Handbook for the Self-Evaluation of Early Childhood and Preschool Education Institutions

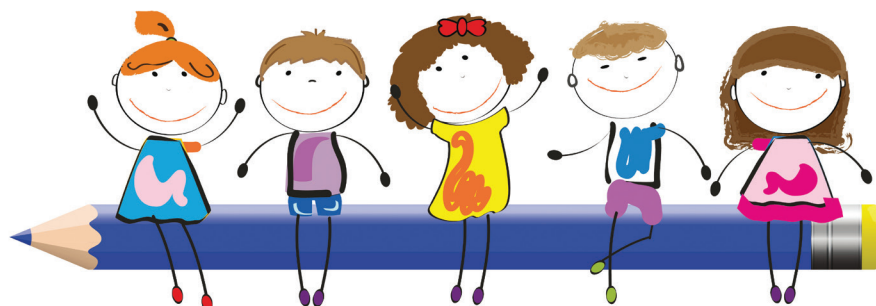National Centre for External Evaluation of Education

Zagreb, 2013

NACIONALNI CENTAR ZA VANJSKO VREDNOVANJE OBRAZOVANJA

Handbook for the Self-Evaluation of Early Childhood and Preschool Education Institutions

Zagreb, 2013

Handbook for the Self-Evaluation of Early Childhood and Preschool Education Institutions

Zagreb, 2013

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

by the Editor-in-Chief

> Man is most nearly himself when he achieves the seriousness of a child at play.
>
> Heraclitus

With the adoption of the EUROPE 2020 Strategy, the European Commission encourages intelligent, sustainable and inclusive growth based on knowledge and innovation, economic growth and social cohesion. The Strategy is also geared at monitoring and developing instruments for economic governance. Both the Lisbon Strategy (2000) and the EUROPE 2020 Strategy include society as a whole and thereby encompass the development of the education system. One of the priorities in this domain in Croatia is the implementation of the external evaluation of learning outcomes as a means to raise discussion on quality and take steps to improve and enhance the education system. The National Centre for External Evaluation of Education (hereinafter: the "Centre") was founded in 2006 as an independent public institution. It is responsible for organising and conducting external evaluation of the education system, for processing and analysing the results, for making proposals for modifications, and for training all participants to use the results and to introduce modifications in the system.

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is part of the Croatian education system and is intended for children from six months of age until school age. The National Curriculum for Preschool, General Compulsory and Secondary School Education is a fundamental document of the education system which provides for the meaningful and balanced integration of all the essential system elements into a single coherent whole (Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, MSES).

From the very beginning, the Centre has encouraged schools to improve the quality of their work through self-evaluation projects and by using the results of external evaluation and related questionnaires. The projects started in 2006 with the first national examinations in gymnasiums and from 2007 in vocational schools, while in 2008 projects were implemented in elementary schools. These projects have proven a great success and have become a regular tool to raise quality in schools. The Centre adds to this success by providing new materials as well as assistance in the school self-evaluation process.

In accordance with the education policy, in 2010 the Centre started the project of self-evaluation of early childhood and preschool education institutions, with the intention of integrating all participants in the system through a unique method of quality evaluation. For this segment of the education system, using the experience gained through the self-evaluation of schools and in cooperation with experts, the Centre developed both a methodology and a range of instruments adjusted to the entire system, yet unique in expression and in addressing the youngest participants of the education system. As "every journey begins with a first step", the systematic education of children starts in the kindergarten. This is why it is necessary to provide support and assistance for these institutions to reach a high quality of provision and to ensure a sound first step for each child.

All future talents or gifts usually come out in children's games.
Miroslav Krleža

As with all assignments, the Centre earnestly approached this joyful population, their parents and the employees of early childhood and preschool education institutions in order to encourage modifications and participation, as well as to provide the best possible beginning of education. We would like to thank the members of the Commission for their professional, devoted and enthusiastic work regarding materials, and all the kindergartens which opened their doors in the phase of the pilot project. We would also like to invite all kindergartens and their participants on a journey of quality as, with the assistance of the Centre, they make use of a self-evaluation methodology.

Jasmina Muraja, PhD
National Centre for External Evaluation of Education

PREFACE

The *Handbook for Self-Evaluation of Early Childhood and Preschool Education Institutions* (hereinafter: the "*Handbook*") is intended for all early childhood institutions, irrespective of the founder (legal entities and natural persons, religious communities, other institutions), its size, pedagogical understanding, and its programmes, etc. The *Handbook* is intended for teams responsible for quality assurance, as well as for all other expert employees of the early childhood and preschool education institution who think and act in terms of quality improvement.

The *Handbook* is designed for the self-evaluation of early childhood and preschool education institutions. It serves as support in monitoring quality and in quality assurance within preschool education. Quality assurance is a continuous process which encompasses all participants related to the education institution and for which all participants of the education process are responsible. Self-evaluation is a process of systematic and continuous monitoring, analysis and evaluation of work efficiency, in which all participants of the education process (children and adults) are effectively involved. It is conducted according to a predetermined methodology and in compliance with predefined criteria (evaluation areas).

The *Handbook* is organised in four main parts. The first part consists of definitions of basic terms: the purpose of early childhood and preschool education as well as the contemporary understanding of the child and the early childhood and preschool education institution. This part explains the concept of quality of early childhood and preschool education providers and the role of external evaluation and self-evaluation. It also includes experiences from Europe and the rest of the world regarding quality assurance in preschool education.

The second part of the *Handbook* identifies the key areas of quality in early childhood and preschool education institutions: strategy, organisational leadership, culture, spatial, material and technical working conditions, sanitary and hygienic conditions and safety, the curriculum and the education process, human resources, collaboration with the local and broader community, as well as the monitoring and evaluation process. Each area is divided into key components, with guidelines for self-evaluation, i.e. quality improvement in each area.

The third part describes the methodology of the self-evaluation of early childhood and preschool education providers. It explains the structure and organisation of quality teams and provides guidelines to observe, and to analyse, the current state of the quality of the institution. It also includes guidelines for making a development plan for the institutions.

The fourth part includes guidelines to monitor quality in priority areas for improvement.

Besides the term *kindergarten*, this *Handbook* also uses the term *early childhood and preschool education institution*. The *Handbook* is written in a gender-neutral form which refers to the male and female gender equally.

Sandra Antulić, MSc (Psychology)
Department for Quality Assurance in Education
National Centre for External Evaluation of Education

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS TO

the early childhood and preschool education institutions

which participated in the pilot project of self-evaluation

KINDERGARTEN IZVOR, ZAGREB

KINDERGARTEN DIDI, DUGO SELO

KINDERGARTEN TRNSKO, ZAGREB

KINDERGARTEN KUSTOŠIJA, ZAGREB

KINDERGARTEN MARKUŠEVEC, ZAGREB

KINDERGARTEN ZRNO, ZAGREB

KINDERGARTEN DJEČJA IGRA, ZAGREB

KINDERGARTEN RAZLIČAK, ZAGREB

KINDERGARTEN RADOST, CRIKVENICA

KINDERGARTEN PAHULJICA, RAB

KINDERGARTEN CVRČAK, MALI LOŠINJ

KINDERGARTEN SI RIN TIN TIN, PULA

KINDERGARTEN RADOST, SPLIT

KINDERGARTEN ČAROBNI PIANINO, SPLIT

CONTENTS

1. QUALITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD AND PRESCHOOL EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

1.1. The purpose of early childhood and preschool education[1]

Preschool education and child care is part of the education system of Croatia, intended for children from six months of age until school age. It is a service organised as a subsystem of education.[2] Early childhood and preschool education and child care are perceived as complementary to family upbringing.

The purpose of early education is to ensure optimal conditions for the successful upbringing and complete development of each child, as well as to improve the skills and talents of the children that start to form at an early age and are necessary during life for individuals to fulfil their needs, exercise their rights and act responsibly towards other members of the community. These skills include: creativity, initiative, independence, self-esteem, situation adaptability, problem solving, building and maintaining quality relationships, collaboration, effective communication, taking responsibility for one's own actions, etc.

One of the basic skills of children that should start to develop at an early age is the self-evaluation of their own actions and overall behaviour. It is a skill that enables children to fulfil their personal needs and to exercise their rights without compromising themselves, others or relationships with others, and shows the path towards the development of responsible behaviour.

---

[1] For simplicity, further in the text the expression "early childhood and preschool education" will be replaced with the expression "early education". "Early age" is considered to be the age of a child until school age, while the term "education", in the broader sense, encompasses a child's education and care.

[2] Preschool Education Act, Official Gazette, No. 10/97 and 107/07.

1.2. What is quality?

The concept of quality can be approached in many ways. Quality can stand for anything that individuals decide to bring into "their quality world";[3] it is culturally defined and has a different meaning for individuals, depending on their experience, interests, beliefs and values.[4]

Quality of life is primarily a psychological category whose formation is influenced by a number of objective (social organisation, dogmas, standards, etc.) and subjective (psychological) factors.

This is why it is so hard to agree on a concept of quality. When it comes to education policy and society's interest in educational results, it is necessary to reach consensus on all education factors, especially in the early childhood and preschool education system (educators, other professionals employed in the early childhood and preschool education institution,[5] principals, children and parents, and the local community).

> The quality of the early education institution is a developmental and not a static category.

This means that once achieved, the level of quality is not permanent – it needs constant maintenance. Reflection and systematic improvement is imperative for every education institution whose quality is constantly increasing or decreasing. Standing still is just an illusion.[6]

Discussion on the quality of an organisation, in the broadest sense, encompasses the form of mutual work and reflection on it, the elements that we evaluate, and the way we measure success.[7]

---

[3] Glasser, 1994.

[4] Jaeckle, 2006.

[5] For simplification, further in the text the expression "early childhood and preschool education institution" will be replaced with the expression "early education institution". This term stands for an education and care institution for children from six months of age until school age.

[6] Stoll and Fink, 2000.

[7] Roberts and Thomson, 2002.

In an early education institution, this is related to:

✓ the mutual work of educators and other professional employees (forming mutual responsibility for the education process, mutual reflection and analysis of education practice, team work, etc.)

✓ the way that educators and other professional employees reflect (on the children, ways of learning, their educational role, education practice as a whole, etc.)

✓ the elements of evaluation in the early education institution (evaluating specific dimensions of education practice, e.g. individual situations, activities and results, or practice as a whole)

✓ the way success is measured in the early education institution (external and/or internal evaluation, the methodology we agree on, etc.).

The quality of an education institution is constantly increasing or decreasing. Standing still is just an illusion.

1.3. Understanding of the child and of the early education institution as prerequisites for quality assurance within the institution

1.3.1. Contemporary understanding of the child and new education paradigms

Contemporary understanding of the child has imposed new paradigms for childhood and education.[8] Accordingly, the child is *a complete being*, which implies comprehensive care, protection, upbringing and education as integral and indivisible processes, understanding the importance of children's quality of life in general and respect for individual and developmental differences among children, as well as their different interests and capabilities. These paradigms also include the child as the *subject of his/her own education*. A child is a social subject who actively influences his/her own development, education and learning, who has his/her own culture and opinion and who is able to plan, organise and control numerous personal activities that will enable him/her to develop intellectual, social, emotional, creative and other potentials.

A child is also *an active, curious and competent being*, i.e. a competent person with different interests and capabilities, knowledge and comprehension, who explores the world and gains knowledge actively, guided by inborn curiosity. Further, a child is *a social being* who starts various purposeful interactions with the environment from his/her birth. Namely, childhood is perceived as a process of social construction in which children and adults participate together and which they mutually create. Finally, a child is *a person with his/her own culture, needs and rights*, which implies acceptance of diversity among children and recognition of their real needs and rights. In fact, every child has the right to equal opportunities and the right to equality in general (respect, acceptance, diversity, education).

---

8 *"New paradigms in early education" is also the title of a scientific project approved by the MSES in 2007. This project stems from the latest scientific knowledge on the development of a child during the first seven years and the importance of the education and care that a child receives during the early period of his/her life. New knowledge about a child, his/her development, education and learning requires the acceptance of a child as an active and competent being who is aware of everything that is going on in his/her environment. New knowledge has redefined early education and enhanced the development of new pedagogical concepts based on the idea of improving relationships between adults and children (in the family and in the institution), the co-construction of the curriculum (based on the idea of an educator as a reflexive practitioner), the early education institution as a learning community, and pedagogical theory which arises from active reflection and education practice research. Within this project, a scientific study under the same name was published in 2011.*

New paradigms in early education interpret childhood as a process of social construction that children and adults mutually create, develop and improve through their active participation and co-existence within the early education institution. Children are active co-creators of their own development, culture, upbringing and education. A prerequisite for this is the establishment of reciprocal communication between children and adults based on equality and respect. Quality communication focuses on the better understanding of children and on respecting their perspective as an appropriate basis to support their development, upbringing and education. Quality upbringing and education are based on the contemporary understanding of the child as a complete being, the subject of his/her own education, an active, curious, intelligent and competent being, a social being and a person with his/her own culture, needs and rights.

> Contemporary understanding of the child and childhood is the basis for the formation of a quality education process in the contemporary early education institution. A quality early education institution is characterised by quality relationships at all social levels, based on the understanding and acceptance of every individual.

Understanding of the child is the starting point for the formation of all segments of the education process, as well as quality of life, upbringing and learning in the early education institution.

1.3.2. Contemporary understanding of the early education institution

The contemporary early education institution is defined as a place with a high quality of life, equal participation and learning among children and adults, where all subjects have the opportunity to practise responsible behaviour (towards themselves, others and the environment in general). The structure of such an early education institution is based on the values of **freedom and respect for each individual** (the child and the adult). In such an institution, attention is paid to ensuring the children's right to equal opportunities and the right to equality in general (respect, acceptance, diversity, education, etc.). As opposed to the traditional understanding of an early education institution as a place where a child

"is raised and educated", the contemporary institution is perceived as a place of mutual learning and self-learning, development and self-development, education and self-education or, in other words, a place for the quality co-existence of equal subjects (children and adults). A major sustaining factor of the contemporary early education institution is the acceptance and practice of continuous learning among all subjects.

A successful early education institution is characterised by quality relationships at all social levels, based on the understanding and acceptance of every individual.

The contemporary early education institution is **democratically structured**, which means that power and responsibility are shared equally between the subjects that become responsible for its overall functioning and quality.

Professional partnership among all employed professionals of the early learning institution is known for its culture of reciprocal and respectful communication between educators and all other subjects and the support given for issues that are directly or indirectly related to the education process. This is seen in mutual reflection and in the conducting and evaluation of the education process, geared towards constant improvement in the quality of that process. The contemporary early education institution embraces pluralism of pedagogical ideas and concepts based on humanistic thoughts as well as on appropriate developmental practices.

It forms the foundation of the child's lifelong learning. This is why it directs the education process towards forms of learning that contribute to this goal. These are active and discovery forms of learning based on the individual exploring, discovering and solving problems, and on collaboration with others.

In the high-quality early education institution, power and responsibility are equally shared between the subjects who become responsible for its overall functioning and quality.

The contemporary early education institution promotes the idea of children's participation in the process of making decisions which affect their education and learning. Children should be encouraged to express themselves through propositions, initiatives and suggestions which will be taken into consideration during their education. In this way, the development of children's civic competences is encouraged, i.e. children are preparing for democratic dialogue with other participants in the process of and in active participation in the life and work of the community.

The contemporary early education institution is characterised by its **openness towards the outside and inside**. Openness of the institution towards the outside implies its connection with the local and broader community, for example the creation of new forms of collaboration with parents, which manifests itself through their active participation in the planning, realisation and evaluation of the education process. It also encompasses the formation of a learning network which includes other subjects (experts in the field of early education, education and related institutions, etc.). Openness of the institution towards the inside relates to the association and collaboration of education groups (children and educators) in order to improve the quality of the education process. It also encompasses the building of a collaborative environment and team work among educators and other employed professionals, as well as the development of mutual responsibility for the children, premises and the education process.

Every institution is a "living system"[9] consisting of numerous interdependent elements (subsystems) whose continuous interactions define its characteristics. None of these elements can be grasped without an understanding of all other elements that influence it.

One of the subsystems within the early education institution is the education group as a homogenous, unique union of children and adults. It has an authentic culture[10] defined by the composition of children, parents and educators and by the quality of the learning environment. A high-quality learning environment within the education group in the early education institution reflects the contemporary understanding of the child. It also implies the quality of the conditions in which a child has an opportunity to make various interactions with his/her material and social environment, gain numerous valuable experiences and develop different competences.

---

[9] Strozzi, 2002.
[10] Vujičić, 2011.

1.4. Evaluation as an essential element of quality assurance in early education institutions

The specific characteristics and vulnerability of children at an early age require a high level of quality in early education institutions. The quality of these institutions is affected by different elements (environment, climate, leadership, relationships, communication, beliefs, values, attitudes, etc.) necessary for the complete development and education of a child. Since quality is a result of methodical and planned activities, it is necessary to determine standards (criteria, quality indicators) and use them in continuous analyses of education practice, i.e. to highlight its positive sides and identify and improve its "critical points".

In this way, the activity of individuals and of the whole institution is directed towards the elimination of the identified weaknesses and the continuous improvement of the existing conditions. Continuous reflection and evaluation of the quality of education practice ensures the constant improvement and development of the institution. **The purpose of evaluation** in the institution[11] is to:

- ✓ promote responsibility among all individuals in the institution, as well as the institution as a whole (practitioners are aware that they are responsible for the development, upbringing and education of children; institutions are aware that they are responsible for ensuring the conditions necessary for appropriate improvement; and all of them together are aware that they are responsible for the overall quality and development of the institution)

- ✓ provide useful indicators of what has been accomplished and what needs to be improved (identifying the positive sides and "critical points" is a starting point to improve quality)

- ✓ ensure equal conditions for all children (e.g. younger children in relation to older ones, one ethnic group in relation to the other, children from families with a low socio-economic status and children with difficulties in relation to the other children, etc.)

- ✓ determine trends in the quality improvement of the institution (practitioners, and the institution as a whole, need to know if their quality is decreasing or increasing with regard to the history, context and culture of the institution).

---

[11] Stoll and Fink, 2000.

With regard to the form of evaluation, there is an **internal** (inside) and **external** (outside) approach. These approaches differ according to the subjects that conduct the evaluation. Internal evaluation is conducted by those within the institution that directly or indirectly participate in the education process (educators and other employed professionals, parents, children, principals, factors of the local community, etc.), while external evaluation is conducted by the factors outside the institution (the Centre, institutes, associations, the Ministry, national or international experts, etc.). Since the evaluation is conducted by those *inside* and *outside*, who are also responsible for its high-quality functioning, it is necessary to determine the criteria for the evaluation of quality of the early education institution.

The education process in the early education setting is very dynamic and complex and depends on a number of factors (size, conditions, location, vision, human resources, founder, organisation, etc.) which are specific for each institution and for each education group. Common valid parameters (criteria/indicators/standards) are reference points according to which internal quality evaluation, i.e. **internal evaluation**, is conducted. A significant element of internal quality evaluation is the ability of everyone in the education process (adults and children) to engage in continuous and high-quality (self-)evaluation. Constant "work on oneself", with the goal of improving personal and professional performance, provides a suitable model for the children to help them towards self-improvement, i.e. for the self-regulation of their own behaviour and to build quality relationships with their peers and others inside and outside the institution.

> Constant "work on oneself", with the goal of improving personal and professional performance, is the obligation of educators and other participants in the process and also a postulate in work with children.

