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## Part one

### **IDENTITY AND AIMS OF THE INFANT-TODDLER CENTRES AND PRESCHOOLS**

#### **1.1 Education is a right**

Education is the right of all, of all children, and as such is a responsibility of the community.

Education is an opportunity for the growth and emancipation of the individual and the collective; it is a resource for gaining knowledge and for learning to live together; it is a meeting place where freedom, democracy, and solidarity are practiced and where the value of peace is promoted.

Within the plurality of cultural, ideological, political, and religious conceptions, education lives by listening, dialogue, and participation; it is based on mutual respect, valuing the diversity of identities, competencies, and knowledge held by each individual and is therefore qualified as secular and open to exchange and cooperation.

#### **1.2 The infant-toddler centre and the preschool**

The infant-toddler centre hosts children from three months to three years of age and the preschool hosts children from three to six years old, without any exclusion based on gender, race or ethnic group, religion, culture, or socio-economic status.

##### **1.2.1 Educational services**

The infant-toddler centres and the preschools are educational services that construct a culture of childhood and promote children's right to care, education, and learning, all based on the value of social interaction.

As such, the infant-toddler centres and the preschools are public places, a project and a resource of the community in which democracy and the rights and responsibilities of citizenship are practiced. The infant-toddler centres and the preschools belong to a 0-6 educational project that, in respect for the specific ages of reference, is configured with a unitary cultural and management orientation that assures pedagogical continuity for the children.

The infant-toddler centres and the preschools endeavor to carry out research and experimentation, and to expand the opportune forms of con-

nection and continuity between the whole of early childhood services and the primary school, based on exchange, comparison of ideas, and shared professional development and planning, and undertake to collaborate with other educational entities such as the upper school and university.

### 1.2.2 Qualified in a system of relationships

As an active and dialoguing part of the community life of the city, the infant-toddler centres and the preschools are constantly engaged in developing a close relationship with the territory, interacting and collaborating with the entire system of cultural, educational, and economic offers of the city managed by both public and private bodies. The infant-toddler centres and the preschools belong to a city that has undergone major changes that increasingly project it into a multicultural and international dimension, requiring an elaboration of thought and action capable of joining the local dimension with a global perspective.

The infant-toddler centres and the preschools contribute to this elaboration in close relationship with Reggio Children, the Friends of Reggio Children International Association, the Loris Malaguzzi International Centre, and with other local, national, and international entities.

### 1.2.3 Promote the rights and potentials of children

The infant-toddler centres and the preschools promote the potentials of all children and their rights to relationships, autonomy, creativity, and learning. The infant-toddler centres and the preschools are conceived and act as a cultural laboratory, carrying out ongoing research on pedagogical and social innovation in relation and exchange with other national and international experiences and entities.

It is the right of children that the preschool and infant-toddler centre, the families, and the local authorities together carry out research and become contexts of dialogue, co-responsibility, and shared elaboration that give value to the specific educational responsibilities of each.

As educating communities, these subjects contribute to the integral growth, development, and education of the children and to constructing the conditions of well-being such that each individual can enjoy a rich, original, and harmonious experience of life.

With this intent, the infant-toddler centres and the preschools recognize the priority right of children with special needs to attend school, ensuring the conditions for inclusion and the necessary additional human and material resources. These conditions and resources are defined by means of a strategy of collaboration with the families and with the public and

private authorities and bodies that share responsibility for the processes of growth and development and inclusion of these children.

### 1.3 Generalization of the services

The Preschools and Infant-toddler Centres *Istituzione* of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia, in concurrence with other entities and resources of the city, and according to the principles of these Indications of the infant-toddler centres and preschools of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia, endeavors to ensure that all resident children who apply have the possibility to attend the preschool and infant-toddler centre.



### 2.1 Children are active protagonists of their growth and development processes

Children possess extraordinary potentials for learning and change, as well as extensive affective, relational, sensory, and intellectual resources that manifest in an ongoing exchange with the cultural and social context. Each child is the subject of rights, first and foremost possessing the right to be respected and valued in his or her own identity, uniqueness, difference, and in his or her own rhythms of growth and development. Each child, individually and in relation with the group, possesses an ecological sensibility towards others and towards the environment, and constructs experiences to which he or she is capable of giving sense and meaning.

