



PEDAGOGICAL PROGRAMME

My Baby Nursery School

Bilingual school

1. INTRODUCTION

The Medacta for Life Foundation, the founding organisation of the My Baby nursery school, operates across numerous areas, united by a common purpose of working to benefit the interests of future generations.

Through the My Baby Nursery School, available to children aged 0-3 years, it aims to:

- Support families in the care and education of their children, nurturing each child's unique qualities and respecting their dignity and freedom. The developing child is placed at the centre of all educational activity, within which it is essential to know how to understand and interpret the needs of the individual and, based on these, to know how to formulate an adequate response.
- Support the re-entry of women into professional life following maternity leave, offering them the space and time for temporary detachment and the tranquillity necessary for the well-being of both the mother and child.
- Offer a high-quality service in a carefully designed, calm, welcoming environment, which responds to childcare and safety requirements, whilst fostering learning and discovery.
- Be a reliable partner for the cantonal bodies dedicated to the needs of families and young people (Office of support for organisations and activities for families and young people (UFaG)).
- Encourage the professional training and development of all staff (in the trained, untrained and support sectors) who work together on a daily basis towards quality in education, mindful of the fact that they belong to an educational community in which each individual has a share of the responsibility.
- Encourage a "doing, being, knowing" framework in terms of parents' involvement in supporting the nursery school in its provision of childcare.
- Support the continuation of breastfeeding following the mother's return to work and the physical proximity between parents and newborns with infant massage (IAIM).

2. PSYCHO-PEDAGOGICAL ORIENTATION

The pedagogical approach adopted at the nursery school does not align with one single method, but accepts ideas and philosophies from different schools of thought, reworking their content and translating into practice the most relevant and highly valued aspects within the context of nursery care.

We have conducted in-depth studies of the Loris Malaguzzi approach (with the nursery schools of Reggio Emilia), the Montessori method and the forest schools model: pedagogies in which the child plays an active role in all aspects of their learning.



Together with John Dewey, Maria Montessori is an exponent of pedagogical activism, a school of thought originating at the end of the 19th century which can be summed up by her famous phrase "Help me to do it myself". The key feature of active learning is that children play an active role in the educational process and are not simply passive receivers of adults' actions.

The idea of the competent child, capable of using 100 different languages to express and develop his or her creativity, if allowed to do so, is the foundation of Loris Malaguzzi's approach. The slogan that echoes throughout the Reggio Approach is "the child at the centre".

Italian/English bilingualism through immersion is adopted across the different nursery levels using the "OPOL: one person one language" principle. Learning between the age of 0 and 3 years, which M. Montessori defines as the "Absorbent Mind" period, takes place with no apparent effort. The child learns everything unknowingly, passing gradually from the unconscious to the conscious.

The opportunity to have experiences, to build and use feelings, to explore materials and spaces using the 100 languages that children are equipped with, to listen to different sounds and to build relationships with numerous individuals: these are the conditions that we create in order for the children to express themselves and gain experiences in different ways, giving each child the opportunity to find what they are suited to best.

The emphasis is placed on the process of the experience: the final product is not important.

3. PEDAGOGICAL PROGRAMME GUIDELINES

The My Baby nursery school is an educational and social service, open to all children aged 3 months to 3 years. It is a welcoming, open and flexible environment, which pursues the right to education, promoting the comprehensive development of children in collaboration with their families.

Space, time, and experimentation during play, discovery, learning and relationships with others constitute the aspects in which the children most often find opportunities to acquire greater awareness of themselves and their own abilities.

The well-being and inclusion of every single child are the principle aims of all employees at the My Baby nursery school: from the staff who are trained, untrained and undergoing training, to the support staff (kitchen and cleaning staff, caretakers/gardeners) and management. All members are part of the nursery school's educational community, each individual playing their own part.

It is essential that each member is aware that by directly or indirectly forming a relationship with the child, they share the responsibility for the children's developmental journey.

4. ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE SCHOOL

The My Baby nursery school is organised into three sections, dedicated to children who are divided by age.

The facility is open from Monday to Friday. As well as being closed during the summer (the first two weeks of August), the school is suspended during the first week of January and on public holidays.

The nursery school is open every day from 7.30 to 18.30, with families able to choose the hours that work best with their individual budgets.



The My Baby nursery school is authorised by the competent authorities to take care of up to 50 children at a given time, divided into 10 for the baby section, 20 for the middle section and 20 for the section for older children. The ratio of teaching staff to children set by cantonal legislation is 1 teaching staff to every 4 babies, 1 teaching staff to every 5 children aged 12 to 24 months and 1 teaching staff to every 8 children in the 24-to-36-month age bracket.