Besides internal evaluation, early education institutions are subject to constant **external evaluation** with criteria which are harmonised and determined in advance. Internal and external quality evaluation of early education institutions encompasses the institution as a whole (the totality of its performance, including its legal regulation, the application of pedagogical standards, programme diversity, etc.) as well as its individual segments (for example, monitoring children's improvement, respecting children's and parents' rights, the inclusion of children with difficulties, professional training of experts employed in the institution, etc.).

The limitation of the internal evaluation model is that individuals in the institution (and the whole institution) are not able to identify their weaknesses easily since they are "too close" to the problems to diagnose them. In this sense, the external factors can warn about significant problems which should not be overlooked on the path towards quality improvement. The limitation of the external, standardised evaluation model is its insufficient sensitivity to the specific context,[12] i.e. the particular features of a particular institution. It can also create pressure and thereby inhibit the creative and critical thought of the practitioner, especially if the model identifies itself with the inspection model of evaluation, the goal of which does not include giving direction related to quality improvement. Therefore, institutions which combine internal and external evaluation are able to consolidate the best features of both approaches.

Determining criteria for the evaluation of early education institutions is the obligation of experts in the institutions, as well as the education authority, the creators of educational policy and especially independent state bodies (the Centre). Besides mutually agreed standards, each early education institution can determine its own (additional) standards which fulfil its specific needs and match its unique features.

1.4.1. Self-evaluation as a key element of quality assurance in early education institutions

The starting point in the quality improvement process of particular institutions and the entire early childhood and preschool education and care system is to initiate change and improve the system from the inside. Real quality improvement comes from the inside and is not imposed from the outside.[13]

Contemporary early education institutions accept responsibility for the quality of life and work in the institution. Therefore, the self-evaluation of individuals, as they carry out all the processes in the institution, becomes more important. Self-evaluation is a systematic, internal and definite process and its goal is to illuminate the current state of the institution, determine its positive achievements, detect problems and suggest solutions and improvement strategies. The focus on quality implies continuous professional reflection throughout the education process – self-evaluation and work on the quality improvement of individual segments and of the institution as a whole.[14]

---

[12] Petrović-Sočo, 2009.
[13] Stoll and Fink, 2000.
[14] Ljubetić, 2009.

Self-evaluation is systematic, planned and organised action which includes all participants (children and adults) in the education process. It is conducted according to a predetermined methodology and in compliance with predefined criteria (evaluation areas).

Continuous self-evaluation of one's own education practice, as a first step on the path to its improvement, is the obligation of all participants in the education process.

> Real quality improvement in the early education institution comes from the inside and is not imposed from the outside.

1.5. Reference points in evaluation and self-evaluation - experiences from Europe and the rest of the world

The Commission of national experts in the field of education, designated by the Education Ministers of the European Union and of acceding countries (Prague, 1998), suggested 16 quality indicators for education which cover four broad areas: *attainment* (mathematics, reading, foreign languages, learning to learn, science, etc.), *success and transition* (from one education level to another), *monitoring of school education* (parental participation, steering of school education) and *resources and structures* (educational expenditure per student, education and training of teachers, participation in pre-primary education, number of students per computer). The suggested indicators, as an integral part of *the European Report on the Quality of School Education*, are considered an important European contribution to national evaluations in the field of education standards.[15]

The **National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAYEC)**[16] emphasises the key points of quality in the form of different self-evaluation protocols. The first category comprises criteria related to *children's learning and development* (including relationships, curriculum, learning and teaching, the assessment of child progress, health). The second category encompasses criteria related to the *educator* (qualifications, knowledge and professional commitment), the third category is related to the *family and community partners*, while the fourth category includes questions related to the *physical environment of the institution and its leadership and management*. These areas (*educators, children, parents, leadership, community and overall context*) are considered crucial for the quality functioning of the entire system and of each unit (institution) within the system. In some of these areas (*educator, child, parent, relationships, context*), the individual can make the greatest contribution to the improvement of the current state.

---

[15] www.ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/indic/back_en.html.
[16] http://www.naeyc.org/academy/primary/standardsintro.

The curriculum for early childhood education and care in New Zealand, **Te Whāriki**,[17] is characterised by an interesting approach to evaluation and self-evaluation. In this curriculum, the process of determining quality implies evaluations and the self-evaluation of children. The basic principles, shown as evaluation areas, are divided into four groups:

1. *empowerment* (evaluation is considered a two-way process in which evaluations of children and adults contribute to improving the development and learning conditions and help children to perceive themselves as responsible and competent students)

2. *holistic development* (learning is considered an integrated process based on respect of the child and on the development of his/her curiosity, confidence, independence and responsibility. It is very hard to measure these qualities, so evaluation in this respect is mostly based on listening to children and monitoring them)

3. *family and community* (the quality of associating and of realised partnership between the institution and the family and community is evaluated through the process of two-way communication)

4. *relationships* (children are educated and raised by means of responsive and reciprocal relationships with other people, children and things, which is considered the key area of evaluation).

The Te Whāriki process of the self-evaluation of children[18] includes a number of questions which express crucial values, i.e. the philosophy of the curriculum:

✓   *Belonging*: "Do you know me?" (Do you respect my interests and capabilities, as well as the capabilities of my family?)

✓   *Well-being:* "Can I trust you?" (Do you fulfil my everyday needs carefully and considerately?)

✓   *Exploration:* "Do you let me fly?" (Do you encourage me to think, and do you ensure enough challenges for me to spread my horizons?)

---

[17] http://www.northcotecreche.org.nz/pdf/whariki.pdf.
[18] According to Curtis and Carter, 2008.

✓ *Communication:* "Do you hear me?" (Do you encourage communication with me; do you understand my questions and needs?)

✓ *Contribution:* "Is this place fair for us?" (Do you make me feel comfortable in this place, as a valid member of a group?)

The examples above serve only as an illustration, since the implementation of foreign evaluation models in our education system is not possible. In the process of the creation, improvement and evaluation of pedagogical practice, it is necessary to respect cultural, traditional, religious, civilisation, natural and social achievements of the surroundings in which the institution functions. Only then can the quality indicators ensure high-quality self-evaluation of the current pedagogical practice of early education and guarantee a firm starting point for its improvement.

1.6. Evaluation and self-evaluation in Croatia

One of the basic human rights is the right to education. An ethical principle which is integrated in the most important national documents is the equal access of all citizens to quality education. The approach to quality assurance in education is characterised by monitoring quality and improving each education institution, including primary and secondary schools, as well as early education institutions.

One of the strategic goals in the development of the education system in Croatia, included in *The Education Sector Development Plan 2005 – 2010*, with early education as its integral part,[19] is the implementation of the external evaluation of education. External evaluation focuses primarily on monitoring the quality of educational achievements and pays less attention to identifying the quality of the process which precedes the achievements. Self-evaluation deals with processes, relationships and conditions within which the education process is realised. The goal of self-evaluation is to systematically determine the current state of different quality areas regarding the work of the institution, to identify the advantages and disadvantages of the education practice and to encourage the institution to improve quality. The purpose of setting this strategic goal in Croatia is to improve the education system at all levels and to align it with existing European education guidelines. These guidelines are based on the Lisbon Declaration (2000) whose major goal is the improvement of education quality, strategic planning and the development of lifelong learning.

The legal basis for quality assurance in education can be found in the Primary and Secondary Education Act,[20] the Preschool Education Act[21] and in documents regarding state pedagogical standards for all three levels of the education system: preschool,[22] primary school[23] and secondary school.[24]

A key role in the promotion of education quality in Croatia is taken by the National Centre for External Evaluation of Education whose task is the implementation of external evaluation in the Croatian education system.

---

[19] The Education Sector Development Plan 2005 – 2010, MSES.
[20] The Primary and Secondary Education Act, Official Gazette, No. 87/08 and 86/09.
[21] The Preschool Education Act, Official Gazette, No. 10/97 and 107/07.
[22] The State Pedagogical Standard of Preschool Education, Official Gazette, No. 63/08 and 90/10.
[23] The State Pedagogical Standard of Primary Education, Official Gazette, No. 63/08 and 90/10.
[24] The State Pedagogical Standard of Secondary Education, Official Gazette, No. 63/08 and 90/10.

Besides this, other tasks of the Centre are:

✓ conducting advisory work within schools – supporting schools in self-evaluation and development based on the results of standardised testing

✓ suggesting guidelines to the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports for the permanent improvement of education quality, based on the analyses of evaluation.

From the beginning of its work, the Centre has been developing an external evaluation methodology according to existing models from all around the world and it aligns these models with the current needs in Croatia. As support to quality assurance in education, the Centre develops school self-evaluation projects. The self-evaluation project in secondary schools started in 2006, after the first national examinations in gymnasiums, and it has been conducted in gymnasiums and vocational schools from 2007. At the same time, a network of associates, who give support to institutions during the self-evaluation process, is being developed. On the basis of the self-evaluation experience in secondary schools, a self-evaluation project in primary school started in 2008 and has lasted until the present day.

The Centre has an advisory role in the quality assurance process and provides a self-evaluation framework within which it develops a methodology and instruments for the self-evaluation of institutions.

The Centre also provides support during the analysis and interpretation of the self-evaluation results and in monitoring improvement in the quality of work of education institutions. Professional training also falls within the scope of the Centre, with the goal of strengthening the institutions' organisational structures responsible for quality evaluation and monitoring (quality teams). The role of the Centre is not to compare or classify education institutions according to the results of external evaluation or self-evaluation, but to provide support during the processes of quality assurance and improvement. During these processes, the Centre collects and analyses data which serve as guidelines for the improvement of educational policy, in order to ensure equal conditions for the development of each individual at all levels of the education system.

In 2010, on the basis of the experience gained through self-evaluation in primary and secondary schools and with the formation of the Commission for the development of a methodology and of instruments for quality monitoring in early childhood and preschool education institutions (hereinafter: "the Commission"), the Centre started to implement

self-evaluation at the early childhood and preschool education level. In this way, the entire education system, comprising preschool, primary and secondary level, is included.

The main goal of the Commission is to develop instruments and a methodology for the quality evaluation of early education institutions for the purpose of monitoring these institutions and for their improvement. The Commission uses guidelines which, at the same time, justify the need for the implementation of the project. These guidelines set the course towards:

- ✓ a systematic approach to improving quality

- ✓ a legal framework which prescribes self-evaluation for early education institutions

- ✓ recognising the importance of early education (a critical period for the development and growth of a child)

- ✓ awareness of the contradiction between the results of scientific studies and theoretical models on the one hand, and their implementation in practice on the other

- ✓ the protection of quality regarding every child, which means that every child has the right to quality care and a good start

- ✓ equal early education conditions for every child

- ✓ raising the awareness of key participants in early education about quality standards

- ✓ raising the quality of practitioners' work

- ✓ setting a self-evaluation framework

- ✓ making comparisons at micro and macro levels

- ✓ bringing home the fact that quality is obligatory and requires continuous work.

The preparation of early education institutions, in all aspects of their work, to conduct high-quality self-evaluation is a prerequisite for them to evaluate and improve the quality of their work. The current material was created precisely to achieve this goal.

2. KEY AREAS OF QUALITY

Key areas of quality in the early education institution are related to different segments of work. These areas are:

- ✓ strategy

- ✓ organisational leadership

- ✓ culture

- ✓ spatial, material and technical working conditions

- ✓ sanitary and hygienic working conditions and safety

- ✓ curriculum and the education process

- ✓ human resources

- ✓ collaboration with the local and broader community

- ✓ the monitoring and evaluation process.

These areas of quality cover different levels of the early education institution which directly influence the quality of life for children, employees, parents, the local community and other key participants. Although the areas of quality overlap, each area consists of key components on which emphasis is placed in the guidelines to ensure improvement. Each area also contains self-evaluation guidelines, which encompass questions that require reflection. Sources of information are also provided that can serve as the basis for discussing the quality of the areas.

2.1. Strategy in the early education institution

Strategy is a means of accomplishing a certain goal or purpose, i.e. the clear direction we take, and determining the potential means of reaching our goal and attaining a certain value. The strategy of the early education institution is one of the conditions for its efficiency and an indicator of the achievement of a high quality of education. It is a guideline for all employees to take personal and professional responsibility on the path to improving the quality of education.

If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got.[25]

Strategic planning in the early education institution can help focus the vision and priorities with regard to the changeable surroundings to ensure that employees work together on the realisation of common goals. It is a systematic process whereby employees are directed towards real priorities and their sense of responsibility is raised for the priorities, which are crucial for the realisation of the mission of the institution and for the improvement of its work. Strategic planning in the early education institution cannot be imposed from the outside. It is created only if individuals in the institution (especially the principal) want to apply strategic and critical thinking in order to improve their work by implementing innovations for the purposes of the personal professional development of all educators and other professionals. Under these circumstances, the early education institution becomes the place of mutual continuous learning of children, educators, members of professional teams, principals and parents, i.e. it becomes a learning organisation.

2.1.1. Personal and shared vision

Vision is a set of individuals' values and beliefs which form their view of a desirable future. Each participant's vision of the life and work of the institution forms his/her sense of a desirable future for it, i.e. for the possibilities of its development.

---

[25] Stoll and Fink, 2000.

The continuous encouragement of employees of the early education institution to build a **personal vision** allows for the crystallisation of new understanding and the creation of a **shared vision** which drives their actions in the desired direction. Employees have the right to a personal vision of the institution's development, but they also have the obligation to collaborate on the creation of common value systems, i.e. on the development of a shared vision. The goals of attaining quality can be seen differently from different perspectives, i.e. from the point of view of educators, principals, members of a professional team, etc. Hence, it is important to develop part of their shared perspective which leads to acceptance of the idea that the quality of the early education institution reflects the realisation of a long-term plan which is known as continuous change and improvement. The discrepancy between the vision and the current state of the institution is actually a source of energy that is necessary for its development.

A shared vision is the first step in building trust and in working together in order to create a common identity.[26]

A shared vision provides a sense of purpose and understanding of the goal that needs to be achieved, and this leads to the coordination of educators' actions among themselves and with the actions of other professionals employed in the early education institution. In order to mobilise their energy in the process of quality development, they need as far as possible to be "on the same wavelength,"[27] to complement each other and to work together. Quality development in the early education institution depends on the compatibility of the actions of all employees. A shared vision is "a rudder that keeps the course"[28] in the process of quality improvement. It reflects those things that make every early education institution unique and different. Even when the vision is shared, employees can have different opinions about it.[29] In the stage of accepting the vision, employees can express:

- ✓ **commitment** (they want to realise the vision and they create whatever structures are needed)

- ✓ **enrolment** (they want to realise the vision and they will do whatever can be done in the spirit of the law)

---

[26] Senge, 2003.
[27] Senge, 2003.
[28] Senge, 2003.
[29] Senge, 2003.

✓ ***genuine compliance*** (they see the benefits of the vision and they will do everything expected, and even more)

✓ ***formal compliance*** (on the whole, they see the benefits of the vision, they will do what is expected and no more)

✓ ***grudging compliance*** (they do not see the benefits of the vision; they will do what is expected because they have to, but will also let it be known that they are not really on board)

✓ ***noncompliance*** (they do not see the benefits of the vision and will not do what is expected)

✓ ***apathy*** (they are neither for nor against the vision; they have no interest and no energy for change).
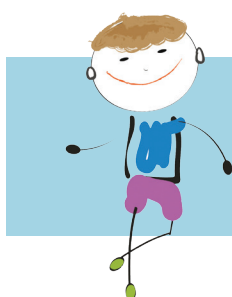
You leverage long-term vision
to endure short-term sacrifices.[30]

A shared vision forms, develops and strengthens during shared reflections, discussions and analyses of the education practice in the early education institution. During shared discussions, educators and other employed professionals question, awaken and coordinate their own values and beliefs which form the basis of all aspects of the education process. In this way, they participate in the co-construction of the vision, i.e. in its adjustment to shared values. By means of shared discussions, educators are able to move from respect of the vision, to acceptance, and eventually to commitment.[31]

2.1.2. Mission

The mission is a quest, i.e. the main purpose and function of a particular organisation. The mission of the education institution mirrors the task which society has assigned to it, but also its culture and development. The mission of an education institution is an articulation of the values represented by the institution, i.e. ***the materialisation of its***

---

[30] Maxwell, 2003.
[31] Senge, 2003.

education philosophy. In the early education institution, the mission should be coordinated with the basic principles of contemporary education. For example, it can include the creation of better conditions for children's learning and education, more efficient educators' work, the continuous professional development of employees, the improvement of the quality of partnership with parents and the broader community, or similar goals that lead to the welfare of its members. The mission builds enthusiasm for the future development and channels the energy and loyalty of employees. According to the mission, as a reference point, decisions are made, the strategy and developmental policy are determined and work is evaluated.

The realisation of the mission depends on whether the mission is known and clear to all employees and on how much the employees are dedicated to it, i.e. in what way and how far they contribute to its realisation.

> The mission is a powerful tool for translating an imaginary, ideal picture of the early education institution into reality.

The vision and mission assist the early education institution in defining its own orientation and in building its own identity.

However, they should be coordinated with the values which are based on the contemporary understanding of the child and childhood, as well as on the values contained in the National Curriculum Framework (NCF).[32]

2.1.3. Values

Educators' opinions and attitudes about children are based on the values which influence the entire formation of the conditions for the education of children in the early education institution. Therefore, the process of quality development in these institutions begins with the creation of the conditions in which educators, expert associates and other participants have the opportunity to acquaint themselves with their personal values and the values of their colleagues, as well as to discuss and transform them, guided by the

---

[32] National Curriculum Framework for Preschool Education, General Compulsory and Secondary Education, 2010.

shared vision.[33] Creating the conditions which encourage educators to awaken their personal attitudes and values is an important prerequisite for them to be revised and modified. This, therefore, has to be part of the educators' professional training. Namely, "professional development must engage teacher's beliefs (...) [S]ince beliefs filter knowledge and guide behaviour, significant transformations of teaching practice are unlikely to occur if they are ignored".[34]

The formation of the education process of the early education institution should also include values contained in the NCF. These values include *knowledge* (preparing children for lifelong learning, understanding and critical thinking, coping with new circumstances, etc.), *solidarity* (training children to show concern for other people and the environment), *identity* (strengthening the child's personal, cultural and national identity, building respect for differences), and *responsibility* (inciting the active participation of children in social life, the development of responsible behaviour, of personal freedom and personal responsibility).

The whole area of the strategy of the early education institution is the backbone of the institution's work. The attitudes and actions of individuals strongly influence the overall work and development of the institution and focus on the shared vision and devotion to the mission.

Consequently, this area of quality is vital for understanding the philosophy which lies behind the processes which the institution conducts. The mission, vision and values are elements from which the institution draws guidelines for everyday planning and for the realisation and evaluation of the achievements. The guidelines for the development of the institution and for the realisation of its goals also come from this area of quality.

The strategy of the early education institution is important for all *key participants* of the process: the *principal*, who runs the institution; *educators, expert associates and other employees*, whose everyday work contributes to the realisation of the mission, vision and values; *parents*, who choose the institution in order to give their child the opportunity to have a high-quality education; the *local community*, that lives with and in the institution; and the *governing council*, which makes decisions that are important for the future of the institution.

---

[33] Slunjski, 2006.
[34] Valli and Hawley, 2002.

Self-evaluation of this area includes reflection on the following key questions.

Is there a developed vision and mission in our institution?

