean and it is the next child's turn.

7.4 Teaching and learning materials for personal development

Personal development materials are available for Grades 1–12. They are based on the 10 life skills as defined by the WHO, but grouped into the following broader categories:

→ **Cognitive skills** such as problem-solving skills, creative thinking skills, critical thinking skills and meta-cognitive skills;

→ **Social skills** such as communication and cooperation skills, interpersonal skills, relationship skills and empathy;

→ **Self-awareness skills** such as self-responsibility, decision-making skills and self-reflection skills;

→ **Emotion-regulating skills** such as dealing with emotions, dealing with stress and conflict-solving skills.

Personal development and life skills education is embedded in all school subjects and is always connected to learning content that is relevant to the individual at his or her current stage of development. The content and tasks in the personal development programme are targeted at different age groups and grades. Throughout the curriculum of compulsory schooling, teaching life skills becomes more and more complex, following similar topics each year and focussing on the same skills throughout the entire time at school. Life skills education is built up progressively from an early age, starting at kindergarten or primary school lasting until the end of compulsory education (Introduction to A Teacher's Guide to Personal Development for Grade 1).[2]

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2   https://ipe-textbooks.phzh.ch/globalassets/ipe-textbooks.phzh.ch/english/personal-development-english/personal_development_grade_1_en_v2_web.pdf

Each booklet is structured in the same way and is divided into 5 modules, as shown below:

Module 1
"Self-knowledge and knowledge of others" emphasises self-knowledge and self-esteem, exploration and self-evaluation of personal resources, family as a value, responsibilities, gender roles, stereotypes, assertive, non-conflictual and non-violent communication, volunteering, etc.

Module 2
"Ensuring quality of life" emphasises integrity, efficient resource management, responsibility for sustainable development, effective self-management, etc.

Module 3
"Healthy lifestyles" guides students on issues related to physical and emotional health, healthy nutrition, counteracting vices such as drugs, alcohol and smoking, gender influences, etc.

Module 4
"Designing personal careers and developing entrepreneurial mindsets" focuses on understanding career prospects from a labour market perspective, career planning and career decision making, entrepreneurship as a career option, etc.

Module 5
"Personal safety" equips students with the attitudes and behaviours necessary to ensure their own safety and the safety of others.

Figure 4   **Modules in Personal Development** www.ipe-textbooks.phzh.ch

The following task is drawn from the guide for Grade 1 and belongs to Module 2 "Ensuring quality of life":

TASK 5
LET´S MAKE PEACE

Goal

The students reflect on conflicts and discuss why arguments occur. They develop a sense for solving them.

Time needed

45 minutes

Social settings

- Individual work
- Pair work
- Plenary session

Preparation

Worksheet; A4-sheets; Scissors (if worksheets cannot be copied for all students); 4 – 5 sets of pictures

Module 2

Ensuring quality of life

LESSON DESCRIPTION

1. Activating game "Sculptor and Sculptress": One child is the raw marble block that has to be formed. He or she stands without moving. The other child is the "sculptor". The first step is to create the sculpture first by touching the child and adjusting her into the desired position by moving his or her body. Then the children change roles.
2. The teacher introduces the worksheet (or shows the pictures) and explains that there is a story of a fight but it is not in the correct order. The children work alone and cut the pictures and put them in the correct order. When the worksheet cannot be copied, the children sort the pictures into groups of four.
3. The teacher checks the work. The children can then stick the pictures onto a sheet of paper.
4. Questions the teacher could ask in a follow-up discussion:
   - How does Anca feel?
   - How does Catalin feel?
   - Why is Anca angry?
   - Why is Catalin angry?
5. Role play: In pairs, the children play the short scene with a different solution at the end.
6. Some children volunteer to play the scene in front of the class.
7. Calming game "Back writing" (see task 3).

The ludic element is very prominent and is used to support the purpose of the task.

The lesson is introduced by an activating game, in which children have to cooperate and adjust to each other. The topic of sculpting introduces the formative aspect of conflicts, which are an integral part of life and must be resolved in order to make peaceful coexistence possible. The starting point is a picture story about a conflict. After arranging the pictures in the correct order, children discuss the situation with the help of the teacher. The recreation of the scene in a role play helps the pupils experience in a playful way how resolving a conflict could work. The lesson ends again with a cooperative game, in which children have to guess what is written on their backs – a guessing game in which the players have to be attentive and can be creative.