In the middle and older child section at the My Baby nursery school, a mother-tongue English teacher is present for at least 4 hours every day, who is responsible for the bilingual Italian/English immersion approach. Bilingualism is adopted using the "OPOL: one person one language" principle.

Together with the teaching staff, other co-workers are involved in everyday strategic roles. They are assigned the roles of looking after and cleaning the rooms, preparing meals, and ensuring that the children progress with their eating habits, in compliance with the benchmark regulatory and nutritional principles.

5. SETTLING IN

For all children, starting nursery school means being accepted somewhere where they are recognised, where they are given opportunities, and where they feel safe, because they have time to settle in, to understand, and to feel capable and competent to act independently, and because they know they will have an adult with them to understand their needs and offer support and personalised attention.

Right from the very first meeting with the parents, the director emphasises the central importance of settling in properly, the timings and methods used, and the energy and emotions that come into play from everybody involved.

In order to help the children to settle in, the teaching staff organise games and activities that help to construct a social environment centred around sharing, ensuring the safety of the individual and of the group. The teacher is present as a central figure, aware of their role as a "fixed term" mediation strategy rather than a strict authority. The teacher takes on the responsibility of being the point of contact between the parent/child unit and the nursery school, in the knowledge that they are not the only participant in this relationship, and that they have a working group to go back to to share and define individual interventions with a common goal.

The participation of the parent in their child's care transforms an "expected" dual relationship into a three-way relationship, in which each subject is an active participant. The teacher knows how to interpret the family's implicit and explicit requests and is able to find the best way to deal with them with a flexible outlook that allows for the meaningful involvement of the parents.

There is no rigid requirement for the time requested from the parents to accompany their child whilst they settle in. Instead, this is agreed upon mutually. The relationship, based on the transparency and genuine interest towards the parent and child, contributes to the formation of an authentic and continuous alliance between the nursery school and the family.



6. ROOMS AND MATERIALS

Although some fundamental aspects are fixed, such as current legislation in terms of the physical and emotional safety of the children and their daily routines, the children enjoy ample freedom of choice when selecting activities, as well as with whom and for how long they engage in them.

The areas are organised by different activities (movement and experimentation with the body, water activities, reading and dressing-up games, heuristic workspaces, fine motor skill activities, outdoor activities), each supervised by a different teacher who sets out the basic materials at the start of the day, tidies up during the activity and observes individual children and the dynamics between them. The teacher will report back to the nursery daily and document each child's day in a diary.

The teacher's actions towards the children are accompanied and/or preceded by verbal communication, and the children are always encouraged to express their emotions, which are often repeated back to them with a name.

Each child is viewed and considered as a unique individual with a developing personality which belongs only to them. The internal and external school environments are designed to welcome them and are structured in such a way so as to allow them to gain experiences, each depending on their own capabilities and stages of development, and on their interests and curiosities, and each child being supported to reach and exceed their next developmental stage.

Living in a community can jeopardise feelings of reassurance and recognition, which must therefore be rebalanced with welcoming environments, in which children feel safe and protected and in which they are surrounded by familiar objects, which allow them to find pleasure in recognising the environment in which they live and understand the continuity of experiences.

Environments for exploration and discovery are provided through spaces and materials that encourage curiosity and the pleasure of play, increase movement and perceptive development, and expand opportunities for constructing reality.

7. TIMINGS

The nursery school, as an establishment promoting a culture of education, is characterised by a daily schedule that fosters moments dedicated to settling in, drop-off/pick-up, engaging with others, play, learning and familiarity.

Through these daily activities and routines, which comprise different forms of fixed sequences, and consistent and regular moments, which are predictable and repeated, the child recognises actions and situations, anticipates spaces, behaviour and languages, places them in time, and classifies them in a context in which the concepts of "before, during and after" take on tangible meanings.

Arrival and drop-off are particularly special moments that occur every morning, during which children rediscover friends, objects, and traces of actions performed on previous days. It means saying goodbye to the family member who accompanies them and rediscovering familiar people and places.



Timings of educational activities Observation is the first stage of each project, and the questions arising from this guide the actions and choices that are made, transforming them into theories to be questioned, verified, and changed in order to construct new projects and new directions. At the centre of the planning is play, which is a common theme across the nursery school, because it encompasses the spaces, times, and materials, defines the role of the adult, and determines the children's actions.

Promoting play means allowing active participation of the children in the construction of their educational context, as play is the main method children have to express themselves and to give a voice to their emerging identity.