Do the vision and mission correspond to what we are and what we want to be?

Are all participants acquainted with them?

Do the vision and mission make our institution recognisable?

Do we live this vision and mission every day?

How do we do so?

When reflecting on the quality of this area, the following can be useful **sources of information**:

✓ results of questionnaires developed by the Centre for principals, educators, the expert team, administrative, technical and other staff, the governing council and parents, and obtained in the process of self-evaluation of early education institutions

✓ website of the institution

✓ notice boards and other means of information for parents and other participants

✓ annual report of the early education institution

✓ other sources.

2.2. Organisational leadership in the early education institution

Quality organisational leadership of the institution is based on knowledge and wisdom, not on the position and power of the leader,[35] i.e. the principal. A key feature of high-quality organisational leadership is the equal distribution of power and responsibility among all employees of the institution, instead of problem solving "from above". Good leadership is not directed towards the control of people and processes within the institution, but towards the development of relationships, the strengthening of partnerships and the development of teams and learning networks. Instead of dictatorial and autocratic decision making, employees of the institution should be encouraged to participate in the process of decision making and to find different problem-solving strategies. Quality leadership is the art of influencing people to do what is required willingly, readily, reliably, intensively and efficiently.[36]

Successful leaders do not stand behind the group in order to push it, but they stand in front of it in order to inspire it and ease its progress.[37]

In order to develop such an approach, the principal of the institution should question his/her understanding of leadership and redefine power in the institution where this is needed. The forms of **power distribution** in the leadership of the institution can be on several levels:[38]

✓ traditional delegation of power (the principal gives tasks to employees, but he/she is not concerned with the development of their capacity for the creation of a shared vision)

✓ progressive delegation of power (the principal shares power with a certain number of associates, different mediators and with all others)

[35] Senge et al., 2007.
[36] Staničić, 2006.
[37] Staničić, 2006.
[38] Hargreaves and Fink, 2006.

✓ guided distribution of power (there is a professional learning community which is supported and maintained by the principal, but it depends on the duration of his/her mandate)

✓ emergent distribution of power (the creation of permanent change in the institution by the formation of the community which learns in the strict sense of the word – "a community of continuous inquiry and improvement")

✓ assertive distribution of power (the principal focuses on achieving deeper and sometimes even riskier changes in the institution, and the educators and the expert team support him/her actively, united in the realisation of the mission and ready to confront possible bureaucratic obstacles on the path to change).

Quality organisational leadership focuses on the formation and strengthening of the shared vision in the institution. The absence of a shared vision, i.e. the discrepancy between the values and attitudes of all professionals employed in the early education institution, including the principal, is a big problem on the path to the development of quality. Quality organisational leadership leads to the development of a collaborative culture which includes democratic decision making based on consensus, on the distribution of duties, but also on the shared (open) responsibility and equal rights of all participants in the education process. It implies the possibility for all subjects to participate in making decisions regarding key matters in the work and development of the institution. After all, decision making is based on the strength of the arguments of the people who make them.

Efficient principals ensure professional development and learning for all employees of the institution they lead, but they also invite themselves professionally.[39]

This kind of leadership implies the continuous professional training of employees. Without intensive professional training, educators are not able to keep up with their surroundings. In such a case, the principal could be held responsible for the potential

[39] Stoll and Fink, 2000

professional and pedagogical inferiority of the educators and of other professionals employed in the institution.[40]

The quality of life of children and other participants in the processes of the early education institution depends on the quality of their relationships. As already mentioned, **the area of organisational leadership** is directed towards the development of relationships, the strengthening of partnerships and the development of teams and learning networks, while the employees should be encouraged to participate in the process of decision making and to find different problem solving strategies. This area comprises communication models at different levels within the institution, the accessibility of "the administration", openness to employees' proposals and suggestions, work ethics, problem solving strategies, openness to new ideas and working methods, etc.

The organisational leadership of the institution is important to all *key participants* in the process: the *principal*, who guides the institution in the desired direction; *educators, expert associates and other employees*, whose everyday work is conducted within particular organisational frameworks, and the *governing council*, which makes decisions that are important for the future of the institution.

Self-evaluation of this area includes reflection on the following key questions.

Is the organisational leadership of our institution successful?

Is all of the information important for my work in the institution available to me?

Is the principal of our institution open to suggestions?

Is team work encouraged in the institution?

Do we deal with problem situations in our institution as a team?

Can I contribute to the realisation of shared goals?

---

[40] Staničić, 2006.

When reflecting on the quality of this area, the following can be useful **sources of information**:

- ✓ results of questionnaires and self-evaluation processes

- ✓ statute of the institution

- ✓ records

- ✓ other sources.

2.3. Culture in the early education institution

The totality of conditions which define the quality of education in the early education institution is named differently: *climate,*[41] *atmosphere* or *ethos,*[42] i.e. *culture.*[43]

Climate is created as a result of the frequent use of particular education procedures, as well as interpersonal relationships among the children, the relationship between children and educators and between educators and other professionals employed in the institution. The social climate is the quality of all the relationships among the participants of the education process, while the emotional climate is the predominance of the pleasant or unpleasant emotions which the participants of the education process feel.[44] The concept of *climate* is usually associated with inquiries into the efficiency of the education institution, the concept of *culture* with inquiries into the improvement of efficiency, and *ethos* pictures its basic quality.[45] Ethos is the characteristic spirit of a particular community which affects the nature and quality of the children's education and learning.

All these concepts (*climate, atmosphere, ethos*) actually constitute the concept of *culture*, which signifies the set of basic assumptions made by a particular institution while developing its work to achieve its goals.

The culture of the early education institution includes the norms and the expectations of educators and other employees, their rights and obligations, the roles and relationships of all members of the institution, which influence all formal and informal interactions between adults and children.[46] Employees of a particular institution define their own culture as a specific "way of living the life" determined by shared rituals, routines, norms and values, as well as people's usual behaviour. The normal sequence of everyday events in the institution shapes its authenticity and identity. In fact, the culture ensures the models of identity and work of its members.[47] It is sometimes compared with the lens through which we see, i.e. interpret, the education reality of a particular institution.[48] The culture should be thoroughly viewed in its multiple dimensions since all its factors are connected in multiple ways.

[41] Prosser, 1999; Domović, 2003.
[42] Prosser, 1999; Hopkins, 2001; Domović, 2003.
[43] Prosser, 1999; Leithwood, 2002; Sušanj, 2005; Vujičić, 2011.
[44] Bognar and Matijević, 1993.
[45] Prosser, 1999.
[46] Moran, 1998.
[47] Bruner, 2000.
[48] Stoll, 1999.

Changing the culture of the organisation means changing members' basic attitudes developed during their career.[49]

Every early education institution is composed of a variety of interactively associated organisational structures (physical, temporal and social), which are based on deeper levels of its culture (educators' attitudes, values, beliefs, etc.). In fact, behind every organisational structure are particular aspects of its culture[50] which provide the anchorage, sense and justification of each structure. Organisational features and legitimacy in a particular institution and which are the result of its culture are not necessarily valid in some other institution. The culture of a particular institution is a sort of filter which determines what is possible and desirable, or impossible and undesirable in the institution. It is hard to generalise on these "unwritten rules of living" in a particular institution and make them applicable in all institutions. This is why it is not possible to reproduce the quality of an education practice, i.e. to simply transfer it from one early education institution to another. Changing the culture of an institution is a subtle and complex process and there is no recipe or standardised formula for doing so. Any attempt to improve the quality of an early education institution cannot lead to a desirable result unless an understanding of its culture is taken into consideration.

2.3.1. Collaborative culture in the early education institution

Collaboration is an important dimension of quality development in the early education institution since high quality educational practice is always a collective, not an individual, achievement;[51] it is created by all participants proportionally to the practitioners' ability to identify and apply the (different) ideas and knowledge of their co-workers as the most valuable potential of (shared) development.

Hence, the quality of work of each employee during a particular period should be seen in the context of other employees' work, just like the contribution of a particular instrument within an orchestra is evaluated according to its contribution to the harmony of the whole.

---

[49] Senge et al., 2003.
[50] Hargreaves, 1999.
[51] Fullan, 2001.

A collaborative climate in the institution is a prerequisite for the development of **shared responsibility** for children, premises and the entire education process.

Each employee bears responsibility for the quality of the education process to the extent to which the employee's work is adjusted to the work of others and to the extent to which he/she contributes to the achievement of the shared goal (short-term and long-term). The educational work of each educator and other employed professionals is greatly determined by their values, beliefs and attitudes. Individuals are not always aware of them, but, whether or not they are, these values, beliefs and attitudes govern their work.[52]

Quality education practice is always a collective,
not individual achievement.

The culture of dialogue, i.e. the professional discussions of all professionals employed in the education institution about their values and beliefs, has a great influence on the development of the quality of their practice. The changing structural dimensions of education practice (e.g. the reorganisation of space and time, the supply of equipment, etc.), if they do not change employees' attitudes and ways of thinking, can only result in superficial and temporary improvements in education practice. Structures are adaptable, but, without a parallel change in values, the achieved change is always insignificant.[53]

The culture of open discussions and dialogue does not occur by accident and it cannot be introduced by force. It is necessary to create **a climate of mutual trust** among all participants of the education process in order to introduce a culture of open discussion and dialogue. Before such a climate is created, individuals may have no wish to discuss delicate questions (which are crucial for the improvement of the quality of education practice) since they are afraid to disturb their relationships with colleagues, the expert team and the principal, i.e. they are afraid that they will be judged, criticised or even sanctioned. Therefore, a collaborative culture in an institution is characterised by the sense of the psychological security of all employees. This is necessary so that mistakes, misunderstandings, or outdated work methods can be acknowledged, to oneself and to others, without the risk of this confession resulting in a sense of discomfort and failure.

---

[52] Malaguzzi, 1998.
[53] Stoll and Fink, 2000.

In open discussions, educators have the opportunity to unpack "the baggage of their attitudes, beliefs and practice which they have carried around for a long time without questioning".[54]

This kind of security encourages employees to start an open dialogue, i.e. to take the risk of exposing their opinions, attitudes, beliefs and ways of working to the judgement of others. Despite the diversity of opinions, a sense of security and acceptance is created through the culture of conversation, i.e. dialogue in which attitudes or actions are judged and analysed without attacks on personal integrity.

A collaborative culture makes room for shared reflection and planning, as well as shared interpretation and understanding of the education process. It enables the high-quality professional bonding of all employees and **team work** which are necessary to achieve quality in the early education institution. In order for a group of people to make a team, they need to have a shared vision, take mutually connected actions and possess complementary skills.[55]

In order for a group of people to make a team, they need to have a shared vision, take mutually connected actions and possess complementary skills.[56]

This is why professional development should include all employees of the institution, not just the chosen or highly motivated individuals.

---

[54] Lieberman and Miller, 2002.
[55] Rogers, 2006.
[56] Rogers, 2006.

High-quality professional connections and the collaboration of all participants in the education process are reflected in the practice [57] and are characterised by:

- ✓ strong connections, the co-dependence of actions and shared responsibility (e.g. for all children, premises and the overall education process in the institution)

- ✓ mutual contribution and engagement in the process of improving education practice and the curriculum

- ✓ readiness to participate in the process of change and assistance in "tough" situations

- ✓ readiness to give information to co-workers and to receive their feedback.

The development of a collaborative culture in the institution can be encouraged in specific ways, by specific structural conditions (regarding time, space, responsibility, communication, autonomy in decision making) and also by cultural conditions (which imply openness to change, trust, mutual respect, etc.).[58] An important dimension in the development of quality is the development of collaborative relationships, i.e. the development and strengthening of mutual trust among educators and other employed professionals, giving mutual support connected to issues which are directly or indirectly related to the education process, shared problem solving and polite, two-way, reciprocal and respectful communication among all participants in the process.

The culture of the early education institution is important for all *key participants* in the process: the *principal*, who ensures the conditions for the quality climate within the institution; *educators, expert associates and other employees*, who work and live in the institution every day, and the *governing council*, which makes decisions that are important for the future of the institution.

---

[57] Modified according to Fullan and Hargreaves, 1991.
[58] Little, 2002

Self-evaluation of this area includes reflection on the following key questions.

Is my work environment comfortable and encouraging?

Is the work environment important to me?

Am I satisfied with communication with educators, the expert team, the principal, the administrative, technical and other staff?

Am I satisfied with collaboration with educators, the expert team, the principal, the administrative, technical and other staff?

Do we develop collaborative relationships?

Do we treat each other in a professional manner?

Do we appreciate the individuality of each other?

Are my relationships with colleagues more supportive than conflictual, more often collaborative than competitive, do I more often feel trust than scepticism?

When reflecting on the quality of this area, the following can be useful **sources of information:**

✓ results of questionnaires and self-evaluation processes

✓ annual report of the institution

✓ annual programme and plan

✓ other sources.

2.4. Spatial, material and technical working conditions

Elements of **spatial, material and technical working conditions** are determined by the State Pedagogical Standard[59] which defines criteria regarding the number of children in education groups, the number of educators, expert associates and other employees in the early education institution as well as material and financial working conditions, criteria regarding the equipment in the institution and didactic resources and materials. The quality of this area can be evaluated on the basis of the level of coordination between the spatial, material and technical elements of work and the regulated standard. Key elements are listed below.

The building in which early education is conducted should ensure a pedagogical, aesthetic and encouraging environment for the education of young children, from six months of age until school age, and meet all the hygienic and technical requirements as well as the basic ecological and aesthetic criteria.

The premises include rooms for educational groups, a cloakroom, a room for children's care with sanitary equipment, a terrace and several multifunctional rooms such as a gym, equipment storage and auxiliary didactic resources.

The areas used by educational, health and other staff include a room for educators, a room for the health professional with an isolation area for an ill child, a room for the counsellor, psychologist and special education expert, a room for the principal, a room for the secretary, a room for the accounting staff, educators' cloakrooms and a storage room, i.e. archives.

The auxiliary space of the institution is related to the kitchen area, with a central kitchen in the main building and a distribution kitchen in another department of the institution, a storage area, a changing area and sanitary facilities for the kitchen staff. The laundry service includes an area for washing and ironing, an area for dirty laundry and a storage facility for clean laundry. The energy and technical block includes a boiler room for the central heating, a janitor's closet, a changing area with sanitary facilities for technical staff, a general storage area, a changing area with sanitary facilities for the cleaning staff, a waste disposal area and garage (in the head institution). Other areas include the entrance, hallways, stairways and

---

[59] The State Pedagogical Standard of Preschool Education, Official Gazette, No. 10/97 and 107/07.

sanitary facilities for educational, health and other staff as well as sanitary facilities for parents and visitors.

Outdoor areas include approach roads (roadway and pavement access to the building), a parking area and public courtyard. They also include playgrounds for the children, an obstacle course, unused areas, storage for outdoor playgrounds and sanitary facilities near the playground.

Outdoor areas intended for children need to be safe and should be enclosed by a fence; they should include green space, as well as sunny and shaded playing areas. Playgrounds need to be equipped with age appropriate play structures, drinking water and water for games, sandboxes, etc.

Creating appropriate conditions for educational work in the early education institution implies basic equipment, didactic resources and other materials. Equipment and furniture in these institutions have to be functional, portable, stable, made of high-quality material (if possible, natural materials) and should be easy to maintain, colour resistant, and with a design which is aesthetically appropriate for children. Didactic resources and materials have to suit the tasks which are carried out in the early education institution. They need to be developmentally appropriate, functional, pedagogically based, appealing, diverse, etc.

Besides acquiring furniture, it is necessary to monitor its functionality and appropriateness, which means replacing or repairing old and non-functional furniture and equipment, as well as acquiring or making new items. This also applies to toys and all didactic materials that need to be constantly checked, while those that are damaged or worn-out need to be removed.

Sanitary facilities and toilets have to work properly and be functional; they must be clean and adequately enclosed. It is necessary to ensure equal privacy for children when using the toilet, in the same way as for adults. Lighting in the institution should be diverse in order to be adaptable to different needs during the education process.

It is especially important to ensure appropriate equipment for planning, conducting, monitoring and evaluating the education process. This includes different didactic resources, materials, tools, instruments and other equipment necessary for the children's education activities. It is also important to ensure desktop or portable computers for the professionals employed in the institution, a TV, video recorder, cameras, video cameras, video projector, etc. This technical equipment has to be constantly and easily available to all participants in

the education process, and, if necessary, the institution should ensure training in the use of this equipment.

2.4.1. Creating an environment for the education process

The entire spatial and material environment of the early education institution is the children's essential learning source[60] since they learn actively (by exploring, by doing) and through collaboration with other children and adults. This is why the environment needs to have a pedagogical basis and needs to have **high educational potential**. The structure of the rooms contributes to this. The area for each education group should be divided into smaller spatial units (centres of activities) where children are indirectly invited to join a smaller group, which improves the quality of their communication and collaboration. Clear partitions in the room make it easier to determine the contents of the room. Each of the spatial subunits should contain material for a particular activity since children's activities are more effective when the materials in the each centre are offered in a clear, logical and meaningful manner.

During the organisation of the centres of activities, certain criteria need to be taken into consideration. In each centre of activity, there should be sufficient diverse materials. In this way, children with different interests, development possibilities and learning styles are provided with continuous support for their (individually different) development and learning. Each centre of activity should contain only those materials which belong there. If materials are offered in a confusing manner, children will be bewildered when they try to use them. It is also necessary to ensure different tools and instruments whose presence (or absence) highly determines the quality of children's activities.

The variety of carefully chosen materials encourages children to identify and solve problems, make hypotheses, explore, experiment, etc. The constant availability of the materials for children is also an important criterion. Nicely offered materials that children can use at any time, depending on their wishes and interests, promotes the children's independence. Materials which are placed too high to reach, that are closed in a closet or elsewhere, and that children can use only occasionally do not fulfil this criterion. Spatial organisation strongly determines the quality of interactions among children, as well as interactions between children and educators.

---

[60] Cohen et al., 1996.

The physical environment of the education institution has the potential to strengthen the learning process, but also to make it poor.[61]

The entire spatial organisation of the early education institution, including hallways, should be directed towards the promotion of children's encounters, communication and interactions.[62] It also needs to ensure freedom of movement, which is a characteristic desire of young children.

Good spatial organisation and a rational approach to this for each education group have a great effect on the quality of children's experiences and learning and contribute to the maintenance of a good general environment for the group.

Criteria for a good environment are:

✓ different activities taking place at the same time (children do not participate in the same activity but each child chooses a particular one, grouping in smaller units)

✓ a working environment, i.e. busy children (they all participate in activities which they consider interesting)

✓ different social interactions among children (they play, socialise and discuss in small groups)

✓ children's freedom of movement (activities are not static since young children are characterised by their desire to move around)

✓ children's freedom of choice regarding contents and other children with whom they will conduct the activity (they are not forced to do only what their educators have planned), etc.

---

[61] Prosser, 1998.
[62] Malaguzzi, 1998.
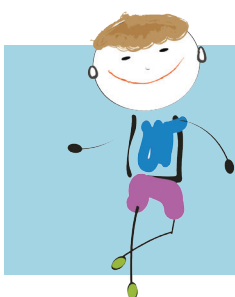
Our environment determines our feelings, thoughts and behaviour and, in fact, it influences the quality of our life dramatically.[63]

One of the important criteria for the quality of the environment, related to the spatial and material aspects of the institution, is its level of comfort. The whole environment of the early education institution should be pleasant and resemble the family surroundings, transmitting a message of welcome to the child. Furnishing rooms with soft and comfortable beds, armchairs, chairs, mats, etc., contributes to the creation of a pleasant atmosphere, as do curtains in pleasant colours, soft cushions and carpets, green plants, etc.