MATERIALS FOR THE STUDENTS

On blackboard/projector/worksheet
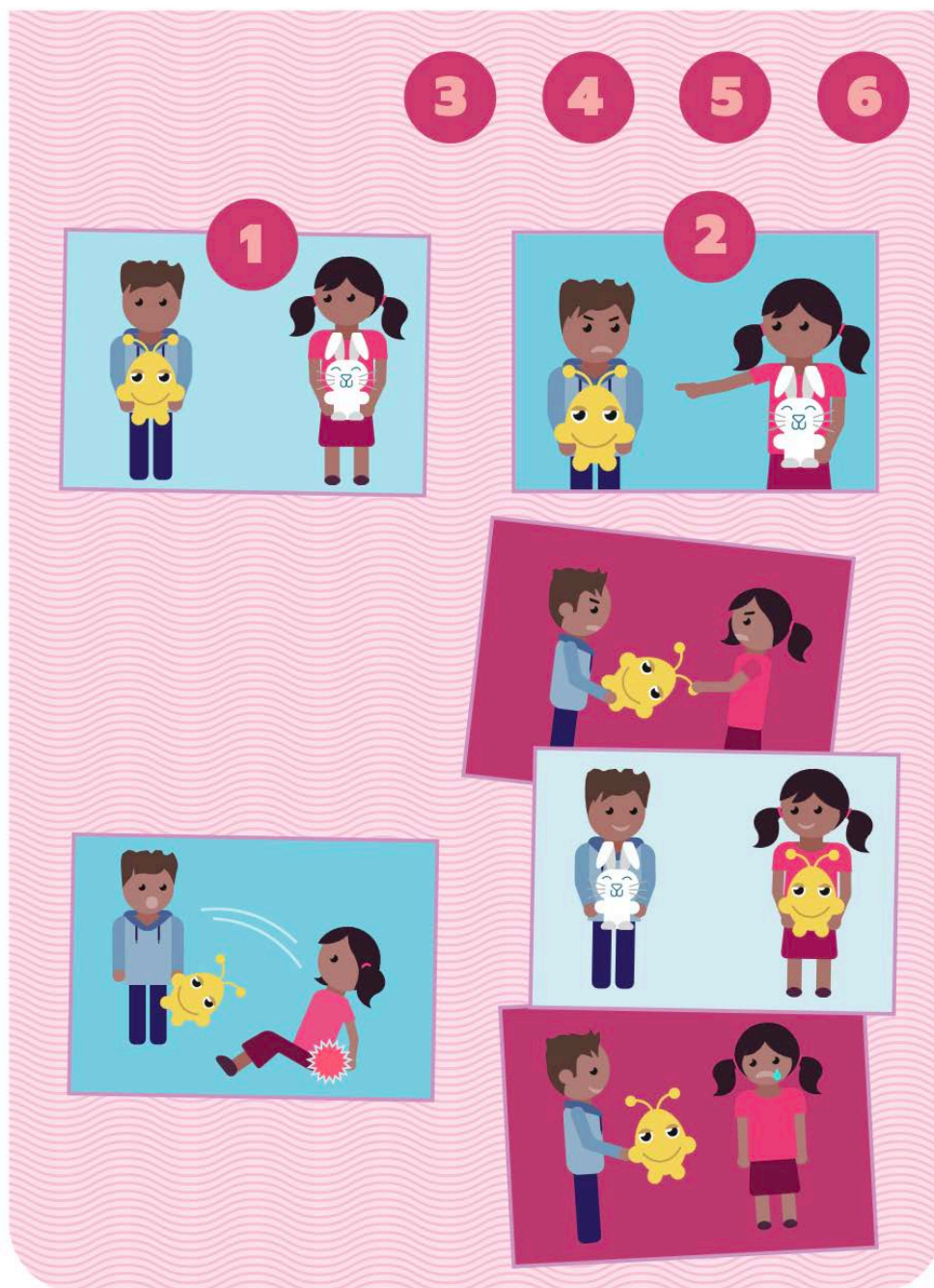
7.5 Videos

▶ **Video 1:**

Rain

Guided play and play with rules

A traditional game in which the kindergarten teacher organizes the game and gives instructions, the children are focused on each other and take care of the rules of the game. Each child pays attention when it is their turn to repeat a movement or a sound, this contributes to the shared enjoyment of the play. Coordinated movements and sounds contribute to the pleasure of all participants.

https://youtu.be/g-s2vCtcC-8

▶ **Video 2:**

Children in Motion

Experts often refer to functional play as "first play", since it characterizes how young children first begin to explore all the things around them and their functions. Children learn that they have control over their bodies and objects, and they can act upon those objects. They jump in puddles, experiment with water or dance creatively.

https://www.spielenplus.ch/english#Children-in-Motion

Djeca u kretanju

https://www.spielenplus.ch/bosn-serb-kroat#Kinder-in-Bewegung

▶ **Video 3:**

Seeing the World through a Child's Eyes

Symbolic play involves the use of symbols to represent real-life situations or objects. Children learn to use their imagination and creativity to create new scenarios and ideas. For example, a cardboard box can be used as a car, or a wooden stick can represent a phone.

https://www.spielenplus.ch/english#Seeing-the-World-with-Children-s-Eyes

Vidjeti svijet sa dečijim očima

https://www.spielenplus.ch/bosn-serb-kroat#Die-Welt-mit-Kinderaugen-sehen

▶ **Video 4:**

Circus Play Project

Role play involves children taking on different roles and acting out scenarios. For example, pretending to be a parent or a super-hero. Children learn to understand different perspectives and develop empathy for others. They also develop social skills such as communication, cooperation and problem-solving.

https://www.spielenplus.ch/english#Circus-Play-Project

Projekt igrati se Cirkusa

https://www.spielenplus.ch/bosn-serb-kroat#Spielprojekt-Zirkus

▶ **Video 5:**

Children Plan and Build

In constructive play, children use objects to create something new. For example, building with blocks or drawing a picture. Children learn to plan and organise their ideas, develop fine motor skills and gain knowledge through experimentation.

https://www.spielenplus.ch/english#Kinder-planen-und-konstru-ieren

Djeca planiraju i grade

https://www.spielenplus.ch/bosn-serb-kroat#Kinder-planen-und-konstruieren

▶ **Video 6:**

Fortress

Open play, extended play and construction play

As part of this game, children need to agree on the necessary materials for building a fortress, building and creating from various materials, proposing ideas for the continuation of construction, providing solutions to construction problems, asking questions, questioning certain proposals and solutions, giving feedback on given solutions, giving instructions to others, agreeing on the rules during play, as well as disagreeing and discussing. The role of the kindergarten teacher is to expand and enrich the play with ideas and materials.

https://youtu.be/Jbjr1J44Iy0

▶ **Video 7:**

Family

Open play and roleplay

The open symbolic play of the family shows how the children easily pass from one to another imagined situation of gender roles in the family and introduce new elements that play out in their own way. The children showed that within the family there is a supportive behaviour of the adult members between themselves and according to the child. Children independently agree on the division of roles and conducting the conversation, listening carefully to the interlocutor. Following the theme in the play process itself, self-regulation in behaviour and harmony in the accepted roles are noticeable.