### 2.2 The hundred languages

As human beings, children possess a hundred languages, a hundred ways of thinking, of expressing themselves, of understanding, and of encountering others, with a way of thinking that creates connections between the various dimensions of experience rather than separating them. The hundred languages are a metaphor for the extraordinary potentials of children, their knowledge-building and creative processes, the myriad forms with which life is manifested and knowledge is constructed. The hundred languages are understood as having the potential to be transformed and multiplied in the cooperation and interaction between the languages, among the children, and between children and adults. It is the responsibility of the infant-toddler centre and the preschool to give value and equal dignity to all the verbal and non-verbal languages.

### 2.3 Participation

Participation is the value and the strategy that defines the way in which the children, the educators, and the parents are stakeholders in the educational project; it is the educational strategy that is constructed and lived day by day in the encounter with others and in the interpersonal relationships.

Participation gives value to and makes use of the hundred languages of children and of human beings, viewed as a plurality of points of view and of cultures; it requires and fosters forms of cultural mediation and develops in a multiplicity of occasions and initiatives for constructing dialogue and the sense of belonging to a community.

Participation generates and nurtures the feelings and culture of solidarity, responsibility and inclusion; it produces change and new cultures that contend with the dimension of the contemporary world and globalization.

### 2.4 Listening

In participated education, an active attitude of listening between adults, children, and the environment is the premise and context of every educational relationship.

Listening is an ongoing process that nurtures reflection, welcoming, and openness towards oneself and others; it is an indispensable condition for dialogue and change.

The attitude of listening raises the threshold of attention and sensitivity toward the cultural, values-related, and political scenarios of the contemporary world. The infant-toddler centres and the preschools have the responsibility to foster and make visible these processes by means of the pedagogical documentation.

### 2.5 Learning as a process of individual and group construction

Each child, like each human being, is an active constructor of knowledge, competencies, and autonomies, by means of original learning processes that take shape with methods and times that are unique and subjective in the relationship with peers, adults, and the environment.

The learning process is fostered by strategies of research, comparison of ideas, and co-participation; it makes use of creativity, uncertainty, intuition, curiosity; it is generated in play and in the aesthetic, emotional, relational, and spiritual dimensions, which it interweaves and nurtures; it is based on the centrality of motivation and the pleasure of learning.

### 2.6 Educational research

Research represents one of the essential dimensions of life of children and adults alike, a knowledge-building tension that must be recognized and valued. Shared research between adults and children is a priority practice of everyday life, an existential and ethical approach necessary for interpreting

the complexity of the world, of phenomena, of systems of co-existence, and is a powerful instrument of renewal in education.

The research made visible by means of the documentation builds learning, reformulates knowledge, underlies professional quality, and is proposed at the national and international levels as an element of pedagogical innovation.

## 2.7 Educational documentation

Documentation is an integral and structuring part of the educational theories and teaching practices, as it gives value to and makes explicit, visible, and assessable the nature of the individual and group learning processes of both the children and the adults, processes which are identified by means of observation and which become the common wealth.

The educational experience that unfolds in the infant-toddler centres and preschools assumes its fullest meaning when the documentation produced in progress is revisited, reconstructed, re-signified, and assessed; that is, interpreted, in the exchange and with the contribution of different points of view.

Viewed as a “public place”, documentation substantiates the idea of the preschool and infant-toddler centre as a forum in which a culture of childhood and of education is elaborated by means of a democratic process.

## 2.8 Progettazione

The educational action takes shape by means of *progettazione*, which is the process of planning and designing the teaching and learning activities, the environment, the opportunities for participation, and the professional development of the personnel, and not by means of applying predefined curricula. *Progettazione* is a strategy of thought and action that is respectful and supportive of the learning processes of the children and the adults; it accepts doubt, uncertainty, and error as resources, and is capable of being modified in relation to the evolution of the contexts. It is carried out by means of the processes of observation, documentation, and interpretation in a recursive relationship, and through a close synergy between the organization of the work and the educational research.

## 2.9 Organization

The organization of the work, the spaces, and the time of the children and the adults is a structural part of the values and choices of the educational project. The organization constructs a network of choices and the assump-

tion of shared responsibility at the administrative, political, and pedagogical levels; choices that contribute to guaranteeing identity, stability, and security to the children and to the educational service, connoting it in its potentialities, quality, and praxis.