Rooms in the early education institution should not be "decorated" with installations in different colours and applications of unsatisfactory aesthetic and/or artistic quality, but with carefully chosen works which meet high aesthetic and artistic criteria and standards. These include paintings and photographs, authentic children's works and documentation on current activities and/or projects.

The spatial, material and technical working conditions are very important for the quality of work of the early education institution. The spatial and material environment brings out the education philosophy of the institution. The environment affects the children's quality of learning by providing them with opportunities for the active construction of knowledge and for the autonomy of learning. It also provides appropriate working conditions for employees.

The spatial, material and technical working conditions are important for the *key participants* of the process: the *principal*, who ensures the conditions and manages the resources; *educators, expert associates and other employees*, whose everyday work is influenced by the spatial and material environment; and the *governing council*, which makes important decisions in this respect.

---

[63] Gandini, 1998.

Self-evaluation of this area includes reflection on the following key questions.

Does our indoor space fulfil the needs of children (of all education groups)?

Is our indoor space encouraging enough for the children (of all education groups)?

Do we provide sufficient materials for high-quality work?

Is our institution well equipped?

Are we satisfied with the equipment and decoration of the outdoor area of the institution?

Are we satisfied with the equipment and decoration of the indoor area of the institution?

Is time organisation in the institution flexible?

Are the working hours of the institution adjusted to the needs of children and parents?

When reflecting on the quality of this area, the following can be useful **sources of information**:

✓ results of questionnaires and self-evaluation processes

✓ annual report

✓ annual programme and plan

✓ statute of the institution

✓ photos, videos and other documentation of the institution

✓ other sources.

2.5. Sanitary and hygienic working conditions and safety

Particular elements of the sanitary - hygienic working conditions and safety are determined, as in the previous area, by the State Pedagogical Standard[64] which is also used for defining criteria for children's healthcare and nutrition in the early education institution as well as the technical working conditions. The quality of this area can be evaluated on the basis of the extent of the coordination of the work of the institution with the regulated standard. In addition, healthcare, hygienic and nutrition requirements are determined by the Programme of Health Protection Measures, Hygiene and Nutrition of Children in Early Education Institutions.[65] These requirements include immunisation, physical examination, the health examination of a child after his/her absence from the institution lasting longer than 60 days due to illness or for some other reason, anti-epidemic measures in the event of infectious diseases, the health education of children on acquiring proper hygiene habits and a healthy lifestyle, especially considering the prevention of the most important health issues, the health education of employees of the early education institution, as well as parents (guardians or adopters). The requirements are met according to the yearbook of the early education institution.

Hygiene assurance measures in the early education institution include meeting requirements related to accommodation, nutrition, infectious disease prevention, everyday activities in the early education institution, hygiene maintenance and monitoring, hygienic and epidemiological control of infectious diseases, anti-epidemic requirements, requirements regarding trips into the countryside and summer vacations, as well as children's health education.

The early education institution has to meet several requirements regarding the children's accommodation. Rooms need to be clean, while sanitary facilities should be disinfected every day. It is also necessary to ventilate rooms regularly, to provide adequate heating as well as regular washing and changing of linen. It is obligatory to ensure safe drinking water in the institution, as well as the proper treatment of waste water and solid waste. It is necessary to provide appropriate furniture which will not cause injury, while toys and other objects of general use should meet all health and safety requirements.

---

[64] The State Pedagogical Standard of Preschool Education, Official Gazette, No. 63/08 and 90/10.
[65] Official Gazette No. 105/02, 55/06 and 121/07.

The institution needs to ensure a sufficient amount of materials for children's hygiene. The maintenance of the institution's physical environment requires special attention (watch out for sharp objects, broken glass, hypodermic needles and syringes, etc.).

Health control of the employees of the early education institution includes a physical examination before employment, occasional physical examinations and a health examination after recovering from infectious diseases.

During their stay in the early education institution, children and adults undergo continuous health education, which includes personal hygiene (hands and body), food and drink hygiene, contact with illnesses and sick persons (sick children and adults) as well as trust and a positive relation towards doctors and vaccination. Collaboration with different health workers (paediatricians, dentists, orthopaedists) is needed as part of this health education.

2.5.1. Nutrition

The programme for the children's health protection and hygiene[66] also determines several requirements related to the children's nutrition. Employees who, during their work, come into direct contact with food and objects of general use should meet health and safety requirements and the requirements regarding health control related to food. Food has to meet regulatory health and safety requirements.

Only industrially prepared and packaged food should be brought into the early education institution. Proper nutrition in institutions for children is ensured through the regular frequency of meals in accordance with recommended amounts of energy and certain individual nutrients, as well as by the regulated sanitary control of food and objects used in the preparation of the children's diet). The early education institution needs to provide ways to adjust food to children's special nutrition habits and needs, while the provided food should be in accordance with the legislation in force.

Sanitary and hygienic working conditions and safety are prerequisites for the quality work of the early education institution. It is essential to ensure all the conditions for the maximal safety of children during their time in the institution by providing the material and

---

[66] The programme for children's health protection, hygiene and nutrition in early education institutions was issued by the Ministry of Health and Social Care on the basis of Article 18, paragraphs 1 and 3 of the Preschool Education Act (Official Gazette, No. 10/97), with the agreement of the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports.

organisational working conditions necessary, as well as the professional qualifications of all employees. The prevention of potentially dangerous situations, as well as public awareness about existing or potential problems and ways to solve them, are extremely important.

Sanitary and hygienic working conditions and safety are important to the *key participants* of the process: the *principal*, who ensures the conditions and manages the resources; *educators, expert associates and other employees*, whose everyday work is affected by sanitary and hygienic working conditions and safety; *parents*, whose children stay in the institution every day; the *governing council*, which makes decisions that are important for the assurance of appropriate conditions and prevention; and the *local community*.

Self-evaluation of this area includes reflection on the following key questions.

Is the indoor and outdoor space of our institution safe?

Are children safe in the institution?

Do we have safety protocols?

Do we comply with the safety protocols during our work?

Do we conduct health protection measures regularly?

Is the nutrition planned in accordance with professional recommendations?

Do we take enough prevention measures?

When reflecting on the quality of this area, the following can be useful **sources of information**:

- ✓ results of questionnaires and self-evaluation processes
- ✓ the safety, protection and prevention programme in the early education institution
- ✓ medical documentation relating to children's diseases and vaccination, injuries, epidemiological indications, health education, hygienic and epidemiological control, sanitary control, and reports on food analysis, the hygienic minimum, etc.)
- ✓ hygienic measures in the institution
- ✓ annual report
- ✓ annual programme and plan
- ✓ other sources.

2.6. The curriculum and education process

Even though the curriculum includes all areas of quality, we will point out here specific criteria which are extremely important for early childhood education and care.

2.6.1. Values and the understanding of the child as a basis for curriculum design

Curriculum formation in the early education institution is based on the contemporary understanding of young children. Understanding the child as *a complete being* requires a holistic (integrated) approach to curriculum formation. It includes the consolidation of different education areas as well as various learning concepts for children. It is not appropriate to divide the education process into activities whose content resembles school subjects. Instead, institutions should create a stimulating education environment to provide children with various options in the acquisition of different material and social experiences.

Understanding the child as *the subject of his/her personal education* implies the possibility for the child to actively participate in reflecting on and in the creation and evaluation of the curriculum. In the creation of the education process, children's initiative is taken into consideration and their potential to organise their own activities is strengthened. Such an understanding of the child also results in establishing equal and reciprocal communication between children and adults. The preparation of learning content in the formation of the curriculum is based on understanding children and respecting their perspective (their opinion, their way of understanding, etc). The possibility of choosing different contents, as well as choices made by other children and adults during the creation of individual activities, helps in the development of the child's autonomy, identity, self-esteem, self-confidence and self-realisation.

Understanding the child as *an active, curious and competent being* within the curriculum formation implies stimulating active forms of the child's learning through activities which make him/her explore, reveal, build and "test" his/her own theories, as well as gain knowledge and comprehension actively. Hence, it is necessary to offer diverse and appropriate learning materials and situations which will enable the child to identify and solve problems individually. Curriculum formation is based on careful monitoring and

listening to children, as well as on documenting their activities. Special attention is paid to the creation of activities which engage different types of intelligence (multiple intelligences) and develop various competences and skills such as:

✓ learning skills (learn how to learn, respecting children's metacognitive skills as the basis of lifelong learning)

✓ children's participation skills in collaborative activities (leadership, participation, negotiation, resolving conflict situations)

✓ skills of responsible behaviour towards oneself, others and the environment

✓ self-evaluation skills, regarding personal improvement and different achievements

✓ skills of adapting to new and unpredictable situations

✓ skills of individual action, thought and decision-making

✓ skills in the use of various communication modalities

✓ innovation and entrepreneurial skills.

Understanding the child as a *social being* results in the organisation of an encouraging social environment which provides children with various interactions and communication with different children (of different ages, developmental capacity, nationality, ethnicity, religion, culture, etc.). Such a social environment ensures opportunities for the child to communicate with different adults (lead teacher and other educators, members of the expert team, parents and other adults). The development of children's communication skills and social competences is especially encouraged.[67]

Understanding the child as a *person with his/her own culture, needs and rights* means abandoning unified standards for all children and embracing respect, acceptance and understanding of children's diversity. This approach promotes the inclusion of children with difficulties and special needs into the regular education process of the early education institution. This ensures acceptance of the idea of children's right to equal opportunities and the right to equality in general.

Curriculum formation in the early education institution should accord with the values included in the National Curriculum Framework. The *value of knowledge* in curriculum

---

[67] Jurčević-Lozančić, 2011.

formation means the preparation of children for lifelong learning, understanding and critical thinking, adapting to new situations, etc. The *value of solidarity* implies the development of children's sensitivity to others and to the environment. The *value of identity* is realised through the formation of the child's personal, cultural and national identity, as well as through children's education which is characterised by respect for diversity. Finally, *responsibility* in curriculum formation implies promoting children's active participation in social life, and the development of their considerate behaviour, personal freedom and responsibility.

2.6.2. Curriculum features and organisation of the education process

The early education curriculum[68] is *open, dynamic* and **developmental**, which means that it develops and alters in the early education institution on the basis of the learning, research and collaboration of all participants in the education process. Strong regulation of children's learning contents is inappropriate and selecting content should be based on monitoring and supporting children's interests and initiatives. The **holistic** nature of the curriculum implies integrated education in line with the nature of the child's growth and development. The **humanistic** and *developmentally appropriate orientation of the curriculum* focuses on the development of the capacities of all children as well as on respect for their individual interests and developmental needs and rights. The **inclusive** features of the curriculum are reflected in respect and acceptance of children's diversity, which can result from their different ages, special needs and rights, nationalities, denominations, etc.

The formation of the early education curriculum requires a high level of flexibility, i.e. adaptability to the actual possibilities, needs and interests of children. This flexibility is related to the selection of content, but also to the duration and dynamics of education activities within a particular education group. Unification, in any form, is not desirable in the process of curriculum formation.

---

[68] Slunjski, 2011.

In curriculum formation, it is more appropriate to plan contents which children should learn than planning activities which children need to do. It is more appropriate to create conditions and situations which favour learning more than actual activities, i.e. their course.[69]

The vivification of educators' values can be monitored through different dimensions of education practice: the way in which the spatial and material context and learning environment are formed, the way in which the time is organised, the dynamics of children's activities, what and how things are discussed with children, collaboration with colleagues and parents, etc. These manifest, and not declarative, levels of value and conviction should be further investigated and discussed in order to reduce the gap between proclamation (what we wish for) and achievement in practice (what we actually do).

2.6.3. Relationships and communication between adults (educators and other professionals employed in the institution) and children

Quality relationships and communication are central operative principles in the organisation of the education process in the early education institution. They are based on **reciprocity and fellowship**, which enable all participants, including children, to participate actively in the formation of the education process. This system consists of social relationships in which children and adults (professionals employed in the institution and parents) coordinate their activities and restructure their reflections in reciprocal relationship with one another.[70] Believing that children and adults have their opinions which can differ, but which can be based on equally justified reasons and which can serve as the foundation for the evaluation of different (equally valuable) opinions which should be respected, leads to the realisation of **pedagogical reciprocity**.[71]

Children's right to form personal views and express their thoughts on questions that affect them is indicated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child[72] (Articles 12 and 13)

---

[69] Ellis, 2007.
[70] Rankin, 1998.
[71] Bruner, 2000.
[72] The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the international document adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989. The nations that ratified this Convention, among which is Croatia, are bound to it by international law.

and it is an important element of human rights education. Key values of human rights correspond to the key values of quality education and are realised through the democratic process of the institution, dominated by freedom, tolerance, integrity and justice.[73] Democracy is learned in a democratic environment which encourages participation and freedom of opinion and promotes children's and adults' freedom of speech.

> In the quality early education institution, children are not disempowered objects but are equally valuable participants in the process of shared learning with other children and adults.

In such an environment, children should be encouraged to evaluate themselves and should be trained to do so; thus, they learn to take responsibility for their decisions and actions, i.e. personal choices and their consequences. Through excessive control of children's behaviour, by constant evaluation coming from adults, children are denied the opportunity to learn how to evaluate their own actions, which negatively affects the development of their autonomy. The educators' educational role should be directed towards the development of children's independence, their critical thinking and responsible behaviour, unlike authoritarian styles of education which deprive children of the same.

The organisation of the education process based on **respect for children's rights and individual freedom** favours the development of qualities which are necessary for their free, active, creative and responsible life in the present and future. An appreciative and equal relationship among all participants results in an education process where the educator is not a "soloist" but a "backing vocal" in the education of the child.[74] This type of education focuses on the complete development of each child's personality, with respect for his/her subjectivity and individuality.

The quality communication of adults (educators and other professionals employed in the institution) with children is reflected in their sensitivity to children's different needs as well as in their adequate and timely response. It includes a variety of everyday interactions which constantly show children that adults care for them, love them, understand and

---

[73] Maleš et al., 2003.
[74] Delors, 1998.

respect them and that the early education institution is a place of delight, contentment, belonging and quality relationships. The educators' overall communication and all education interventions should express respect for children, their needs and rights.

The high-quality education institution encourages the development of creative and critical thought in children, which is accomplished by negotiating with children, not by forcing them.[75]

Unfortunately, there are a number of children's rights which are often (perhaps not intentionally, but certainly inexcusably) taken away, sometimes to simplify the organisation of the education process. For example, forcing children to sleep after lunch. Some children have a need to rest, i.e. to sleep, in this period, but this does not apply to all children from the same education group or of the same age. The affirmation of children's rights in this context refers to the opportunity of going to sleep for those children who have this need, as well as staying awake (i.e. not lying in bed awake) for those children who do not have this need.

The quality communication of educators with children in the education process can be seen in three categories:[76] *sensitivity* (educators' sensitivity to children's needs), *autonomy* (encouraging children to make decisions and sense the consequences of their choices) and *stimulation* (respecting children's interests and abilities as well as encouraging their further development). This type of educational approach enables children to gain quality experiences and an understanding of the world in which they live from the perspective of relations and successful communication with others.

The quality of relationships and communication is highly determined by the level of understanding which educators and other employees of the early education institution show for the children. This is why it is necessary to watch and listen to children as well as to have shared discussions about their behaviour and activities (with children, educators and other professionals employed in the institution). The development of different techniques for the careful monitoring and understanding of children as a foundation for the quality

---

[75] Elliott, 1998.
[76] Ellis, 2004.

formation of the education process in the early education institution leads to a **pedagogy of listening**.[77] The development of such a pedagogy is based on the documentation of children's activities, which includes collecting photo-documentation and video-documentation, transcripts of conversations among children and children's conversations with the educator, and children's two- and three-dimensional pieces of work and other notes which serve as the basis for a shared analysis and better understanding of children and the entire education process.

In the quality early education institution, children are not disempowered objects but are equally valuable participants in the process of shared learning with other children and adults. This requires deep and complex change in the organisation of the early education institution towards its democratisation, i.e. humanisation of human relations at all levels.

The **curriculum and education process** is the key area for the quality of work of the early education institution, intertwined with all other areas of quality. It comprises values which form direct education work, pedagogy, the environment, the quality of relationships and the communication of children and adults, and ensures the conditions for the quality development and growth of each child.

The *curriculum and education process* is important for all *key participants* in the process: the *principal*, as a leader of the institution; *educators, expert associates and other employees*, in everyday direct work and reflecting on quality; *parents*, whose children live, learn and develop every day in the institution; the *governing council*, which makes decisions that are important for the future of the institution; and the *local community* that lives with and in the institution.

---

[77] Malaguzzzi, 1998; Edwards et al., 1998; Rinaldi, 2002, 2006.

Self-evaluation of this area includes reflection on the following key questions.

Do I adjust my working style to the children's different abilities?

Do I respect the children's different learning styles in my direct work?

Does each child have the freedom to choose content and activities?

Do I encourage children to self-evaluate their activities and actions?

Does our environment ensure different interactions among children and adults?

When reflecting on the quality of this area, the following can be useful **sources of information**:

✓ results of questionnaires and self-evaluation processes

✓ annual report

✓ annual programme and plan

✓ book of pedagogical documentation of the education group

✓ children's individual files

✓ documentation of the education process

✓ other sources.

2.7. Human resources

Personnel management, which involves acquiring an adequate number of professionals and other employees with appropriate qualifications as regulated by the State Pedagogical Standard, greatly affects the quality of work in the early education institution. Quality is also determined by the **_professional competences_** of educators and other professionals employed in the institution, the way they apply their competences in their work and how they collaborate with their colleagues and contribute to the creation of a collaborative environment. This quality is best reflected in their readiness to constantly improve the education process. Educators contribute to their professional role and to the quality of their work by introducing, affirming and connecting the early education institution with other early education institutions and other schools in the broader community.

2.7.1. Educators

The educator is a professionally qualified person who directly participates in conducting the education process. In collaboration with other professionals employed in the institution, he/she professionally reflects on the education process, i.e. plans, programmes and evaluates educational work in determined periods, collects, designs and maintains working materials intended for children, and takes care of the aesthetic and functional environment to achieve different educational activities. The educator monitors and creates conditions for the fulfilment of children's everyday needs and encourages the development, education and learning of each child in accordance with the child's abilities. The educator also collects and keeps documentation on children and the entire education process in order to improve it systematically. Thus, he/she continuously collaborates with parents, the expert team and other professionals inside and outside the early education institution.

2.7.2. Expert associates

Expert associates in the early education institution are the counsellor, psychologist, special education experts (a speech and language therapist, rehabilitator, social counsellor) and senior nurse. In reflecting on, performing and evaluating the education process, they use a multidisciplinary approach, thinking and acting as a team.

Counsellor

The counsellor monitors, supports and reflects on the education process and encourages its continuous development. Hence, he/she encourages inquiry and shared reflection on education practice among educators and suggests innovations and encourages the implementation of contemporary methods and forms of work. Therefore, he/she strengthens the process of the professional training and lifelong learning of educators. The counsellor also works with parents and collaborates with them and others inside and outside the institution. He/she especially reflects on opportunities for developing a collaborative culture and contributes to building team work in the institution. The counsellor initiates, conducts and participates in research in the early education institution and presents the results to the public.