https://youtu.be/c7CI4IOi8BY

▶ **Video 8:**

Football

Open play and play with rules

Children playing freely in the open space (kindergarten yard) reflects their spontaneity in organised play. They take care of each other and respect each other while playing – inclusion in the play, everyone is a playmate (co-player). Despite the limited movement of the child with a physical disability, children organise and build play quite freely. The conversation is in two languages (Serbian and Russian). A high degree of tolerance and involvement of all children is visible in this play.

https://youtu.be/5xZ3nAeiO_M

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CHAPTER 8
The importance of families for play and life skills

Svetlana Lazić
Wiltrud Weidinger

Introduction

In all societies, families fulfil some basic functions: among other things, they ensure the survival of the children to maturity and provide how children can acquire skills to develop economic productivity. Families teach the children the basic values of their culture. How well a family can live up to its basic functions in the upbringing of children, depends on many factors, including in particular the family dynamics, i.e. the way in which the family works as a whole.
Play in this respect is one of the crucial factors that can be influenced by families and make a difference in the socialisation of children. Not only is play and its various forms of play embedded in a constant dialogue between caregivers and children but also provides multiple opportunities to acquire, train and further develop transversal competencies and life skills of children. Play connects people, and interpersonal relationships are built through playing. These are learned from the immediate environment, at first in the family and in a neighbourhood, as well as through relatives, etc. Children's play reflects the child's life, their family relationships, culture, social and economic values. Due to the specificity of play, play can be connected to different areas of family functioning and the realisation of their roles, such as the function of leisure, education and emotions.

In this chapter, special emphasis is placed on a holistic view of the family and its different forms, on presenting and understanding family-related factors that influence the child's development. The role of adult caregivers in the development of children is discussed in the light of socialization processes. Challenges faced by families today will be addressed and the question how play can influence the development of children in families is discussed. Ideas for improving the daily life of the family are given and some hints for teachers how to relate to families and raise awareness for play are highlighted.

8.1 Modern families / challenges for contemporary families

Todays' family is characterised by the features of modern, contemporary society and social values. The roles of the contemporary family are realised through and identified by the following contemporary functions (Velišek-Braško, 2015): a reproductive function; an emotional function; an economical function; a function of providing protection; an educational function; a leisure function.

The family is one of the oldest and most complex, permanent social groups. It has undergone a number of changes related to historical periods and the place of origin with regard to civilizations, values and contexts. It is characterised by different internal functions and relations, which are diverse and form a climate widely referred to as 'family relations'. The harmony of family relations and the upbringing of children in the family have also experienced change in accordance with the prevailing social values and culture at specific times.

In comparison to some decades ago, families and their structure have changed as a result of societal challenges, phenomena such as migration, digitalization and specific regional or personal challenges (e.g. poverty, climate challenges, economic stress, illness within the family, death etc.).

Depending on the cultural context, children may increasingly be part of blended families, with stepbrothers, stepsisters who move in and out of their lives. The "core" or "small" family that was recognised in Europe as consisting of one mother, one father and two children (e.g. sister and brother) no longer is the prevailing form of a family. Even before, families existed as a form of 'cooperative' in which each member of the family (a cooperative member) had their own responsibilities in order to maintain the farm. A working upbringing was dominant, and the emotional function of the family – especially in the relationship between parents and their children – was completely neglected, because it was assumed that the child was loved, but this was not said out loud due to the low level of health care and high infant and child mortality rates that resulted in low survival rates.

In some cultures, children are still more likely to grow up in extended families (Woolfolk, 2010, 68). Childcare and economic support often are shared among family members. And, play happens within this bigger context, across generations, across ages and across genders.

In the following text about families and play all forms of families are meant and included: single-parent families, blended/patchwork families, extended families, same-gender families, nuclear/traditional families, stepfamilies and grandparent-families. We use the term "parents" for easy reading. However, all caregivers responsible for children are also addressed.

8.1.1 Socialization in families

Socialization is the process by which children learn the values, norms, acquire skills, knowledge and behaviours, who are responsible for their present and future role in their respective culture. Parents contribute to development of their children through socialization processes in the following roles (Parke & Buriel 2006):

→ **Parents as direct teachers:** Parents can give their children access to teach skills, rules and strategies directly and they explicitly talk about various matters inform or advise them on it.

→ **Parents as indirect socializers:** Parents socialize their children indirectly through their own behaviour towards their children. In everyday life parents act as role models to their children and convey information and rules. They also serve as a model for attitudes and behaviours towards others.

→ **Parents as social managers:** Parents shape the experiences and the social life of their children, including the confrontation with different people, activities, and information. This managerial role is particularly noteworthy while the children are still small.

These are crucial roles in the development of a child, but every family is different in their family dynamics, their division of roles and in their chosen parenting style (Siegler et al. 2016, 444).
Parenting styles can be differentiated according to Diane Baumrind (1991/1996) into four main types (Woolfolk 2010, 68).

→ **Authoritative parents** (high warmth, high control): They set clear limits, enforce rules, and expect mature behaviour. They are warm with their children. They listen to concerns, give reasons for rules, and allow more democratic decision-making. There is less strict punishment and more guidance. Parents also help children think through the consequences of their actions.

→ **Authoritarian parents** (low warmth, high control): They seem cold and controlling in their interactions with their children. The children are expected to be mature and to do what the parent says. There is not much talk about emotions. Punishments are strict but not abusive. The parents love their children, but they are not openly affectionate.

→ **Permissive parents** (high warmth, low control): They are warm and nurturing, but they have few rules or consequences for their children and little in the way of mature behaviour because "they are just kids".