The administrative, political, and pedagogical levels also bear shared responsibility for a constant and systematic assessment of the consistency between the principles of the educational project and the organizational choices made.

Particular importance is given to the working conditions and the contractual forms that foster stability, continuity, and a sense of belonging.

## 2.10 Environment, spaces, and relations

The interior and exterior spaces of the infant-toddler centres and preschools are designed and organized in interconnected forms that foster interaction, autonomy, explorations, curiosity, and communication, and are offered as places for the children and for the adults to research and to live together.

The environment interacts with, is modified by, and takes shape in relation to the projects and learning experiences of the children and of the adults in a constant dialogue between architecture and pedagogy.

Care of the furniture, the objects, and the activity spaces by the children and the adults is an educational act that generates psychological well-being, a sense of familiarity and belonging, aesthetics and the pleasure of inhabiting a space, which are also primary premises and conditions for the safety of the environments.

Safety is therefore a quality that is generated by the dialogue and the shared elaboration between the different professionals who are engaged and concerned with this aspect, and who must likewise assess both risk prevention and the richness and quality of the opportunities offered.

## 2.11 Professional development

Professional development is characterized as a process aimed at building understanding and awareness of the meanings and methods of education, the central qualifying points of the educational project, and the specific competencies of the various professional roles. Ongoing professional development is both the right and duty of each individual and of the group, and is included and taken into consideration in the work schedule and organized collectively in terms of its contents, forms, and the methods of participation of each individual.

Professional development is given priority within the daily activity of the

centres and schools through the reflective practices of observation and documentation, with the weekly staff meeting being the primary occasion for in-depth study and sharing.

Professional development takes place synergistically between the staff meetings of the single preschools and infant-toddler centres, the system-wide professional development program of the educational services, and the educational and cultural opportunities provided at the local, national, and international levels.

## 2.12 Assessment

Assessment, being an action aimed at the continuous attribution of meaning and of value, is a structuring process of the educational and administrative experience.

The assessment process is part of the totality of the aspects of scholastic life, including the children's learning, the professionalism of the personnel, the organization and quality of the service; it is understood and proposed as an opportunity to recognize and to negotiate the meanings and intentionalities of the educational project and is configured as a public action of dialogue and interpretation.

To this end, the infant-toddler centres and the preschools make use of specific instruments (for example: the Community-Early Childhood Councils, the pedagogical coordinating team, the work group and the co-presence and co-responsibility of teachers) and practices (for example: documentation, the participation of the families and of the surrounding community, participation in the integrated public system).

# 3

## Part three

### ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR THE OPERATION OF THE INFANT-TODDLER CENTRES AND PRESCHOOLS

#### 3.1 Organisms of participation and co-responsibility

##### 3.1.1 The Community-Early Childhood Council

Each infant-toddler centre and preschool has its own Community-Early Childhood Council formed of parents of the children who attend, educators, the *pedagogista*, and other community members.

The Community-Early Childhood Council represents the basic democratic structure that promotes and contributes to giving public, organized form to the whole of the processes of participation and co-responsibility according to the criteria and the values set forth in the Charter of the Community-Early Childhood Councils.

The Community-Early Childhood Council is elected every three years in a public assembly. In fulfilling its duties and according to the intentions that it aims to pursue, the council may decide upon its own forms of organization.

##### 3.1.2 The *Interconsiglio*

The *Interconsiglio* is the context in which the Community-Early Childhood Councils are coordinated and meet together periodically.

The *Interconsiglio* is composed of representatives from all the Community-Early Childhood Councils of the municipal and the public-private preschools and infant-toddler centres, Reggio Children, the Friends of Reggio Children International Association, the Preschools and Infant-toddler Centres *Istituzione* (President, Director, Board of Directors), and the City Council person of reference.

The *Interconsiglio* serves as a liaison with the city administrators in relation to school policy; it has functions of consulting and making proposals with regard to the principle educational, management, and administrative choices of the *Istituzione*; it promotes the qualitative and quantitative development of the educational services and contributes to the construction of the culture of childhood.

The *Interconsiglio* is convened and presided over by the President of the Preschools and Infant-toddler Centres *Istituzione* and meets at least three times a year.