Psychologist

The psychologist monitors the psycho-physical development and improvement of each child and reflects on ways to improve the child's mental health. An important role of the psychologist is to identify children with special educational needs (children with difficulties and gifted children) and reflects on developmental tasks which are necessary for their improvement. He/she also collaborates with parents, giving them professional help in the education of the child. He/she participates in programmes for the professional training of educators and other professionals employed in the institution. He/she collaborates with health and social care institutions and ensures supervisory support. He/she also initiates, conducts and participates in research in the early education institution and presents the results to the public.

Special education experts

Special education experts (a speech and language therapist, rehabilitator, social counsellor) work on the prevention, recognition, identification, mitigation and elimination of children's difficulties. They identify specific forms of support for children with difficulties and they discuss them with educators, other associates and parents. They create conditions for the inclusion of children in regular and special programmes of the early education institution. In collaboration with educators, the expert team and parents, they determine

appropriate working methods for each child, which all participants apply. They monitor the development and improvement of a child and suggest modifications, additions and improved methods and techniques in educational work with children. They collaborate with health and social care institutions as well as with others in the prevention of developmental disorders in children. They monitor, examine and evaluate in practice scientific and theoretic knowledge in the area of education and rehabilitation sciences. They improve their own work and the entire process of the inclusion of children with difficulties into the community.

Senior nurse – health professional

The health professional in the early education institution is a senior nurse who ensures and improves children's health protection and participates in the realisation of this and related tasks with expert associates, the principal, educators, parents and others. The health professional directly conducts health education among children, educators and other employees of the institution, collaborates with other institutions and participates in professional training.

2.7.3. Other employees of the early education institution

Depending on the structure and size of the early education institution, it employs a secretary, a head of accounting and an accounting administrative assistant. It also employs staff whose work is related to nutrition, cleaning, washing, ironing, sewing, as well as procurement, heating and maintenance of the premises.

2.7.4. Professional development directed towards the continuous improvement of practice

The continuous professional training of educators and other professionals employed in the early education institution is essential to ensure and improve the quality of the education process. The *educator's professional development should result not only in shifts in knowledge, but also in changes of his/her views and actions*. Therefore, types of

professional training which have not only informational, but also transformational, potential are more suitable,[78] i.e. those which have an exploratory feature and allow for the questioning of educators' beliefs, experiences and everyday practice. Namely, beliefs filter knowledge and control the educator's behaviour, so an improvement in practice will not occur until it is connected with questioning and changing these beliefs and the entire educational philosophy of the educator. Accordingly, the professional training of educators is directed towards the development of their **exploratory and reflective skills**. Reflective inquiry shared with other educators and professionals trains educators to better understand and modify and refine individual practice, during which they turn into "reflective practitioners"[79]. Reflective practitioners attempt to explore, comprehend and change their own practice, which is achieved by **action research**.

Action research is intended for the simultaneous research and modification of education practice, which mostly relies on the development of exploratory and reflective skills of practitioners. The holistic approach to improving practice is characteristic of action research, rather than fragmented and mechanical interventions directed at "fixing" particular problems. One of the famous models of action research is Lewin's model[80] which is like climbing the stairs, where each stair consists of planning, action and evaluation of the results. In practice, this process starts with evaluation of the current state in order to determine whether it is necessary to implement change, i.e. improvement. It begins with questioning current conditions and determining the current state of practice, on the basis of which a decision on a general action plan should be made. The general action plan serves as a source of practical steps and of ways of monitoring their effects. Taking the first step leads to determining (initial) information, i.e. the actual circumstances whose effects can be described and evaluated, after which new planning follows. Therefore, each initial plan is actually revised in terms of new information, which represents the basis for each new step of the action.

The central features of action research:[81]

✓ it is a *social process* (participants tend to understand how they change alone and in relationship with others, e.g. how they collaborate, how they work with children, how they improve the education process, etc.)

---

[78] Hawley, 2002.
[79] Šagud, 2006.
[80] Kemmis and McTaggart, 1981.
[81] Kemmis and Wilkinson, 1998.

✓ it is *participatory* (participants are actively engaged in examining their knowledge, understanding, skills, etc.)

✓ it is *practical and collaborative* (participants are engaged in examining their communication with others and ways to improve it)

✓ it is *emancipatory and critical* (it helps participants to unshackle themselves from the constraints of particular unproductive social structures which limit their self-development and self-determination)

✓ it is *reflective and dialectical* (it helps participants to investigate reality in order to change it and to change reality in order to investigate it).

In the last fifteen years, action research has been conducted in kindergartens in different Croatian towns and cities and comprehensive studies have been published on some of them.[82] During this period, several research teams have been active, or still are, and consist of researchers from universities, and researchers-practitioners from different kindergartens, on the path towards the shared creation of high-quality education theory and practice. In the process of educators' training for the better understanding and continuous improvement of individual practice through action research, external experts could be helpful (i.e. external expert associates of the institution), whose task is to initiate the development of the practice. Their role is gradually taken over by the expert team and educators alone who contribute to the realisation of the concept of the institution which functions "in a permanent learning state, creating change".[83]

> The educator's professional development should result not only in shifts in knowledge, but also in changes of his views and actions.

For an organisation to sustain itself and develop, its speed of learning has to be equal to or higher than the speed of change in the external environment.[84] Therefore, the professional development of those employed in the education institution should not only be a

---

[82] Miljak, 1996; Petrović–Sočo, 2007, 2009; Slunjski, 2006, 2011; Šagud, 2006, Vujičić, 2011 et al.
[83] Senge, 2003.
[84] Stoll and Fink, 2000.

continuous process, but also **a process of constant evolution.**[85] The realisation of the concept of continuous learning in the early education institution leads to the creation of an organisation which is able to "organise itself and constantly invent itself".[86]

This form of professional training turns practitioners into **reflective friends**[87] who warn each other about things they are not able to see for themselves, i.e. to support each other in considering from a broader perspective than their own the problems in which they are immersed. It is on these foundations that educators gradually eliminate the problems they encounter on the path towards improving their practice.

> A reflective friend can help each educator to consider problems in which he is immersed from another, broader perspective and to eliminate them on these foundations.
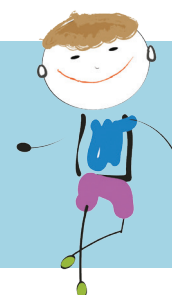
Strengthening the self-organisational potential of the early education institution leads to continuity in improving education practice and to the durability of the achieved changes. This requires the readiness of employees to accept new forms of professional learning, which is not confined to occasional events (seminars, lectures, workshops) that include only selected individuals, but implies a continuous process of research and the shared learning of all professionals employed in the institution.

The area of **human resources** is very important for the quality of work of the early education institution because it encompasses all key participants. Successful education institutions show real interest in employees as their most valuable capital, providing them with systematic professional training and improvement. They apply a reward plan for the best achievements and provide systematic support in work and encourage participation in all elements of the life and work of the institution. In such institutions, employees are rarely absent from work and are highly committed and devoted.

The area of *human resources* is important to all *key participants* in the process: the *principal*, as a leader of the institution; *educators, expert associates and other employees* in everyday direct work, training and planning of personal and professional development;

---

[85] Stoll and Fink, 2000; Hopkins, 2001; Datnow et. al., 2002.
[86] Senge et al., 2007.
[87] Ross et al., 1993.

parents, whose children live, learn and develop every day in the institution with competent, satisfied and motivated employees; the *governing council*, which makes decisions important for the future of the institution; and the *local community*, that lives with and in the institution.

Self-evaluation of this area includes reflection on the following key questions.

Do I like my job?

Do I feel that my job has a sense and purpose?

Am I capable of responding to all the demands of my job?

Is continuous improvement of my work important to me?

Do I possess competences which are necessary for my work with children, parents and colleagues?

How do I contribute to the continuous development of my competences?

Do I apply knowledge gained during professional development in my direct work?

Do I have continuous professional training?

When reflecting about the quality of this area, the following can be useful **sources of information**:

- ✓ results of questionnaires and self-evaluation processes

- ✓ individual plan and programme of professional training

- ✓ annual report

- ✓ annual programme and plan

- ✓ register of educators' exchanges

- ✓ statute of the institution

- ✓ statistical data

- ✓ other sources.

2.8. Collaboration with the local and broader community

2.8.1. The early education institution as an "open system"

The early education institution is a complex, "open" system. Every system, including the early education institution, consists of a set of interdependent elements (subsystems) whose continuous interactions determine its features.[88] Systems differ according to the level of openness to the environment in which they function. Each "open system" is superior to a "closed one" since the interaction between closed systems and the environment in which they function is rigid and one-sided, whereas an open system is flexible and open. Therefore, **the concept of "the early education institution as an open system" promotes the idea of its openness both towards the inside and outside**.

One of the advantages of the open system[89] is its ability for continuous self-healing and self-organisation. In the early education institution, this is achieved through the training of practitioners for research, understanding and gradual and continuous improvement of the quality of education practice. Employees' openness to new knowledge helps the institution to continually develop its quality, which manifests itself through a set of interrelated aspects of the education process. *Such an institution can provide higher quality experiences for its subjects (children and adults) than an institution which is closed to interactions with its environment. The latter institution does not develop and is characterised by rigid and static organisational structures and maintains the status quo of practice.*

> The early education institution, as an "open system" in the broadest sense, implies the "openness" of professionals to new knowledge and to improving education practice.

A high quality institution is also open to the outside, which implies its readiness for interaction and for the establishment of collaboration with different factors in the community.

---

[88] Datnow et al., 2002.
[89] Spodek, 1973; Kamenov, 1982; Pešić, 1987; Marjanović, 1987; Miljak, 2009.

2.8.2. Developing a network of early education institutions that learn and improve their quality together

Numerous advantages arise from the connections, communication and professional exchange among educators and expert teams from different institutions. This type of professional fellowship provides all these employees with continuous mental and emotional support which is necessary for high quality education practice. Opportunities to discuss everyday problems with people who face the same problems reduce the weight of these problems and strengthen people.

Shared discussions about different (or the same) problems which occur in different institutions, as well as the successful solutions achieved in dealing with some of them, open up new possibilities and ideas for trying out these solutions and for modifying them in individual terms, i.e. in the individual institution. The goal of the integration of institutions which compose such a "**community of reflective practitioners**",[90] or "**early education institutions – learning communities**"[91] is not to share recipes for quality practice, since each institution is unique and cannot be replicated. The goal of such professional gathering is to exchange practitioners' and theoreticians' experiences for the purpose of the shared formation of new knowledge and better practice.

2.8.3. Relationships and communication between educators (and other professionals employed in the institution) and parents, i.e. the children's families

In a high quality early education institution, parents have a very important place. They are equally valuable participants in the children's education and the main allies of educators in ensuring the quality of the institution. Not only does the level and quality of parents' engagement in the process of children's education in the institution determine the quality of children's educational experiences, but an important opportunity is also provided for their own learning, i.e. for the development of their **parental competences**.[92]

High quality and reciprocal communication provides educators and parents with a shared understanding of children, which none of them could achieve alone. The parents'

---

[90] Miljak, 2009.
[91] Slunjski, 2006; Petrović-Sočo, 2007; Vujičić, 2011.
[92] Ljubetić, 2007.

life with a child (in the family), in relation to the educators' life with the child (in the institution), is the basis for different perceptions of the child and various interpretations of his/her behaviour, determined by the diversity of contexts in the child's life. This diversity, if not discussed, leads only to partial understanding of the child, which can result in inappropriate educational moves (from both sides).

Parents' quality engagement in the work of the institution determines the quality of children's education, but it is also an opportunity for the development of parental competences.

The continuous exchange of subjective experiences and partial understanding of the child guides educators and parents to a shared, integrated understanding of the child and the development of an educational approach adjusted to the child's individual and developmental features.

For this to happen, the institution should transmit to parents the message of acceptance, respect and welcome in its every move. Parents are welcome to come to the institution at any time, watch children during their activities and socialising with other children, socialise with children and meet their friends, see learning materials, talk to their educators and other parents, etc. Any impression that children have that their parents are not welcome in the institution can cause inestimable damage, not only to the children's adjustment to the institution, but also to the quality of their overall education.

Introducing parents to particular aspects and to the whole of the education process is very important. With the help of different forms of documentation, parents are provided with an insight into the course and purpose of various education activities in the institution, which are important for understanding how children learn, how they use particular materials, how they collaborate with other children and educators, what interests them, etc. Therefore, such documentation should be constantly available to parents and children. Situations in which children, with the help of documentation, convey and retell activities in which they have participated, what kind of experiences they gained and what the particular experiences meant to them are especially valuable. The availability of documentation depends on the overall (spatial, temporal, social) organisation of the institution and mostly

on the relationship of educators towards the value of (and the need for) such connection with parents.
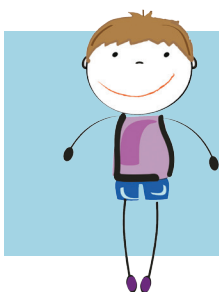
Parents are equally valuable participants in the education process and the main allies in the improvement of the quality of the early education institution.

Communication and collaboration of the early education institution with other participants is also achieved through parent-teacher meetings, individual and group conversations, thematic discussions, workshops, communication meetings, trips, visits, etc. The frequency and efficiency of collaboration with parents, and especially the possibility for parents to have an influence on the formation, realisation and evaluation of the education process, are important indicators of the quality of the early education institution.

2.8.4. Collaboration with the local community

The openness and collaboration of the early education institution with the local community provide different forms of direct and indirect support in achieving and improving its quality. The coordinated functioning of the early education institution and different services of the local community ensure multiple forms of support in solving actual problems and carrying out specific tasks. At the same time, the active participation of the early education institution in the life of the local community is an opportunity for it to present itself, i.e. to affirm its overall work.

Collaboration with the local community is very important for the quality of work of the early education institution. This area includes collaboration with parents as key participants in the education process, and collaboration with other early education providers and other education institutions. The area also includes collaboration with competent institutions, agencies, ministries and universities. Collaboration with the local community in different ways is also singled out as a key area. Collaboration of the early education institution with the local and broader community differs according to the quality, frequency and modality of the collaboration and, ultimately, to the contribution of the achieved collaboration to the quality of the work of the institution.

Collaboration with the local community is important to all *key participants* in the process: the *principal*, as a leader of the institution; *educators, expert associates and other employees*, as employees of the institution; *parents and families* of the children, who are in everyday contact with the institution; the *governing council*, which makes decisions important for the future of the institution; and the *local community*, that lives with and in the institution.

Self-evaluation of this area includes reflection on the following key questions.

Am I satisfied with the collaboration with parents?

Is good collaboration with parents important to me?

Does our institution offer parents different forms of inclusion in its work?

Do I have an open and reciprocal exchange of information about children with parents?

Does our institution offer support programmes to parents?

Does our institution provide parents with support in the realisation of the parental role?

Is our institution recognised and appreciated in the local community?

Do we participate in different events in the city/town?

Does the local community provide support for the work of our institution?

Am I satisfied with the collaboration of our institution with competent institutions and education institutions?

When reflecting on the quality of this area, the following can be useful **sources of information**:

- ✓ results of questionnaires and self-evaluation processes

- ✓ yearbook of the institution

- ✓ annual report

- ✓ annual programme and plan

- ✓ records

- ✓ documentation of the institution

- ✓ other sources.

2.9. The monitoring and evaluation process

According to the State Pedagogical Standard, in order to assure the quality of preschool education (Article 52), preschool institutions are obligated to monitor the quality of work in accordance with by-laws; external evaluation is conducted by the competent ministry and the founder; and preschool institutions conduct self-evaluation. Evaluation, as a process of systematic and continuous monitoring and analysis of the efficiency of work, is the basis for the improvement of quality in institutions.

2.9.1. External evaluation

External evaluation is primarily directed towards monitoring the quality of educational achievements and less towards determining the quality of the process which precedes the achievements. It is conducted according to criteria which are mutually adjusted and determined in advance. It is conducted by bodies outside the institutions (the Centre, institutes, associations, the Ministry, national and international experts, etc.).

2.9.2. Self-evaluation

Self-evaluation is a systematic, internal process directed towards shedding light on the current state in the institution, determining positive achievements, detecting problems and suggesting solutions, and for improving the current state. It encompasses not only achievements, but also the processes, relationships and conditions under which the education process is conducted. Orientation towards quality requires, from all factors of the education process, continuous professional reflection and self-evaluation geared towards improving the quality of particular segments and of the institution as a whole. Continuous self-evaluation of education practice, as the first step on the path towards its improvement, is everyone's obligation in the education process.

2.9.3. The role of documentation in the monitoring, evaluation and quality improvement of the institution

Educators' professional development, as well as the improvement of education practice, is especially aided by the type of feedback which enables educators to see themselves "from the outside", i.e. from the perspective of the external observer, and to discuss practice with colleagues. Various forms of documentation can serve as support, by providing recall and shared reflection about the recent activities in which a particular educator has participated directly or indirectly. Educators can use photo material, video and audio recordings, transcripts of conversations between educators and children, conversations among educators, conversations between educators and other professionals and conversations among children, journals and other narrative forms, various children's works, etc.

> Documentation deepens the educator's awareness of individual and developmental features of each child and eases the choice of adequate strategies for supporting the child's education.

Documentation is **a means of reflection on education practice** because it allows for interpretation and reinterpretation of the process of children's learning and education, as well as of the quality of the educator's interventions in this process. Using pedagogical documentation, educators have an opportunity to monitor and evaluate the child, as well as themselves in interaction with the child, which deepens their awareness of individual and developmental features of each child and eases the choice of suitable strategies for supporting the child's development, education and learning. Documentation enables more careful monitoring, reflective interpretation of children's activities and the shaping of educators' appropriate educational interventions.

Some of the valuable forms of documentation are educators' written notes. In these notes, the educator can summarise the key moments of particular activities, e.g. children's questions, the educator's questions to children, children's statements, shared conclusions, dilemmas encountered and the potential for further development of activities. The

educator's written notes can be especially valuable in an analysis of the conducted activities, as well as in the shared analysis of and reflection on new activities.

Video recording is one of the best forms of documentation. Video recording can cover a great part of the context of particular activities, and so there are frequent opportunities to analyse these activities. This form of documentation is suitable to analyse children's individual activities and the educator's participation in them, the spatial and material context and the way in which children use the offered materials, etc. Therefore, video recording is a powerful tool for educators' and other professionals' reflective practice which enables them to see and hear themselves "from the outside", a position from which they cannot regularly see themselves. Similarly, it is possible to apply other documentation forms, such as photo documentation, collecting children's art and graphic reproductions, etc., which give an insight into children's everyday activities in the institution, the way they interact, organise their activities, think, solve problems and the way in which educators encourage and strengthen these activities.

Collecting, examining and interpreting documentation is a research and reflective process which develops together with the subjects that document the education process.

2.9.4. The role of discussions in the monitoring, evaluation and quality improvement of the institution

Shared discussions between educators and other participants of the education process play a great role in monitoring, evaluating and improving the quality of the early education institution. The high-quality institution is aware that a group of professionals in shared discussion can reach insights and understandings which none of them could reach alone. Several educators, i.e. "several pairs of eyes", can offer a number of different interpretations of learning activities and situations and understand them better than one educator could do alone. The way in which an individual educator perceives and interprets particular aspects of the education process is a result of his/her current level of comprehension, which can be increased much faster and more easily through discussions with other educators and professionals in the education institution.