→ **Rejecting/Neglecting/Uninvolved parents** (low warmth, low control): They don't seem to care at all and can't be bothered with controlling, communicating, or teaching their children.

Since the family most often consists of a fixed number of permanent members who lead a daily life (with all the challenges and obstacles associated with it), the experience of coexistence provided by this family unit is unparalleled. For children, the feeling of love that connects them with their parents or legal guardians is irreplaceable, and the love for their parents and the desire to imitate them – for the child to become like them as quickly as possible – is a natural mechanism that helps the child to start accepting the social and moral rules of life before being able to grasp them fully and understand them. The feeling of security and protection – so essential for a child to develop into a healthy and secure person – will allow the child to feel loved and to understand that they are being cared for with quality and care, which will avoid the feeling of fear of losing security, i.e. will prevent the child from developing a hostile attitude towards the environment, aggressiveness and withdrawal (Porodica, 2003). By getting to know the relationships between people in the family, children develop their emotions. If they grow up in a family with harmonious emotional and social relationships where there is mutual love and camaraderie between the parents, children will most likely develop into personalities with an abundance of positive determinations who are independent of others' continuous help and have confidence in themselves. On the other hand, excessive strictness (i.e. conflicts and disagreements in the family, or a history of domestic violence) will lead to insufficient love being shown towards the child, who will then feel unloved, and could, potentially, be the cause for domestic violence, which in combination can create a general feeling of mistrust towards people. This in turn can cause insecurity, withdrawal, aggressiveness etc.. We should emphasise that excessive care will not have a positive effect on the child's development either, because it can prevent the child from developing an independent and self-confident personality.

8.1.2 Play in families

When looking at play times within families it becomes visible that the changed form of families (in the European context) also influences the play behaviour of children or play as a family task. According to the Center of the Developing Child of the Harvard University: "The science of child development points to three core principles that can guide what society needs to do to help children and families thrive. These include:

1.	***Supporting responsive relationships***
2.	***Strengthening core life skills***
3.	***Reducing sources of stress***

Play in early childhood is an effective way of supporting all three of these principles." (Center of the Developing Child, 2022). The following paragraphs highlight the strong interplay between family environment and development of children (physical and mental health) (ibid.)

Scientists have made significant findings regarding the impact of early-life experiences and the surrounding environments on children. These factors not only influence the formation of their brain structure but also play a crucial role in determining how and when their genetic instructions manifest across various biological systems. Essentially, the interpersonal connections that young children establish with adult caregivers, both within and outside their families, have a profound influence that extends "beneath the surface" and affects their lifelong learning, behaviour, as well as their physical and mental health, either positively or negatively.

Throughout an individual's life, their capacity to flourish is heavily influenced by their relationships, life experiences, and interactions within their physical and constructed surroundings. This includes factors such as access to nutritious food and exposure to drugs or other harmful chemicals. The extent to which these environments promote health, offer support, and respond to individuals' needs has a direct impact on prenatal development, the well-being of children, and the overall quality of family life.

The core skills that are addressed here include executive functioning and self-regulation skills to filter distractions, prioritize tasks, remember rules and goals and control impulses. All these skills are essential for learning and development. And, they can be integrated in simple play situations, with or without toys. Basically, it is a kind of "scaffolding" – in an age- and context-appropriate way, that caregivers provide. This gives children the opportunity to develop these skills by following routines, developing social behaviour, and creating and maintaining relationships. However,

different focus is put by families depending on the cultural context. In some contexts, problem-solving skills might be more important, while in other contexts specific norms and values might be in the foreground.

8.1.3 The impact of stress in families on children

Following the insights from psychologists of the Center of the Developing Child, the biology of stress activation offers insight into why significant challenges, threats, or traumatic experiences (such as abuse, neglect, extreme poverty, systemic racism, or interpersonal discrimination) can trigger physiological and behavioural disruptions with enduring consequences (Center of the Developing Child, 2022). Nevertheless, it's important to note that not all stress is negative. Children require exposure to manageable levels of adversity, with guidance from supportive adults, to develop coping skills and cultivate healthy stress response mechanisms. However, frequent, or prolonged exposure to stressors that induce excessive stress activation can be detrimental to the developing brains and other biological systems of children. Additionally, such experiences can also overwhelm adults, hindering their ability to effectively engage in work, family life, and community activities. Children who are surrounded by a supportive network of caregivers, extended family members, or friends who are not burdened by excessive stress themselves can be shielded from potential harm. This support system helps them lay the foundation for resilience, which, in turn, paves the way for healthier and more productive lives. Experiencing significant adversity early in life can set up our body's systems to be more susceptible to stress throughout life, with long-term negative consequences for physical and emotional health, educational achievement, economic productivity, social relationships, and overall well-being (ibid). For adults who have experienced a pile-up of adversity since childhood, the additional weight of current adversity, such as from poverty, racism, or unsafe communities, may overload their ability to provide the stable, responsive relationships their children need and consistently meet the demands of work.

8.1.4 Increasing play and communication in families

While play is not argued to be important for the development of a child, the amount of time that is dedicated to play in families has been decreasing over the years. In 2022, the Lego Foundation conducted a study with around 57'000 participants[1], investigating into the current situation of play in families across 35 countries (www.learningthroughplay.com). The results are reassuring on the one hand: 88% of the responding parents said that play is important to children to learn new things – nearly as high as school, and over 90% state that play encourages their children's creativity, communication, problem-solving skills and confidence. However, 34% of all parents say that their family doesn't play together enough and say that a lack of time, long working hours and too much housework are to blame for that. From among the participating children 84% would like to play more with their family and 39% feel that their parents' work gets in the way of family play (ibid.). Even though over 90% of the parents state that joint play also makes their family happier, play seems too often be reduced to using digital games. This finding ties in with the following call for more communication within families. Digital games seem to be perceived by one third of the parents as used too extensively by children. Interestingly, also 15% of the children state that their parents are online for too long. Increasing communication and interaction within families and raising awareness for simple, uncomplicated, and easy play opportunities inside and outside should be in the focus of attention.