The teachers, who are experts in play, know that play naturally combines pleasure, commitment, knowledge and learning, and know how to understand children's playful behaviour, and how to support it, structure it and expand it, starting from what the children themselves propose or are capable of doing.

Personal care not only encompasses hygiene, but involves a series of actions including washing, wiping, and drying. By vocalising the actions that they are carrying out, the teacher educates the child on caring for their own body, the primary tool of communication and knowledge. Over time, self-care will become an area in which the child will exert his or her independence because they will be capable of recognising and meeting their own needs.

Mealtimes at the nursery school are organised according to the timings and needs of the children. From a young age, a relationship of care is prioritised, followed by gaining independence and making relationships.

An afternoon nap follows the meal. In the bedroom, background music welcomes the children towards their beds. Some have a personal item (soft toy, blanket, etc.) and/or a dummy. Falling asleep is about being left and leaving people, objects, and the pleasure of being together behind. It is an experience that, although natural, increases the child's need for control. In light of this, the teachers devise situations which allow the child to predict and control events, overcoming fears and uncertainties.

Successful organisation of lunch, nap and personal care times is characterised by:

- . small groups of children that favour interaction and acquisition of rules;
- . flexibility in managing routine timings, taking into consideration the needs of each child and their habits;
- . close management of transition times to support children when changing from one activity to another, allowing them to work out the change and to increase their awareness of what they are doing at that time;
- . the construction of recognisable rituals shared by the children that signal the start and end of routines.

Leaving time, apart from being an important moment for communication between the nursery school and the family, must allow space for the child to be reunited with their family member.

8. RELATIONSHIPS

It is already well known that nursery has a social role, exchanges with others and adaptation to rules of the group being the most significant aspects. Although understanding the concept of sharing and waiting your turn amongst peers is not easy to take on board, it is also a source of learning and experimentation with initial negotiation. From the second year of life, a child's ability to relate their own activity to that of their peers and the conventional use of objects increases. At nursery, many children are together, they are considered equally, and they are often doing the same things: it is an



environment that allows children to construct how they relate to others and allows them to feel supported; creating a sense of belonging to a group and to a safe space, and as a result making them emotionally open to novel exploration "away from adults".

9. NURSERY SCHOOL AND FAMILIES

The aim is to create an educating community, or a "shared" place where parents and teachers accept the responsibility of the educational processes related to teaching/learning and caring for the children's well-being, while respecting each other's roles.

In order for education to become collective, the participation and open dialogue between families and the nursery school is required, until it becomes a "team game".

In everyday practice, this sharing of goals translates into letting families spend time at the nursery school every day, involving them in the planning for each section, and asking them to be and allowing them to be present and proactive.

Through listening, curiosity, sensitivity and observation, the teacher reflects on the needs of the families and constructs a targeted intervention.

10. THE WORKING GROUP

The nursery school's working group is comprised of different professionals: educators, assistants, kitchen staff, gardeners, directors.

Collegiality is the key tool for sharing educational responsibility, harmonising methodological choices, and identifying, distributing and integrating different roles.

Collegiality is demonstrated during formal and informal collective working moments: at the fortnightly planning meeting with the director, during section meetings, and during group events.

11. TRAINING

Each professional at the nursery school is supported in their search for training in their specific area, in order to obtain unique qualities, both for themselves and in their relationships with the children and their reference system.

This includes specific training related to the different areas of activity, as well as the deepening of specific skills.

The aim is to be open to new ideas, research, and different ways of thinking, in order to stimulate the reflection and exchange that runs throughout the school's pedagogical approach.

12. EVALUATION

Verification and reflection on daily operations is an important phase of the planning process. It means gaining feedback on your own professional skills, facing the strain of uncertainty, trying new paths, sometimes abandoning easier or more common solutions, and sometimes running the risk of making mistakes.

Evaluation justifies the educational intervention or requires modifications to be made. Questions arise that help to define tools, contexts and actions. The routes that gradually open up constitute an opportunity to relaunch, redesign, and review everything that the teacher has knowingly designed and prepared for the children.



This working method, initially used within each of the sections to link research activities to the specific needs of that group of children, then becomes an opportunity for exchange and reflection with colleagues during planning meetings.

In turn, the My Baby nursery school has been subject to evaluation by an external body, and in September 2013 it obtained the "QualiNido" (Nursery School Quality) Quality Mark for childcare facilities. To obtain this recognition, it passed the quality development standards related to the process (development, support and learning; relationships and interactions; integration and participation; collaboration with the family and parent participation) and structural aspects (safety and facilities; staff and qualifications; management and administration; general ethos).

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