Understanding is mutually developed during discussion – in which participants exchange different, individual and partial interpretations of the reality and create a more integral "shared reality".[93]

Different interpretations, **opposite beliefs and understandings can be a valuable opportunity for the shared development** and learning of all professionals employed in the early education institution. During a discussion, participants' ideas and thoughts confront each other and "filter" through the ideas and thoughts of others, and they often change in this process. Educators' participation in a discussion enables them to raise awareness of their own thinking, knowledge and learning (meta-level), which is a step towards reflective thinking and a basis for reflective practice.

Reorganising and changing the way in which educators monitor, interpret and evaluate their own education practice, which occurs in discussions, can lead to **the shared formation of educators' new understanding**. Understanding is mutually developed during the discussion – in which participants exchange individual interpretations of the reality (which are always subjective and partial) and create a more integral "shared reality". Discussion is not a quest for (one) actual answer, but a medium for the shared creation of new answers, where the diversity of the participants' initial understandings is a great potential for shared learning. Therefore, discussion enables better understanding of individual professional experience and leads to high-quality education work with children. For this to happen, it is necessary to reduce the traditional hierarchy and increase the equality of all participants in the early education institution.

The **monitoring and evaluation process** is an integral part of quality assurance in the early education institution. This process can be conducted at the level of the institution, at the level of the target group within the institution (a particular building, a particular education group, educators, parents, etc.) or at the level of the individual. Monitoring and evaluation can be conducted "from the inside", at the level of the institution – when we talk about self-evaluation, or "from the outside" – when we talk about external evaluation. One of the very important elements of monitoring and evaluation is the documentation of the education process, together with other documents related to the quality of work of the

[93] Senge, 2003.

early education institution. On the basis of the mentioned elements, individuals within the institution, as well as those outside it, can make conclusions about the quality of the processes and work.

Monitoring and evaluation are important to all *key participants* in the process: the *principal*, as a leader of the institution; *educators, expert associates and other employees*, as employees of the institution; *parents* of the children; the *governing council*; and the *local community*.

Self-evaluation of this area includes reflection on the following key questions.

Do I understand the purpose of the documentation of the child's learning process?

Is regulated pedagogical documentation helpful in my everyday work?

Do I use documentation as a guideline for planning further activities?

Do I reflect on and evaluate my work in the institution on a daily basis?

Am I ready to accept well-intentioned complaints about work?

Am I ready to make well-intentioned complaints about work?

Can we discuss the quality of the work in our institution openly?

Do we exchange ideas on how to make our institution better?

Do I consider self-evaluation useful?

Do I consider external evaluation useful for the improvement of the quality of work of our institution?

When reflecting on the quality of this area, the following can be useful **sources of information**:

- ✓ results of questionnaires and self-evaluation processes

- ✓ annual report

- ✓ annual programme and plan

- ✓ records

- ✓ documentation of the education process

- ✓ documentation of the institution.

- ✓ other sources.

In the text above, the key areas of quality of the early education institution have been described: the strategy of the institution, organisational leadership, culture, spatial, material and technical working conditions, sanitary and hygienic working conditions and safety, the curriculum and education process, human resources, collaboration with the local and broader community, and monitoring and evaluation. These areas of quality overlap, so particular aspects of each area can be found in one or more other areas too.

In the following text of this *Handbook*, the areas of quality are described, together with the methodology of quality assurance, which is a sort of framework for the self-evaluation of early education institutions.
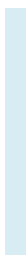
3. SELF-EVALUATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD AND PRESCHOOL EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

> For us, self-evaluation is a professional challenge and satisfaction, an opportunity for learning, personal growth and development, and for the additional strengthening of the collaborative climate in the kindergarten. We became aware of the shared goal and purpose of our shared work, our strong and weak sides and we reflected on new strategies of shared work to improve the quality of the kindergarten.
>
> *Experiences of early childhood and preschool education institutions*

Quality assurance is a very complex system and is distinguished by the way we define quality as well as by the determined standards. Since the education system is so important for society, it is necessary to assure and promote its quality systematically and seriously. The goal of quality assurance in the education system is to provide each individual with equal conditions for his/her personal growth and development. The education system is very specific and diverse at the same time, which makes it a great challenge to form a unique quality assurance system.

Improving the quality of education is one of the strategic goals of Croatia and is achieved by improving the quality of work of each institution. Quality assurance is a continuous process which embraces all participants in the education institution. At the same time, all participants in the education process are responsible for assuring the quality of work of the institution.

The starting point in the process of the quality improvement of individual institutions and of the entire early childhood and preschool education and care system is the initiation of change and the improvement of the system from the inside. The National Centre for External Evaluation of Education, by establishing a self-evaluation system (providing instruments, a methodology, training, monitoring), gives support to each institution in the quality improvement process. However, responsibility for the initiation of change and for improvement is borne by the institution alone, which is the most competent for the evaluation of its current state and of available resources and possibilities.

In order to initiate change and improve the system, it is necessary to determine the current state. When determining the state, as well as while monitoring quality improvement in the institution, we use self-evaluation as a process to systematically and continuously monitor, analyse and evaluate the efficiency of work.

The prerequisite for self-evaluation is a clear vision of the institution, determined by all the factors of the institution. Self-evaluation compares the desired and the achieved results/goals. Through self-evaluation, we endeavour to obtain answers to three fundamental questions:[94]

1. How good is our institution? (How successful, excellent is it?)

2. How do we know this? (On what basis do we reach these conclusions? How can we justify this?)

3. What can we do to become better? (What areas of improvement are priorities for us? How can we improve the quality of the suggested areas? What short-term and what long-term goals do we want to achieve? How can we achieve them?)

It is possible to answer the question **how good is our institution** by comparing the current state and the desired vision, i.e. by comparing the set and the achieved goals. Potential sub-questions which help to make this comparison are: is our institution in practice as we wish to see it? How close is the practice of our institution to our vision, or how far away from it is it? Is our institution developing in the wanted direction? The strategy of the institution, i.e. its mission, vision and the values to which it aspires, determines the guidelines for its development. All major areas of quality should be taken into consideration and all important participants of the education process should be included. Hence, we can evaluate objectively how good we really are.

In order to answer the question **how do we know that** we use objective measures in evaluating the current state of the institution in different areas, for example: the number and type of programmes for children and parents, material conditions, equipment, the achievements of individuals and the institution, permanent professional training of employees, collaboration with the local community, the satisfaction of key participants, etc. Besides the existing documentation of the institution, which is a very valuable source of information, we also use the results of questionnaires[95] for principals, educators, the expert team, the administrative, technical and other staff, the governing council of the

---

[94] Adapted according to: How good is our school?, 2002, http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/Images/HMIEREPORTFINAL2005C_tcm4-712739.pdf (visited 4 March 2013).
[95] The National Centre for External Evaluation of Education, in cooperation with the Commission for the Development of a Methodology and Instruments for Quality Monitoring in Early Childhood and Preschool Education Institutions, developed questionnaires for principals, educators, the expert team, the administrative, technical and other staff, the governing council of the institution and parents. These questionnaires survey the satisfaction, opinions and attitudes about key areas in the quality of work of early education institutions.

institution and parents, conducted by the National Centre for External Evaluation of Education. Answers to these two questions serve as the starting point to observe the strong and weak areas of work in the institution, as well as for the creation of its development plan, whose goal is to improve quality.

To answer the question about **what we can do to become better** on the basis of collected data and results, the institution defines its strong points and identifies those which need improvement. Furthermore, in accordance with what is possible (in terms of material, human, temporal, and organisational resources), the institution determines priority areas of improvement which are defined in its development plan. Each priority area requires defined development goals which should be achieved, methods which will lead to achieving the goals, the required resources, responsible persons and indicators to measure how the set goals are reached. Thereby, with a detailed action plan, the institution systematically improves the quality of individual areas of work.

Self-evaluation is an "internal insight" into the developmental processes in the institution which encompasses the following indicators:

INSIGHT INTO THE CURRENT STATE OF THE QUALITY
OF WORK OF THE INSTITUTION

MONITORING THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF
THE DEVELOPMENT
PLAN AND THE
IMPROVEMENT
OF THE QUALITY
OF WORK IN THE
INSTITUTION

ANALYSIS OF KEY AREAS
OF QUALITY

DETERMINATION OF PRIORITY AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT
AND THE CREATION OF A DEVELOPMENT PLAN OF THE
INSTITUTION
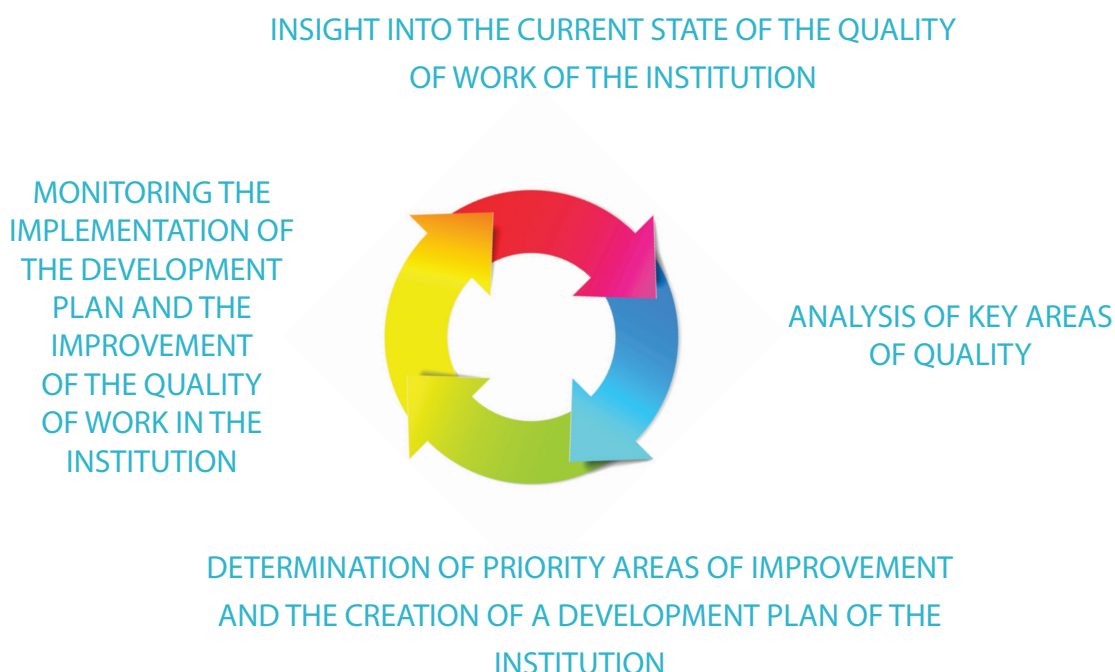
All participants in the institution are included in the process of self-evaluation. The basic assumption for conducting self-evaluation is the motivation and aspiration of all to improve their own work and to develop the institution for the well-being of children.

3.1. Quality assurance teams as a key organisational structure for self-evaluation

The prerequisite for quality assurance and the self-evaluation process is the organisational structure within the institution[96] that has overall responsibility for this process. Such an organisational unit is the **quality assurance team**.

3.1.1. Forming a quality assurance team

The *quality assurance team* is an informal organisational structure within the institution whose primary task is to assure quality of work in the institution, i.e. to conduct self-evaluation and monitor improvement in the key areas of quality. Its goal is to ensure high-quality conditions for the living, socialising, playing and learning of children, and for their educators and other employees and parents in the context of the institution.

According to the State Pedagogical Standard,[97] early education institutions are obligated to conduct continuous self-evaluation of the work in the institution. Since legal and judicial acts (still) do not regulate the obligation of forming quality assurance teams in institutions, such decisions are a matter of choice for employees and the management of the institution. However, numerous examples of the successful operation of such teams in other education systems (primary and secondary schools in the country and worldwide) justify their formation. The National Centre for External Evaluation of Education, following the models in primary and secondary schools, suggests guidelines for the formation of quality assurance teams in the framework of self-evaluation of early education institutions.

The quality assurance team encompasses the representatives of all structures within the education institution who are responsible for improving the quality of work. It is very important that all structures are equally represented so that the interests, opinions and ideas of each structure are responsibly supported. The composition of **quality assurance teams** varies according to the education level and its specificities.

---

[96] Slunjski et al. 2006.
[97] The State Pedagogical Standard of Preschool Education, Official Gazette, No. 10/97 and 107/07, Article 49.

A quality assurance team of the early education institution consists of:

1. **the principal**

2. **at least two representatives of educators (one from the nursery, and the other from the kindergarten education group)**

3. **at least one representative of the professional and development service (psychologist, counsellor, special education expert)**

4. **at least one representative of the administrative, technical and support staff**

5. **at least one representative of parents**

6. **at least one representative of the local community.**

The number of members in a team is not limited, but it is advisable that the minimum number of members is seven, according to the determined guidelines. It is also important that the number of members is not too large in order to ensure optimal working conditions and efficiency. Other members can also join the quality assurance team when needed. Furthermore, by respecting its specificities, such as the dislocation of the parts of the institution, the institution can adjust the composition of a team, but it needs to consider the availability of all key participants and to ensure optimal working conditions and efficiency.

Three models for the formation of quality assurance teams are suggested. *Model A* is intended for institutions with a smaller number of departments which are not located on different sites and where it is possible to form a team according to the given recommendations. According to *model A*, a quality assurance team consists of at least two representatives of educators (one from the nursery and the other from the kindergarten education group), at least one representative of the professional and development service (psychologist, counsellor, special education expert), at least one representative of administrative, technical and support staff, at least one representative of parents, and at least one representative of the local community.

Model B is intended for institutions which are organisationally more complex, i.e. which have more departments, institutions with dislocated departments and those with a specific organisational structure. *Model B* is an extended version of *model A*. The basic quality

assurance team consists of at least one representative of educators, at least one representative of administrative, technical and support staff, and at least one representative of parents. Meetings are organised in smaller organisational units and, when needed, in the full formation of a quality assurance team.

Some early childhood and preschool education programmes are organised in primary schools. Primary schools already have a formed school quality assurance team. *Model C* is applied in such schools. Members of the school quality assurance team are joined by at least one representative of educators, at least one representative of administrative, technical and support staff, at least one representative of parents and at least one representative of the local community.

Quality assurance team models

Model A	Model B	Model C
Operates in institutions with a simple organisational structure.	Operates in institutions with a complex organisational structure.	Operates in primary schools where early childhood and preschool education programmes are conducted.
Members of the quality assurance team	Members of the quality assurance team	Members of the quality assurance team
• the principal • at least two representatives of educators • at least one representative of the professional and development service • at least one representative of administrative, technical and support staff • at least one representative of parents • at least one representative of the local community	• the principal • at least two representatives of educators • at least one representative of the professional and development service • at least one representative of administrative, technical and support staff • at least one representative of parents • at least one representative of the local community At least one representative of each organisational unit: • educators • administrative, technical and support staff • parents	• the principal • at least one representative of the professional and development service • at least two class teachers • at least two representatives of educators • at least one representative of administrative, technical and support staff • at least one representative of parents • at least one representative of the local community

Before the formation of a quality assurance team, it is important to inform all participants of the education process about it. All those who are interested in participating in the work of the quality assurance team should be informed about the goals, roles and tasks of the team. Each participant of the education process should have an equal right to join this team. When selecting its members, it is advisable to take into consideration the principle of volunteerism and the motivation of each potential member.

The initiative for forming the team can come from the principal, expert associates, educators, other employees, parents or individuals from the local community. The person who initiates this procedure informs all the potential associates about the goals, roles and tasks of *the quality assurance team*, emphasising the well-being of children and adults. This invitation can be answered by all employees in the institution, highly motivated parents and individuals from the local community with a personal or professional interest in the institution acquiring a high level of quality. They are all welcome as members of the *quality assurance team*.

After the formation of the *quality assurance team*, the principal of the institution informs the National Centre for External Evaluation of Education, the governing council, employees of the institution and parents and hands decisions on nomination to members of the team.

Following the principle of democracy, team members choose *the leader*, who can be the principal, one of the employees, parents or representatives of the local community. Even though the principal's support, and active participation in particular segments, is necessary, this does not mean that the principal must take the role of team leader. The task of the team leader is to organise and guide the team's key activities, as well as to communicate with other participants of the education process and the National Centre for External Evaluation of Education.

The *recording secretary* is also chosen from among the team members. The secretary's tasks are to take brief notes during the meetings of the quality assurance team (members who are present, the duration of the meeting, the key points of discussion). The meetings of the team should result in strictly determined conclusions, about which other employees, parents and representatives of the local community who actively participate in the work of the institution should be informed. Depending on the priority areas which require improvement, all persons (inside and outside the institution) who can contribute to the better efficiency and faster achievement of the shared goal are included. Achieving the goals should not be the obligation of the team members alone. They take the role of

initiators, coordinators and consultants in order to integrate the agreed tasks and activities into the "broader picture" of quality improvement in the institution. The roles of the members of the quality assurance team can be adjusted to the developing needs of the institution.

3.1.2. Roles, goals and tasks of the quality assurance team

The main task of a quality assurance team is to implement into the life of the institution the values of continuous self-evaluation, both of the institution itself and of all its individuals, including children.

Members of a quality assurance team adjust the self-evaluation process to the specific needs of the institution and the individuals in it. They are expected to be innovative and to explore and implement new methods and forms of conducting self-evaluation which can contribute to improving quality in the institution. The basic principles which characterise a quality assurance team are:

- **team membership is voluntary**

- **active participation in a team is not limited in time**

- **all members of a team have an equal status and they are invited to offer ideas and suggestions for the improvement of quality in the institution**

- **team membership is not an individual privilege**

- **team members are partners focused on the same goal**

- **team members cultivate collaboration and communication based on respect, acceptance, confidence, active listening, accepting diversities, negotiating, non-violent conflict resolution**

- **the realisation of goals is not the obligation of team members alone**

- **team members explore and suggest new methods and forms of self-evaluation of individuals and of the institution, as well as for the improvement of the quality of work.**

The quality assurance team is responsible for conducting key activities in the self-evaluation process, i.e. monitoring and assuring quality in the institution. According to activities, the team leader determines the frequency and agenda of meetings. Team meetings are more frequent at the beginning of the self-evaluation process, when it is necessary to collect documentation of the institution and conduct questionnaires for self-evaluation as well as to analyse the results and determine the priority areas for quality improvement. Afterwards, a quality assurance team monitors the realisation of the development plan of the institution and suggests changes or the adaptation of the development plan, if needed. The purpose of team meetings is to discuss the positive experiences (in order to strengthen the others) and negative ones (in order to overcome difficulties), which can speed up or slow down the self-evaluation process in the institution. After a one-year cycle, the quality assurance team evaluates the fulfilment of the development plan, i.e. the goals achieved, and starts a new self-evaluation cycle. A detailed description of the quality assurance team's tasks is given below.

One of the key roles of a quality assurance team is informing all participants of the education process about key activities: the quality assurance process, the self-evaluation process, results, the development plan of the institution and how effectively the goals have been achieved.

The most significant advantage of inclusion in the self-evaluation process for our institution is the improvement of the relationships between quality assurance team members, more open communication, development of mutual trust, but also the acceptance of individual responsibility of all team members in improving the work of the institution.