Communication in family is a hugely important issue. Every member should be able to express their wishes and needs, live their emotions and share important information in order to be understood as much as possible and accepted as a whole. Bearing in mind that the communication process consists of some very important elements, it is good to know that all of them can improve communication (but can also be an obstacle). For instance, when the sender of an idea has something in mind they wish to express, they need to make sure they transfer it into a channel which is appropriate for this occasion. The sender will only be certain that the message has been delivered correctly to the receiver when they receive feedback (Greenberg, 2002; Lazić, 2011) (Figure 1).
Since family is the place where all members are aware of their individuality and express it without fear, looking at it from the other side, there is mutual energy from all the individuals which make the family synergy affected by quality communication and emotions.

Video 1:
Building with Blocks, LEGO® and Magnets
See Chapter 8.5

Video 2:
Playing Along with Children
See Chapter 8.5

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1   The "LEGO Play Well Study 2022" included a 20 minute online quantitative survey across 35 countries between January and March 2022, asked to a total of 57,374 respondents, including 32,781 parents with children aged 1-12 years old and 24,593 children aged 5-12. The first 15 minutes of the survey were answered by the parent, with the remaining 5 minutes answered by the child whose parents consented to their participation.
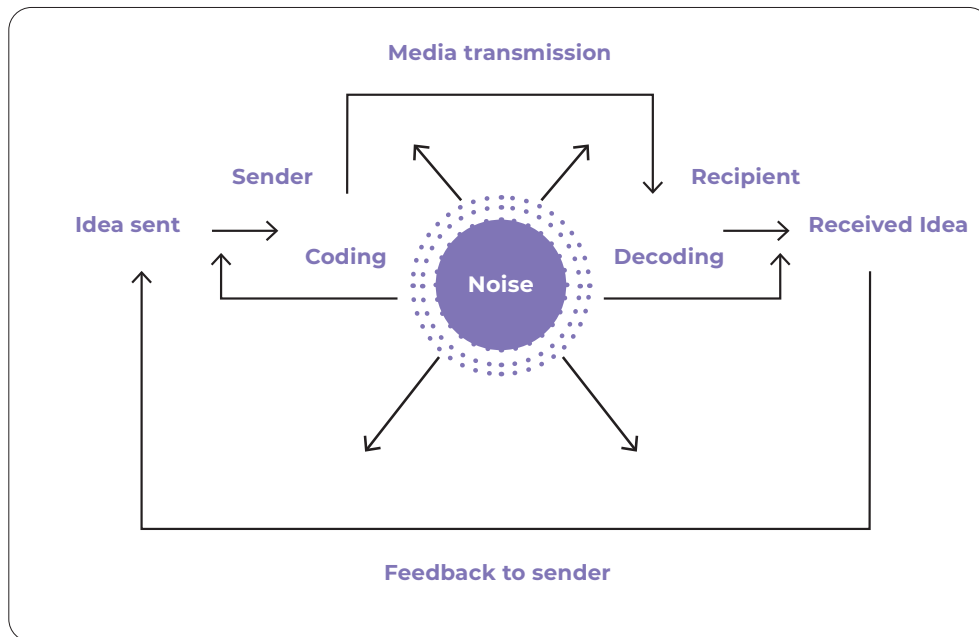
Figure 1   **Communication process** (Lazić, 2011)

8.2 Ideas for everyday life in a family

Ideas for everyday life refers to the quality time spent with family members and children, their inclusion in everyday life and especially events that concern them when children have the opportunity to experience their important right known as participation.

It is certain that joint family activities and/or rituals are very important for preserving family unity and the closeness of all members. No matter how prosaic it may seem, ritual actions breathe life into the family, improve mutual relations and eventually become everyone's voluntary 'obligation' (although they are not defined in this way). Activities that parents perceive as rituals in the family are tasks such as cooking together with the children, making and decorating cakes and cookies, taking a dog for a walk, watching a family movie on Sunday mornings, riding a bicycle, going out for ice cream or cookies, visiting shopping centres, enjoying culture together, visiting cinemas, concerts, museums and enjoying some sports activities together, etc. Shared meals unite the family because they bring together all the family members to share 'small talk', exchange their daily experiences and ideas, smiles, etc., which serve to increase the synergy of the family. Social games are also important and their benefits are constantly reaffirmed, especially against the backdrop of recent years so coloured by the pandemic.

Video 3:
*Hammers,
Saws and Glue*
See Chapter 8.5

Just because they are part of everyday life and form its context, ideas for everyday life are a step forward and a creative contribution to its development. In other words, it's the little things that really give meaning to life. Since they do not represent a selective experience but make up the whole of life itself, they become the frame of reference for every child and adult.

Ideas for play in everyday family life: Go shopping, cleaning, do the washing, cooking, baking etc. https://stock.adobe.com

Above all, daily play at home is essential for children of kindergarten age. Free play is not just a pastime, but an essential opportunity for development. Self-motivated play, for example, plays a crucial role in children's development and learning (Montie, Claxton & Lockhart, 2007). Therefore, it is helpful to allow children enough time for independent free play, ideally with play partners. It is also important to allow phases of boredom and to endure them as parents, so that children can develop creativity and self-efficiency (Habermann, 2020). For children who find it difficult to get involved in play, it can be helpful to take a closer look at the individual interests and needs of the children and to discuss these with them. In this way, parents can also counteract unfavourable patterns and factors, such as excessive media consumption, with attractive alternatives by repeatedly taking time to be attentive to what else interests the child (Hattie & Zierer, 2020. pp. 139 – 143). Examples that consider the heterogeneity in a group and, with that, different forms of play, can be found in Chapter 7.2. Negotiating is sometimes accompanied by differences of opinion, which is an unpleasant but meaningful experience important for the exchange of opinions and ideas. Even though there might be a few raised voices and arguments, the situation calms down and things are

put back in place. The democratic principle of family life and the quality of life can be seen in situations where children actively participate in the agreement with their parents about things such as what will be cooked for dinner tomorrow, what needs to be bought and whether there are enough funds for it now or will it the purchase have to wait a little until the money becomes available. Additionally, parents talk with their children about how they treat their grandparents and how often they visit and call them, and discuss with them how to arrange rooms, move around the furniture, etc. Children listen to each other, but often the parents will finally make their own decisions.

There are also examples of real democratic decision-making in the family, which might look something like this:

a) Everyone has the opportunity to say out loud what their idea, proposal or wish is.

b) If there is any disagreement on the ideas, then an explanation or argumentation is requested (i.e. why the child wants that) and then, based on that, a decision is made.

c) The family sets priorities (what is more important to us) to help come to a decision (for example, the shortest the game should be or the movie should be as funny as possible, etc.).

d) If there are two proposals and the family as a whole cannot come to an agreement, then there is a simple vote.

e) Sometimes ideas can be considered according to some order, e.g. today one person chooses a movie, tomorrow someone else will.

8.3 Implications for cooperating with parents and families[2]

Cooperation and contact with parents and families are an essential factor in promoting children's play and learning behaviours. Elementary teachers are key persons in the question of how parents experience their children's learning and the teaching or care they receive, as they can make a significant contribution to the parents' understanding of the importance of play, and – more specifically – free play. In principle, we can assume that all parents want their children to feel comfortable in kindergarten, school and care, however, questions are often not asked due to a lack of trust. Especially when working with parents and families from different linguistic and cultural contexts, it is precisely this trust-building that is the key to sustainable cooperation in the interest of the child. The following tips are intended to help elementary educators in this process (Lieger & Weidinger, 2021).

Conducting parent interviews to build trust

Before conducting the meeting, it is important to establish whether an intercultural interpreter (= language interpreter) or an intercultural mediator (= interpretation plus mediation of cultural context) is needed.

A meeting with the parents should be planned before difficulties arise – this way the conversation remains unencumbered for the time being and helps to build mutual trust. The following aspects might be addressed in this conversation:

→ Clarify value and educational concepts: what is important to parents and elementary educators in terms of play? What do the parents want to emphasise?

→ Always justify rules in kindergarten, school and childcare and do not leave anything as universally valid, for example: "It is important that your child learns to play independently because…".

→ Create a common ground for cooperation in the conversation, even if you have different views on rules in kindergarten, school and care, for example: "We both want your child to develop as well as possible".

→ Create mutual trust and understanding of different school systems (Switzerland – country of origin): what is school like in the parents' country of origin? What was school like in Switzerland in the past? What value does play have in the school system of the country of origin? What is its value here?

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2   Adapted from Lieger, C.; Weidinger, W. (Eds) (2021): Spielen Plus.

→ Clarify different understandings of what is important for assessing children (kindergarten, school). Also explain what support options are available (school psychology, remedial education, recreational education, etc.). Point out repeatedly how important play and learning spaces are for the development of different skills.

Designing parents' evenings

There are many tips for organising parents' evenings, including ones in this particular intercultural context. They cover questions such as motivating parents to participate in the parents' evenings, as well as the design and sending out of invitations and the organisation and running of the event itself. Some specific ideas for parents' evenings focusing on the topic of play can be found below:

→ Use videos to illustrate what you mean. See videos in chapter 8.5.

→ Some schools provide class teachers with packages consisting of presentations, documents and videos for parent-teacher conferences. Take advantage of this offer.

→ In addition to parents' evenings, initiate parent-child events where parents can play games together with their children and try out some of the different play materials themselves.

→ Make the invitation to the parents' evening as low-threshold as possible. Especially parents who are not familiar with the school system in the new country may have inhibitions about visiting places such as schools, libraries or administrative offices. These possible inhibitions can be overcome by personal invitations, an additional phone call, informing the parents that their child's classmate's parents will be attending, etc.

→ For parents who do not speak the language of the country, use slow language for explanations, use pictures and symbols, translate documents where required and/or offer the services of interpreters.

→ At the events, also show the children's products that were created during play sessions. You might also like to organise an exhibition of the children's artworks.

→ Invite parents to visit you outside the formal parent-teacher conferences or parent-child conferences in kindergarten, school or childcare so that they can get to know your work.

→ Then tie in with the strengths that the respective child shows in play.

Didactic ideas for connecting family background and play situations

For the didactic implementation of free play situations in often hetero-geneous groups of children, various elements are central. These relate both to the context of the child and to the concrete activities in kinder-garten, school and care:

→	Analysis of the child's context
→	Creating a place of safety
→	Promotion of language and expression
→	Promoting the ability to symbolise and the quality of expression
→	Interaction and cooperation in the group
→	Designing a learning environment that takes heterogeneity into account

The following table provides brief didactic suggestions for each element in the form of checklists to be implemented in different settings.