Experiences of early childhood and preschool education institutions

3.2. An insight into the current state of quality of work in the institution

> It was difficult and hard, but very useful. We raised a lot of questions, problems, suggested a number of ideas, and the most valuable thing is that the quality of the institution was discussed by all participants of the education process.
>
> *Experiences of early childhood and preschool education institutions*

In order to evaluate the quality of a particular institution objectively, it is necessary to collect information, i.e. indicators of the quality of its work. The preceding chapter identified key areas of quality and data from which different areas of quality may be evaluated.

We have already mentioned that quality is a subjective category. Different professionals, as well as various individuals of the same profession, can see the same institution in a different light: educators from their perspective, and expert associates, administrative, technical and support staff from theirs. Even though they are all employees of the same institution, everyone is focused on their own job and, accordingly, their aspects of work and life in the institution can seem much more important to them than others. Parents bring their children to the institution and come to pick them up every day, hence they are constantly communicating with educators and other employees. They have their expectations of the institution and create their own "image" of the institution on the basis of their and their child's experience. When the "image" is closer to their expectation, the institution will appear of greater excellence. At the same time, the principal and the governing council see the institution from their perspective. They make decisions which are important for the work and life of the institution on the basis of the current and desired state and depending on the available resources. The local community participates in the work of the institution, but the institution also participates in the life and work of the local community.

All the mentioned structures monitor and evaluate the quality of the institution from their perspective. Therefore, collecting the opinions of all the key participants is crucial in order to gain an objective picture of the current state, as well as a picture of how the institution can be improved.

3.2.1. Conducting a questionnaire survey

For the needs of the self-evaluation of early education institutions, the National Centre for External Evaluation of Education, in cooperation with the Commission for the Development of Methodology and Instruments for Quality Monitoring in Early Childhood and Preschool Education Institutions, developed **questionnaires for principals, educators, expert teams, administrative, technical and other staff, the governing council of the institution and parents**. These questionnaires are used for investigating satisfaction, opinions and attitudes towards key areas of work in early education institutions. They include the key areas of quality which are specified in Chapter 2 of this *Handbook*. The purpose of the questionnaire is to gain an insight into the way the principal and governing council see the institution on the one hand, and the way educators, expert associates, administrative, technical and support staff as well as parents see it on the other hand. The questionnaires are provided by the Centre and are conducted by the quality assurance team, according to the guidelines in the guidebook for conducting the questionnaire. Completing the questionnaire should be organised by taking into consideration the working time of employees, the specificities of their occupation as well as organisational and spatial conditions. Participation in completing the questionnaire is voluntary and anonymous. It is important that all members of a particular group take part in the questionnaire to provide more objective feedback on the quality of work of the institution. It is also important to comply with the given instructions in order to ensure equal conditions for all participants in the self-evaluation process.

After the questionnaires have been completed, they are sent to the National Centre for External Evaluation of Education for statistical analysis. At this point, the conducting of the questionnaire is complete.

3.2.2. Collecting documentation from the institution

Besides the questionnaires from the National Centre for External Evaluation of Education, **the existing documentation** of the institution is a very important source of information, whether prescribed by law or supplementary. The results of the questionnaires reflect attitudes, opinions and satisfaction with particular areas of quality. The results show which

areas of quality were evaluated as good by particular structures and which were evaluated as poor. The results therefore indicate which areas of quality require improvement, but these findings should also be supported by the documentation of the institution. Documentation of the institution and other sources of information will contribute to understanding the elements of particular areas of quality which require improvement and will show if it is necessary to create activities at the level of the whole institution or whether these activities should be directed towards targeted structures, etc.

For example, we can draw conclusions on collaboration between the early education institution and the local community on the basis of the yearbook of the institution, local newspaper clippings, recordings of radio features, letters of appreciation, photos from meetings, etc. We can also draw conclusions on collaboration with parents based on records form parent-teacher meetings, the annual plan of parent-teacher meetings, checklists from parent-teacher meetings, parents' letters and comments, projects in which parents were included, etc. All existing documentation of the institution, together with the results of the questionnaires, can help in drawing conclusions on the quality of work of a particular area. Chapter 2 of the *Handbook* specifies each area of quality together with potential sources of information. Besides the existing documentation of the institution, it is also necessary to use other sources of information. An example of potential sources of information according to areas of quality is given below.

KEY QUESTIONS	SOURCES OF INFORMATION
1. Strategy of the early education institution	
Is there a developed vision and mission in our institution? Do the vision and mission correspond to what we are and what we want to be? Are all participants acquainted with them? Do the vision and mission make our institution recognisable? Do we live this vision and mission every day? How do we do that?	✓ *results of questionnaires and self-evaluation processes* ✓ *website of the institution* ✓ *notice board and other means of information for parents and other participants* ✓ *annual report of the early education institution* ✓ *other sources.*

KEY QUESTIONS	SOURCES OF INFORMATION
2. Organisational leadership in the early education institution	
Is the organisational leadership of our institution successful? Is all the information important for my work in the institution available to me? Is the principal of our institution open to suggestions? Is team work encouraged in the institution? Do we deal with problem situations in our institution as a team? Can I contribute to achieving the shared goals?	✓ *results of questionnaires and self-evaluation processes* ✓ *statute of the institution* ✓ *records* ✓ *other sources.*
3. Culture in the early education institution	
Is my working environment comfortable and encouraging? Is the working environment important to me? Am I satisfied with communication with educators, the expert team, the principal, administrative, technical and other staff? Am I satisfied with collaboration with educators, the expert team, the principal, administrative, technical and other staff? Do we develop collaborative relationships? Do we treat each others in a professional manner? Do we appreciate the individuality of each other? Are my relationships with colleagues more supportive than conflictual, more often collaborative than competitive, do I more often feel trust than scepticism?	✓ *results of questionnaires and self-evaluation processes* ✓ *yearbook of the institution* ✓ *annual report* ✓ *annual programme and plan* ✓ *other sources.*
4. Spatial, material and technical working conditions	
Does our indoor space fulfil the needs of children (in all education groups)? Is our indoor space encouraging enough for the children (in all education groups)? Do we provide sufficient materials for high-quality work? Is our institution well equipped? Are we satisfied with the equipment and layout of the outdoor area of the institution? Are we satisfied with the equipment and decoration of the indoor area of the institution? Is time organisation in the institution flexible? Are the working hours of the institution adjusted to the needs of children and parents?	✓ *results of questionnaires and self-evaluation processes* ✓ *annual report* ✓ *annual programme and plan* ✓ *statute of the institution* ✓ *photos, videos and other documentation of the institution* ✓ *other sources.*

KEY QUESTIONS	SOURCES OF INFORMATION
5. Sanitary-hygienic working conditions and safety	
Is the indoor and outdoor space of our institution safe? Are children safe in the institution? Do we have safety protocols? Do we comply with the safety guidelines of the protocol during our work? Do we conduct health protection measures regularly? Is the nutrition planned in accordance with professional recommendations? Do we act enough on prevention?	✓ *results of questionnaires and self-evaluation processes* ✓ *safety, protection and prevention programme in the early education institution* ✓ *medical documentation (children's diseases and vaccination, injuries, epidemiological indications, health education, hygienic and epidemiological control, sanitary control, reports on food analysis, hygienic minimum, etc.)* ✓ *hygienic measures in the institution* ✓ *annual report* ✓ *annual programme and plan* ✓ *other sources.*
6. Curriculum and the education process	
Do I adjust my working style to children's different abilities? Do I respect children's different learning styles directly in my work? Does each child have the freedom to choose content and activities? Do I encourage children to self-evaluate their activities and actions? Does our environment ensure different interactions among children and adults?	✓ *results of questionnaires and self-evaluation processes* ✓ *annual report* ✓ *annual programme and plan* ✓ *book of pedagogical documentation of the education group* ✓ *children's individual files* ✓ *documentation of the education process.* ✓ *other sources.*
7. Human resources	
Do I like my job? Do I feel that my job has a sense and purpose? Am I capable of responding to all the demands of my job? Is continuous improvement of my work important to me? Do I possess competences which are necessary for my work with children, parents and colleagues? How do I contribute to the continuous development of my competences? Do I apply the knowledge gained during professional development in my work? Do I have continuous professional training?	✓ *results of questionnaires and self-evaluation processes* ✓ *individual plan and programme of professional training* ✓ *annual report* ✓ *annual programme and plan* ✓ *register of substitute educators* ✓ *statute of the institution* ✓ *statistical data* ✓ *other sources.*

KEY QUESTIONS	SOURCES OF INFORMATION
8. Collaboration with the local and broader community	
Am I satisfied with collaboration with parents? Is good collaboration with parents important to me? Does our institution offer parents different forms of inclusion in its work? Do I have open and reciprocal exchange of information about children with parents? Does our institution offer support programmes to parents? Does our institution provide parents with support in carrying out their parental role? Is our institution recognised and appreciated in the local community? Do we participate in different events in the city/town? Does the local community provide support for the work of our institution? Am I satisfied with the collaboration of our institution with competent institutions and education institutions?	✓ *results of questionnaires and self-evaluation processes* ✓ *yearbook of the institution* ✓ *annual report* ✓ *annual programme and plan* ✓ *records of meetings, etc.* ✓ *documentation of the institution* ✓ *other sources.*
9. The monitoring and evaluation process	
Do I understand the purpose of the documentation of the child's learning process? Is regulated pedagogical documentation helpful in my everyday work? Do I use documentation as a guideline for planning further activities? Do I reflect on and evaluate my work in the institution on a daily basis? Am I ready to accept well-intentioned complaints about work? Am I ready to make well-intentioned complaints about work? Can we discuss the quality of the work in our institution openly? Do we exchange ideas on how to make our institution better? Do I consider self-evaluation useful? Do I consider external evaluation useful for improving the quality of work in our institution?	✓ *results of questionnaires and self-evaluation processes* ✓ *annual report* ✓ *annual programme and plan* ✓ *records of meetings* ✓ *documentation of the education process* ✓ *documentation of the institution* ✓ *other sources.*

The mentioned sources of information are just some examples of the way the existing documentation of the institution helps in the self-evaluation process. Besides these sources, every quality assurance team can use other sources which the institution offers and which apply to a particular area of quality. On the basis of the development of activities and on defining indicators to measure how well goals are achieved, each team will develop new sources and forms to monitor improvement.

3.2.3. Professional discussions and focus groups

Results of the questionnaires reflect attitudes, opinions and satisfaction with particular areas of quality. Documentation of the institution provides additional information on activities, trends and other elements within particular areas. For the institution to conduct the self-evaluation process objectively and integrally, shared professional discussions on particular areas are also advisable, in which members of all key structures of the institution should participate. Professional discussions and focus groups allow problems to be better understood, i.e. for a clearer insight into actual weaknesses and elements which require improvement. Such an approach provides possible ways to eliminate the weaknesses, i.e. for problem-solving.

For example, results of the questionnaires can indicate educators' dissatisfaction with collaboration with parents. Through a review of documentation, we can determine the existing forms of collaboration of the early education institution with parents, how often parent-teacher meetings are organised, what the parents' response to parent-teacher meetings is, and what themes are discussed at parent-teacher meetings. However, only in direct communication, in this example with educators and parents (in professional discussions and focus groups), can we identify the key problems. A potential cause could be the unsuitable time of the parent-teacher meetings, the uninteresting content and themes, the parents' or educators' wish for new forms of collaboration, etc. In this way, it is also possible to determine methods of problem solving, i.e. to eliminate the weaknesses.

Professional discussions could be organised according to the particular structures, for example during the meeting of the educators' council, the parents' council or the governing council. Hence, if we believe that only the representatives of a particular structure can illuminate the situation or if the problem is related to a specific group, e.g. only the collaboration of parents within one education group, we can organise a targeted focus

group. For example, this could include only the parents of the "preschoolers" of one education group and the educators and expert associates who work in the group to which the targeted discussion refers.

Professional discussions and focus groups can help to reduce and/or eliminate misunderstanding or a wrong interpretation of the results of the self-evaluation questionnaires, the neglect of a particular area of quality, fragmentary consideration of the importance of quality for the institution, etc.

3.3. Analysing key areas of quality

> The results of our institution which we used for interpretation were the basis of discussions of the quality assurance team. Key questions for discussing areas of quality directed the discussions of the team, and especially useful was the entire CREDA analysis and development plan. Meetings of the quality assurance team lasted for a very long time and, in our opinion, were at a high level, with everyone contributing.
>
> *Experiences of early childhood and preschool education institutions*

Conducting questionnaires, collecting documentation and organising professional discussions and focus groups are followed by interpreting and analysing the key areas of quality. The quality assurance team analyses each area of quality on the basis of the collected data. Guidelines for the analysis and interpretation of results are given in **the self-evaluation form** (the completed self-evaluation form becomes the self-evaluation report). In the first part of the form, *general information about the institution* is included, as well as information about the quality assurance team responsible, among other things, for the preparation of the self-evaluation report.

After this comes the *specificities of the institution*, in which the quality assurance team indicates all the specificities of the institution, for example, whether it includes only the home institution or the departments as well, whether it is a private institution, whether it belongs to an area of special state concern, etc. This part of the form includes all the programmes conducted in the institution – regular, shorter or special programmes. This part also provides the specific living and working conditions of the institution.

Then, an analysis of *key areas of quality* follows. At the very beginning, the quality assurance team analyses the results of the questionnaires at the level of the institution and particular structures. Each area must be analysed at these levels:

✓ with regard to other areas of quality (does the particular area have a higher or lower evaluation in comparison with other areas of quality; for example, the area of material conditions has a lower evaluation than the area of human resources)

✓ with regard to particular structures (which structures within the institution give the highest and which the lowest evaluation of a particular area: for example, do educators give a higher evaluation than the principal or parents for the area of collaboration with the local and broader community?)

✓ with regard to the average of other institutions (is the evaluation of a particular area of quality in our institution higher or lower than the average evaluation of this area in other institutions?).

A higher evaluation means high satisfaction with a particular area, i.e. it confirms that processes and activities directed towards higher quality within a particular area are being conducted in the institution. By analysing the evaluations, it can be determined which areas are considered better and which worse, and who is the most and the least satisfied with a particular area in the institution. On the basis of the results, it is also possible to determine how other institutions evaluated a particular area.

These results should be substantiated with information from the documentation of the institution and from the data collected during professional discussions which will additionally explain the current state.

The next task of the quality assurance team is to evaluate, for each area, what is successful and what requires improvement. On the basis of all the collected data, the good sides within each area are pointed out and the team determines the elements within the areas of quality which need to be improved. After a detailed analysis of each area of quality, the team evaluates its satisfaction with a particular aspect. In this step, the quality assurance team determines the strong and weak sides of the institution, i.e. which are the priority areas for improvement, and this will help decision-making regarding the areas which will be given more attention and care in the development plan of the institution.

3.3.1. Determining priority areas of improvement – the CREDA analysis

A detailed analysis of each area of quality provides the quality assurance team with clear directions about areas of work in the institution which require improvement and the precise elements of the area which need to be improved. The CREDA analysis[98] is

---

[98] The CREDA analysis is a modified SWOT analysis adapted by experts from the National Centre for External Evaluation of Education to the requirements of education institutions, especially schools. These experts are J. Muraja, M. Reberšak and B. Vranković. See: Muraja, 2008.

recommended to define and determine these priority areas, as well as to help accomplish the necessary improvement.

CREDA is an acronym whose first letters refer to terms which are crucial in the approach to setting goals in the self-evaluation process. It is important to set **c**oncrete and **r**ealistic development goals and to approach their realisation **e**nergetically, **d**ynamically and **a**mbitiously. The term CREDA is also applied to the description of the institution whose goal is to be **c**ompetitive, **r**epresentative, **e**fficient, **d**ecent and **a**uthentic.

CREDA analysis	EARLY EDUCATION INSTITUTION
Concreteness	Competitive
Reality	Representative
Energy	Efficient
Dynamics	Decent
Ambitiousness	Authentic

The CREDA analysis is a SWOT analysis adapted to the self-evaluation requirements of education institutions, especially schools. The goal of the CREDA analysis is to question all internal and external factors that influence the quality of work and, in this way, answer the question **How good is our institution?** For the needs of this project, the CREDA analysis is additionally modified to be applicable to early education institutions.

The CREDA analysis is a tool to help determine the priority areas for improvement which will subsequently be implemented in the development plan of the institution. In the first part of the CREDA analysis, the quality assurance team defines the strengths and weaknesses of the institution and in so doing attempts to answer the question **What are the things our early education institution is proud of**? It is necessary to indicate all those areas which make the institution a high-quality one, whether they refer to the education process, the material and technical conditions, the culture of the institution or collaboration with the local and broader community. Then, the **difficulties are identified which the institution encounters on a daily basis** related to its internal work and functioning. These areas are directly connected to the previous parts of the report where the quality assurance teams have already indicated areas which require improvement. The analysis of **unused resources** follows, where the team analyses the unused potentials of the institution. The use of these potentials contributes to improving the institution's quality. Defining **obstacles**, i.e. the

elements which inhibit the improvement of the institution, is the first step towards overcoming them, which increases the chances of the institution achieving its desired growth. Then the question **What can we do to be even better?** follows, where the quality assurance team, on the basis of the previous analysis of the internal features of the institution, plans the steps for the institution to be even better.

The next category is **Who can assist us in improving?** Here, it is necessary to indicate institutions, persons and other factors that could help in improving the quality of work in the institution. The CREDA analysis finishes with the question **How good is our institution?** which reflects the self-criticism of the institution and the ability to evaluate the quality of its overall work.

When making the CREDA analysis, it is recommended to apply one of the methods of creative thinking, e.g. *brainstorming*.

✓ In the first phase, the quality assurance team answers all the questions in the table of the CREDA analysis. The only rule to obey is that each person can give any answer that comes to mind and no one can evaluate this. All answers are written on a board or other visible surface.

✓ The second phase of brainstorming involves discussion on the written answers and agreement about the answers which will be entered in the table of the CREDA analysis as a demonstration of the actual state in the institution. There is no given or recommended number of answers, since this varies according to the specificities of the institution.

✓ At the end of the CREDA analysis, the whole quality assurance team gives a shared quantitative evaluation of the quality of work of the institution on a scale from 1 to 7 (from "we are not satisfied at all" to "we are completely satisfied"). This evaluation is the answer to the question **How good is our institution?**

These activities are the prerequisites for defining the priority areas for improving quality in the institution which derive from the CREDA analysis. We present below an example of a completed table of a CREDA analysis.