Analyse the context (kindergarten, school, and care)	
→ Be aware of a child's background, family situation, language and the socioeconomic conditions in which they live. Seek to talk to the parents and ask questions such as: How does the family usually spend their free time? What are the living conditions like? Do the children have their own rooms? Where do they play? With what? What do they not play with? With whom do they play?	☐
→ Keep in mind that parental discussions should primarily contribute towards transparency and trust-building.	☐
→ Ask the child what games he or she knows and plays at home or how free time is spent in general.	☐
→ Ask about the child's wishes. What are their most urgent wishes? Intangible or material things? Toys? If so, which ones?	☐
→ Have children describe their favourite place. Where do they prefer to play at home? What is their favourite place to retreat to? Why?	☐

Create a place of safety (kindergarten, school and care)	
→ Create an atmosphere in the classroom or care room where children can reach for various games without fear and engage in independent play.	☐
→ Emphasise rituals even more than usual. Especially children from other linguistic and/or cultural contexts need structures they can rely on. Give these children the chance to actively participate, even if they are not (yet) proficient in the language.	☐
→ Give children the opportunity to come to you when they need to. Reserve times in the daily routine for such occasions.	☐
→ Join them in free play situations and create opportunities for conversation. Ask what is being played or what a child is doing. Especially in situations where children are playing alone, this can go a long way toward fostering trust.	☐
→ Pay attention to group composition during shared play activities. Try to consciously pair children playing alone (or 'outsiders') with a play partner. New children often need a role model from their peer group even more.	☐

▶

Video 4:
Circus Play Project
See Chapter 8.5

Promote language and expressive skills (kindergarten, school, and care)	
→ Voluntarily involve children whose first language is not one of the official national languages in dialogues about their games. Repeat what the child says in his or her language in your language. Keep in close contact with the child.	☐
→ Make even more targeted use of symbols (pictures, colours, signs, etc.) that can help with orientation. Children who do not have a national language as their first language initially orient themselves very strongly to sign systems (for instructions, locations, storage locations of games or materials, etc.).	☐
→ Enable language-free engagement with a topic (e.g. experimenting, building, creative design, etc.) through the play settings offered. In a second step, verbalise what the child is doing in parallel.	☐
→ Use role play that arises from the children's free play to consolidate dialogues and promote expressiveness. Play through such dialogues again together (e.g. dialogues while shopping, with parents, in a restaurant, etc.). The third time you play, a child with a non-German first language may want to take on a role. Stand by the child and step in if they need help.	☐

Promote symbolisation skills and expressive quality (kindergarten, school and care)	
→ Immerse children in the new cultural community and language by letting them experience play situations holistically. Prepare play environments and opportunities that involve all the senses. Feel free to allow children to explore a particular material in depth (e.g. water, plasticine, sand, etc.).	☐
→ Verbalise what is being done and played during the playtime. When you come back to it in the large group, repeat what was done and played using the same words.	☐
→ Give children with a different first language and/or a different cultural context enough freedom to make decisions. Provide options in concrete play situations from which the child can choose and thus learn about the linguistic formulation (e.g. "Do you need cardboard or paper for the house?", "Would you rather have x or y?", etc.).	☐
→ If you observe children playing the same game over and over again, allow this initially: it is a sign of the need for security and structure. Seek contact and add a new variation of play (e.g. new playing partners, new objects, different materials, different use of materials, etc.). In this way, the child experiences that there can be different variations to the same game. The child becomes more courageous and moves into the next zone of development.	☐
→ Also set challenging tasks – not being able to use language does not mean the inability to think creatively. In addition to linguistic forms of expression, consciously use gestures and facial expressions to show the difficulty of the problem (e.g. building a bridge out of paper or building blocks, etc.).	☐

Interaction and cooperation in the group (kindergarten, school and care)	
→ For children with a different first language and/or a different cultural background, it is important to integrate into the group as quickly as possible and to establish contact with peers. Control this consciously by creating occasions for cooperation, partner work or group work.	☐
→ Consider a buddy system. Especially in mixed-age groups, this is a good way to have someone experienced or older at your side whom you can ask for help or who can simply show you something. Organize the structure so that there is a continuous opportunity to do and play something together.	☐

→ Take note of the goal of your group activities and under what 'star' they are. Does it force competition, or is it really about together-ness? About jointly developing a product or game, etc.? Especially in linguistically and culturally heterogeneous groups, these so-called 'goal structures' – competition or cooperation – are essential-ly responsible for how comfortable children feel and to what extent they are willing to go out of their way and try something new.	☐
→ In the group you are teaching/coaching, address diversity as a given. Point out different languages. This can be done through songs or rhymes or by celebrating festivals. Make children aware that everyone is different. The best way to do this is by making their own strengths visible. Questions such as "Who is particularly good at what?" will help show this diversity. Do not exclude yourself in the process.	☐
→ Encourage parents to let their children participate in activities with their peers (e.g. afternoon classes, joint leisure activities, etc.). Talk to parents about this and point out what opportunities are avail-able at your kindergarten, school, or childcare centre. Encourage parents to trust their children and gradually integrate them into a second or third new culture and language. Often, newly immi-grated parents move primarily in their own cultural and linguistic spaces (e.g. cultural associations, etc.).	☐
→ Assist parents in exploring appropriate play opportunities for their child. Make them aware of how important play is for a child's learn-ing and that the child goes through different forms of play as they develop. In particular, forms of play such as functional play (which may seem banal at first glance) are essential for the learning de-velopment of children of kindergarten age. Help parents recognise the quality of such play opportunities. For parents, it can be helpful to get to know practical examples for different types of play in the child's development.	☐

Video 5:
Learning Language at Play
See Chapter 8.5

Video 6:
Forest Playground Adventure
See Chapter 8.5

Video 7:
Children in Motion
See Chapter 8.5

8.4 Examples and tasks for students

Think-pair exercise

Think of a situation when working with parents or guardians.
This can be either:

→   a misunderstanding between you and parents/guardians;

→   a personal experience for yourself from communication with parents/guardians.

Share your experience with a colleague. Discuss together your personal 'recipes' for successful communication with parents and guardians.

Make your personal step-by-step-checklist

Go through the checklist of the didactic ideas for bridging the gap between families and kindergarten/school. Select 1 focus for each dimension (e.g. context - Ask the child what games he or she knows and plays at home or how free time is spent in general.). Make your personal checklist compiling the selected items together in a list. For your next internship, try to focus on these items and tick them if you have done/tried them.

You can do this step-by-step and then select another set of items.

Different forms of play

For example, have a look at the different forms of play. Think about examples which parents could easily adapt for their children at home.

Functional Motoric Play:
https://spielenplus.webflow.io/english#Children-in-Motion

Symbolic Play:
https://spielenplus.webflow.io/english#Seeing-the-World-with-Children-s-Eyes

Role Play:
https://spielenplus.webflow.io/english#Circus-Play-Project

Constructive Play:
https://spielenplus.webflow.io/english#Kinder-planen-und-konstruieren

Find videos and descriptions for all play types in chapter 7.1.

8.5 Videos

Introduction for the videos

For children between the ages of 4 and 8, development-oriented learning is the way in which they can discover for themselves how they can play and learn in their world. The Play Plus project in Switzerland focuses on this age group and aims to show the importance and significance of play as an important form of learning – at school, at home and in leisure time. The following videos are specially designed for parents and can be used for parent's evenings or discussions on play at home, at school and/or at parent-teacher conferences.

▶ **Video 1:**

Building with Blocks, LEGO® and Magnets

Unstructured materials and toys can have multiple functions. Through play, children can develop organisational skills, cognitive skills and many more life skills.

https://www.spielenplus.ch/english#Building-with-Blocks-Lego-and-Magnets

Grandnja s kockama, legom i magnetima

https://www.spielenplus.ch/bosn-serb-kroat#Bauen-mit-Kl-tzen-Lego-Co

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▶ **Video 2:**

Playing Along with Children

Functional play is an excellent way for adults to engage with children. You can encourage children to explore and experiment with different objects and toys, and provide them with opportunities to develop their fine motor skills, cognitive abilities and social skills.

https://www.spielenplus.ch/english#Playing-Along-With-Children

Igranje sa djecom

https://www.spielenplus.ch/bosn-serb-kroat#Kinder-im-Spiel-begleiten

▶ **Video 3:**

Hammers, Saws and Glue

Playing is the leading form of learning in children between the ages of 4 and 8. Accompanying children while they play helps you reach them and promote learning with a high degree of positive emotions and motivation.

https://www.spielenplus.ch/english#Hammers-Saws-and-Glue

Čekići, testere i ljepilo

https://www.spielenplus.ch/bosn-serb-kroat#H-mmern-S-gen-und-Kleben

▶ **Video 4:**

Circus Play Project

Role play involves children taking on different roles and acting out scenarios. For example, pretending to be a parent or a super-hero. Children learn to understand different perspectives and develop empathy for others. They also develop social skills such as communication, cooperation and problem-solving.

https://www.spielenplus.ch/english#Circus-Play-Project

Projekt igrati se Cirkusa

https://www.spielenplus.ch/bosn-serb-kroat#Spielprojekt-Zirkus

▶ **Video 5:**

Learning Language at Play

By playing together, children develop their language skills in a natural way. They collaborate, communicate and organise their game together, as a group.

https://www.spielenplus.ch/english#Learning-Language-at-Play

Učenje jezika kroz igru

https://www.spielenplus.ch/bosn-serb-kroat#Sprachen-lernen-im-Spiel

▶ **Video 6:**

Forest Playground Adventure

Playing outside has been proven to strengthen physical, mental, emotional and intellectual health, and helps children develop several important skills for life, such as curiosity, creativity or critical thinking.

https://www.spielenplus.ch/english#Forest-Playground-Adventure

Avantura na šumskom igralištu

https://www.spielenplus.ch/bosn-serb-kroat#Abenteuer-Spielplatz-Wald

▶ **Video 7:**

Children in Motion

Experts often refer to functional play as "first play", since it characterizes how young children first begin to explore all the things around them and their functions. Children learn that they have control over their bodies and objects, and they can act upon those objects. They jump in puddles, experiment with water or dance creatively.

https://www.spielenplus.ch/english#Children-in-Motion

Djeca u kretanju

https://www.spielenplus.ch/bosn-serb-kroat#Kinder-in-Bewegung

▶ **Video 8:**

Seeing the World through a Child's Eyes

Symbolic play involves the use of symbols to represent real-life situations or objects. Children learn to use their imagination and creativity to create new scenarios and ideas. For example, a cardboard box can be used as a car, or a wooden stick can represent a phone.

https://www.spielenplus.ch/english#Seeing-the-World-with-Children-s-Eyes

Vidjeti svijet sa dečijim očima

https://www.spielenplus.ch/bosn-serb-kroat#Die-Welt-mit-Kinderaugen-sehen

▶ **Video 9:**

Children Plan and Build

In constructive play, children use objects to create something new. For example, building with blocks or drawing a picture. Children learn to plan and organise their ideas, develop fine motor skills and gain knowledge through experimentation.

https://www.spielenplus.ch/english#Kinder-planen-und-konstru-ieren

Djeca planiraju i grade

https://www.spielenplus.ch/bosn-serb-kroat#Kinder-planen-und-konstruieren

▶ **Video 10:**

Playfully Exploring Surroundings

While playing, children learn to express wishes and perceive the needs of others: What is good for me? What do others need? Without knowing it, children learn skills that are important when coping with life.

https://www.spielenplus.ch/english#Lebenswelten-spieleri-sch-erkunden

Istražianje okoline kroz igru

https://www.spielenplus.ch/bosn-serb-kroat#Lebenswelten-spie-lerisch-erkunden

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CHAPTER 2

CHAPTER 3

CHAPTER 4

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Kindergarten	Kindergarten Principal	Kindergarten teacher
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