CREDA analysis	
What are the things we are proud of? *(analyse and indicate all the good sides of the work of the institution)* • different regular and shorter programmes • quality equipment and various materials for work with children • regular professional training of employees • regular organisation of summer and winter holidays for children • inclusion of children with difficulties in regular and shorter programmes • good collaboration with parents • counselling centre for parents • pedagogical practice conducted for students from universities • active participation in the projects of the local community • support for educators to continue their education • regular and active participation of educators and expert associates in professional meetings • inclusion of a larger number of children from different parts of the world in regular programmes • high-quality interpersonal relationships	**What are the difficulties we encounter on a daily basis?** *(indicate all the difficulties we encounter on a daily basis and which refer to the work and functioning of the institution)* • lack of space • large number of children in groups • small number of expert associates
What are our unused resources? *(indicate all unused potentials of the institution)* • educator(s) with special talents • assistance from parents • unused gym for physical education in the afternoon • unused premises of the institution during the weekend	**What are the obstacles which inhibit improvement?** *(indicate external obstacles which inhibit improvement of the institution)* • unclear or non-existent legislative regulation • finance
What can we do to be even better? *(on the basis of the internal features of the institution, plan and indicate the steps to be even better)* • improve relationships with parents (start a *school of parenthood*, organise support groups for parents of children with difficulties) • ensure conditions for the inclusion of a larger number of children with difficulties in regular programmes (provide assistants) • design playrooms and organise them in the afternoon • ask for help from local authorities and donors to equip the courtyard of the institution	**Who can assist us in improving our quality of work (persons, institutions…)?** *(indicate institutions, associations, persons, etc., who could be helpful in improving the quality of work of the institution)* • "xxx" association • local community • Faculty of Philosophy/Faculty of Teacher Education • local TV and radio stations • sponsors/donors • expert associates

HOW GOOD IS OUR INSTITUTION? We are satisfied with the quality of our institution (circle the appropriate grade):								
We are not satisfied at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	we are completely satisfied

3.4. Development plan of the institution - priority areas for improvement and development goals

> The development plan of the institution gave great substance to our annual plan.
>
> *Experiences of early childhood and preschool education institutions*

The development plan of the early education institution is the final part of the self-evaluation process and thereby of the self-evaluation report. This plan represents the short-term development strategy for the improvement of quality of the institution, which covers a period of one year. Depending on the part of year in which it is made, it refers either to the current or to the following school year.

Making a development plan is preceded by a detailed insight into the results and documentation, their analysis and interpretation, open and honest communication about "critical points", identification of the good and bad sides of each area of quality, as well as the CREDA analysis. In this way, the quality assurance team gains an insight into all those areas of quality which require improvement. Some areas will require work which could last longer (two, three or even five years). For example, a development goal within the area of *spatial, material and technical working conditions* could be the *enlargement of the existing building*. If the institution does not have sufficient financial resources, various permits and approvals, or other conditions, it cannot be expected that the desired goal will be achieved within one school year. Hence, this development goal should be included in the long-term development strategy, whereas, for example, creating project documentation for the enlargement of the building could be included in the development plan of the institution. It is recommended to include all areas as part of the strategy in the long-term plans for the quality improvement of the institution. However, the development plan should include those priority areas and goals which could be carried out within one school year, in accordance with the available material and temporal and human resources. The selection of such priority areas is neither easy nor simple. Therefore, the basic goal of all the previous actions and procedures is to make the selection of priority areas easier for the quality assurance team. A key criterion for such selection is to answer in what way the improvement of that area improves the children's quality of life in the early education institution.

An appropriate, feasible and achievable development plan is the way to achieve the desired goals and sets the development dynamics. Hence, the development plan provides a clear overview of the goals and activities over a particular period.

The development plan of the institution is entered in a table, which is an integral part of the self-evaluation report. Priority areas for improvement are entered in the first column. Afterwards, development goals, to be achieved in a particular priority area, are determined. Subsequently, it is necessary to identify the methods and activities which will enable the goal to be achieved. After this, the resources necessary for the activities, the final date to accomplish a particular goal, and the individuals responsible for conducting the activities are defined. Finally, indicators are defined to confirm that goals within the determined priority area have been achieved.

In the column **priority areas for improvement**, we enter areas which require improvement according to the analysis and interpretation of results as well as according to the CREDA analysis. It is important to follow the categorisation of quality areas as described in Chapter 2 of the *Handbook* and traced through the self-evaluation report and other accompanying materials. It is recommended that the number of priority areas for improvement in the annual plan of the institution is neither too small nor too large. According to previous experience in self-evaluation processes, the optimal number of priority areas for improvement per development plan is from three to five. The number of selected priority areas depends on the self-evaluation results as well as the available material and the temporal and human resources. The quality assurance team can choose one priority area and determine three to five development goals related to it which will be achieved by the end of the school year. However, the team can choose three priority areas and determine one development goal within each area which will be achieved by the end of the school year. Each team decides which priority areas for improvement they will select and how many development goals they will set.

The **development goals** follow, which describe what exactly the quality assurance team wants to achieve within each priority area. It should be possible to monitor how the goals are achieved. The goals should be concrete, specific, clearly expressed, measurable and realistic, i.e. they should be achievable in the period for which the team makes the school development plan – during one school year. For example, if the priority area for improvement is *collaboration with the local and broader community* and the desired state is better collaboration with parents, one of the goals which the team could set is *better attendance at parent-teacher meetings*, or, more concretely, *improving attendance at parent-teacher*

meetings by 50%. The achievement of the goal set in this way is easy to monitor with the help of the checklists from parent-teacher meetings and notes on parent attendance.

It is necessary to define **methods and activities** for the realisation of each development goal. Planned *activities* refer to concrete actions taken to achieve the goal through the use of appropriate *methods*. It is important for methods and activities actually to lead to achieving the goal. For example, with regard to the previous example where the development goal was to *improve attendance of parent-teacher meetings by 50%,* possible methods and activities are: *surveying parents on the times and contents of parent-teacher meetings, analysing the survey results, adjusting the times of the parent-teacher meetings, enriching the content of parent-teacher meetings according to the parents' interests (based on the survey results).*

It is necessary to anticipate the required **resources** in accordance with the set development goals and selected activities and methods. Resources could be financial, organisational and human, and they should relate to the expenses which are necessary to achieve the goal, to the organisational steps the institution needs to take, to the human resources within the institution, or to the external associates which are needed to conduct the suggested activities which will lead to the set goal. With regard to the example of parent-teacher meetings, the required resources would be, for example, *human*: expert associates (survey design and analysis of the survey results), educators (conducting a survey and parent-teacher meetings); *financial* (office supplies); *organisational* (ensuring a room for parent-teacher meetings outside the working hours of the institution once a month or quarterly and adjusting the educators' shifts on the days when the parent-teacher meeting is held).

For each development goal, it is necessary to set the final **date** for the attainment of the goal, which corresponds to a realistic evaluation of the needed time. As has already been mentioned, the development plan of the institution refers to a period of one school year. Accordingly, goals are planned which are achievable within this timeframe.

Finally, in order to know if the goals are actually achieved, it is necessary to define **measurable indicators of success** for each development goal. Measurable indicators of success in achieving the goals could be photo and video documentation, the results of conducted surveys, reports, children's portfolios, equipment and didactic material, the participation of educators and others in different forms of professional training, etc. It is necessary to reflect on measurable indicators of success when setting and defining development goals.

When designing the development plan, it is necessary to name **individuals responsible for conducting the activities**. Depending on the specificities of the development plan, responsible individuals should be named according to the determined priority areas, or according to the set development goals or according to the planned activities. When selecting individuals responsible for conducting the activities, it is necessary to take care of the interests, abilities, motivation and available time of the person named. Responsible individuals take responsibility for the conducting and monitoring of one or more activities which lead to the set goal. Responsible individuals inform the quality assurance team about particular phases of the activity for which they are responsible.

The example below shows a completed development plan.

DEVELOPMENT PLAN OF THE INSTITUTION for the school year 2012/2013 (example)

PRIORITY AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT	DEVELOPMENT GOALS	METHODS AND ACTIVITIES TO REACH GOALS	REQUIRED RESOURCES	DEADLINE TO ACHIEVE GOALS	MEASURABLE INDICATORS TO SHOW THAT GOALS HAVE BEEN ACHIEVED	INDIVIDUALS RESPONSIBLE FOR CONDUCTING THE ACTIVITIES
1. COLLABORATION WITH THE LOCAL AND BROADER COMMUNITY	1.1. DETERMINE CAUSES OF UNSATISFACTORY COLLABORATION BETWEEN KINDERGARTENS AND PARENTS	1.1.1. CONSTRUCTION OF SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE	EXPERT KNOWLEDGE OF PSYCHOLOGIST/ COUNSELLOR	DURING OCTOBER 2012	SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE	PSYCHOLOGIST/ COUNSELLOR
		1.1.2. APPLICATION OF QUESTIONNAIRE	MATERIAL REQUIRED TO CONDUCT THE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE	DURING NOVEMBER 2012	TIME SCHEDULE TO CONDUCT THE QUESTIONNAIRE NOTICE FOR THE PARTICIPANTS, RECORD OF CONDUCTING THE QUESTIONNAIRE COMPLETED SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRES	EDUCATORS
		1.1.3. ANALYSIS AND PROCESSING OF RESULTS	EXPERT KNOWLEDGE OF PSYCHOLOGIST/ COUNSELLOR	DURING DECEMBER 2012	REPORT ON RESULTS OF SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRES	PSYCHOLOGIST/ COUNSELLOR
		1.1.4. PROFESSIONAL DISCUSSION DURING EDUCATORS' COUNCIL AND PARENT-TEACHER MEETINGS	TIME SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS ROOM FOR CONDUCTING MEETINGS	DURING JANUARY AND FEBRUARY 2013	LIST OF DATES OF MEETINGS, LIST OF PARTICIPANTS, MINUTES/ CONCLUSIONS	PSYCHOLOGIST/ COUNSELLOR

3.5. Informing key participants

The self-evaluation process led to the greater engagement of particular employees who are not quality assurance team members and we are especially pleased because these employees are willing to work on the improvement of quality and their education practice. Actually, participation in the pilot project made it possible for our institution to become a more comfortable and supportive place to live and work.

Experiences of early childhood and preschool education institutions

One of the crucial roles of the quality assurance team is to communicate with key participants of the institution: educators, expert associates, administrative, technical and support staff, the governing council and parents. The institution needs support to conduct the self-evaluation project, so it is necessary for all participants to be informed about the basic stages of the project as well as the goals that the institution wants to achieve through participation. It is extremely important at different levels (at the level of the individual, group, home institution, local community and at the national level) to explain how participation in the self-evaluation project helps improve the quality of life and work in the institution.

The communication and collaboration of the quality assurance team and key participants are crucial for the success of the project. The key stages of the self-evaluation project where communication is crucial are:

- ✓ when the institution decides to participate in the self-evaluation project

- ✓ during the formation of the quality assurance team

- ✓ while conducting the questionnaires

- ✓ while collecting the documentation

- ✓ during the interpretation of results

✓ during the CREDA analysis

✓ while making the development plan.

Even though the quality assurance team takes most of the responsibility for conducting the self-evaluation process, each individual is responsible for carrying out the development plan and for achieving the goals.

3.6. Overview of the self-evaluation process

We experienced self-evaluation as an opportunity to improve the quality of our work: the work of individuals and the entire kindergarten. During the process, we perceived our strong and weak points. The feedback from the Centre enabled us to flesh out how we see ourselves. We are thankful for the excellent instruments and constant support in the process. Even though the process is unified and equal for all, we like the possibility to decide what we want to do with the results and how to create the development plan of the institution. The entire process enabled us to deal with ourselves, our role in the kindergarten and to talk and agree a lot more. The diversity of the quality assurance team strengthened mutual understanding and the sense of belonging among the participants.

Experiences of early childhood and preschool education institutions

After conducting self-evaluation in the institution, as a final part of the self-evaluation report it is necessary to consider the conducting of the entire process. During this part, the quality assurance team describes how often they had meetings, how demanding the self-evaluation process was, how satisfied they are with the work they have done, and what problems and obstacles they encountered. They also evaluate whether (and how) the self-evaluation process is going to help them improve in the future the quality of work in the institution. The team makes suggestions to improve the self-evaluation process in the institution in order to make it more efficient and successful in the following period at the level of the system.

4. QUALITY MONITORING AND ASSURANCE

4.1. Fulfilling the development plan

> Open communication remained the crucial part of our work even after the self-evaluation process, as well as the intention to make a development plan at the beginning of each school year.
>
> *Experiences of early childhood and preschool education institutions*

The self-evaluation process continues through monitoring the activities and achieving the goals defined by the development plan. Individuals responsible for monitoring the activities which lead to the goals inform the quality assurance team of improvement or potential obstacles.

Self-evaluation is a continuous process which constantly improves and continues through monitoring the planned activities and in setting new goals. Given that the early education institution is a living system that constantly changes, it is possible that particular goals will not be achieved in the planned period or it may appear that they should be redefined because of new circumstances. In such situations, the quality assurance team suggests new goals or redefines the existing ones, determines new timeframes, and enters all changes into the development plan, about which it informs all the participants of the education process.

4.2. Quality assurance and self-evaluation as a continuous process

Participation in the pilot project contributed to my personal and professional development.

Experiences of early childhood and preschool education institutions

It is clear that the self-evaluation of the institution is a process which never stops, since quality, which is its basic purpose, should have a constant upward path. It is a process which needs to be continuous and is one of constant evolution.[99] This is why it is necessary to emphasise the need to develop the skill of continuous, i.e. lifelong, learning and the development of new professional competences among educators and other professionals employed in the early education institution.

The things which connect these early education institutions – professional learning communities – are:[100]

1. showing a sense and readiness for sharing mutual goals and values

2. acquiring norms of continuous learning and improvement

3. building a sense of responsibility for learning and development in all children

4. supporting collaborative, collegial relationships

5. promoting reflective practice, collective research and sharing experiences about one's own practice.

The professional development of professionals employed in the early education institution should be a continuous process, as should the process of constant evolution.[101]

---

[99] Hopkins, 2001; Datnow et al., 2002.
[100] Vujičić, 2011.
[101] Hopkins, 2001; Datnow et al., 2002.

It is possible to achieve all this by transforming the early education institution into a *learning organisation*. Namely, without deep changes in the educators' and other professionals' way of thinking, on which the development of their new skills (including the skill of self-evaluation) is based, we can expect very limited improvement in practice.[102] The support and help of colleagues, who also want to improve themselves and their practice, is an important condition for any permanent change in the attitudes and behaviour of educators as individuals. In such an institution, *educators explore their practice together, and interpret, evaluate and continuously improve it through dialogue and discussion with others*.[103] Hence, they create a community of reflective practitioners who are ready and capable of continuous learning, exploration and improvement of the quality of their education work.

In every early education institution, quality assurance team members can help educators to achieve this. They promote the value of quality, and through their personal example and effort become a model and source of encouragement to other participants in the education process for the constant self-evaluation and improvement of the quality of the institution in all aspects of its work.

---

[102] Fullan, 1993.
[103] Šagud, 2011.

LITERATURE

1. Bognar, L., Matijević, M. (1993), *Didaktika*. Zagreb: Školska knjiga.

2. Bruner, J. (2000), *Kultura obrazovanja,* Zagreb: Educa.

3. Cohen, L., Manion, L., Morrison, K. (1996), *A Guide to Teaching Practice*. London, New York: Routledge.

4. Curtis, D., Carter, M. (2008). *Learning Together with Young Children – A Curriculum Framework for Reflective Teachers*. 10 Yorkton Court, St. Paul: Redleaf Press.

5. Datnow, A., Hubbard, L., Mehan, H. (2002), *Extending Educational Reform, From One School to Many*. London and New York: Routledge Falmer.

6. Delors, J. (1998), *Učenje – blago u nama.* Zagreb: Educa.

7. Domović, V. (2003), *Školsko ozračje i učinkovitost škole*. Zagreb: Naklada Slap.

8. *State Pedagogical Standard of Preschool Education*. Official Gazette, No. 55/06, 121/07, 10/97, 105/02, 107/07, 63/08, 90/10.

9. Edwards, C., Gandini, L., Nimmo, J. (1994), *Promoting Collaborative Learning in the Early Childhood Classroom: Teachers' Contrasting Conceptualization in Two Communities*. In: Katz, L., Cesarone, B. (eds.), Reflections on the Reggio Emilia Approach, ERIC/EECE, Pennsylvania Urbana, 69-86.

10. Elliot, J. (1998), *The Curriculum Experiment – Meeting the Challenge of Social Change*. Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press.

11. Ellis, A. K. (2004), *Exemplars of Curriculum Theory*. Larchmont, New York: Eye On Education.

12. Ellis, N. (2007), *Foundation Stage – Expectations and Vision*. In: Moyles, J. (eds.), Beginning Teaching Beginning Learning in Primary Education. Berkshire: Open University Press, 24-32.

13. Fullan, M. (1993), *Change Forces*. London: Falmer Press.

14. Fullan, M. (2001), *The New Meaning of Educational Change*. New York: Teacher College Press, London: RoutledgeFalmer.

15. Fullan, M. and Hargreaves, A. (1991), *What's Worth Fighting for in Your School*? New York: Teachers College Press.

16. Gandini, L. (1998), *Educational and Caring Spaces*. In: Edwards, C. P., Gandini, L., Forman, G. (eds.), The Hundred Languages of Children – The Reggio Emilia Approach, Advanced Reflections. London: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 161-178.

17. Glasser, W. (1994), *Kvalitetna škola*, Zagreb, Educa.

18. Hargreaves, D. (1999), *Helping Practitioners Explore Their Culture*. In: Prosser, J. (eds.), School Culture. London: Paul Chapman Publishing, 48-65.

19. Hargreaves, A., Fink, D. (2006), *Sustainable Leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

20. Hawley, W. D. (ed.) (2002), *The Keys to Effective Schools – Educational Reform as Continuous Improvement*. California: Corwin Press, Inc., Thousand Oaks.

21. Hopkins, D. (2001), *School Improvement for Real*. London, New York: Routledge/Falmer.

22. Jaeckle, S. (2006), *Managing Yourself and Your Learning*. In: Bruce, T. (eds.), Early Childhood. London, Thousand Oakes, New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 1-10.

23. Jurčević-Lozančić, A. (2011), *Socijalne kompetencije djece*. In: Maleš, D. (ed.), Nove paradigme ranoga odgoja. Zagreb: Filozofski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, Zavod za pedagogiju, 209-236.

24. Kamenov, E. (1982), *Eksperimentalni programi za rano obrazovanje*. Beograd: Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva.

25. Kemmis, S., McTaggart, R. (eds.) (1981), *The Action Research Planner*. Geelong, Victoria: Deakin University Press.

26. Kemmis, S., Wilkinson, M. (1998), *Participatory Action Research and the Study of Practice*. In: Atweh, B., Kemmis, S., Weeks, P. (eds.), Action Research in Practice, Partnerships for Social Justice in Education. London, New York: Routledge, 21-36.

27. *Convention on the Rights of a Child* (2001), Zagreb: State Office for the Protection of the Family, Maternity and Youth.

28. Leithwood, K. (2002), *Organization Conditions to Support Teaching and Learning.* In: Hawley, W. D. (eds.): The Keys to Effective Schools-Educational Reform as Continuous Improvement. California, Corwin Press, Inc., Thousand Oaks, 97-110.

29. Lieberman, A. & Miller, L. (2002), *Transforming Professional Development - Understanding and Organizing Learning Communities*. In: Hawley, W. D. (eds.), The Keys to Effective Schools – Educational Reform as Continuous Improvement. California, Corwin Press, Inc., Thousand Oaks, 74-85.

30. Little, J. W. (2002), *Professional Communication and Collaboration*. In: Hawley, W. D. (eds.), The Keys to Effective Schools – Educational Reform as Continuous Improvement. California, Corwin Press, Inc., Thousand Oaks, 43-55.

31. Ljubetić, M. (2007), *Biti kompetentan roditelj*. Zagreb: Mali profesor.

32. Ljubetić, M. (2011), *Partnerstvo obitelji, vrtića i škole*. Zagreb: Školska knjiga.

33. Ljubetić, M. (2009), *Vrtić po mjeri djeteta*. Zagreb: Školske novine.

34. Malaguzzi, L. (1998), *History, Ideas, and Basic Philosophy – An Interview with Lella Gandini.* In: Edwards, C. P., Gandini, L., Forman, G. (eds.), The Hundred Languages of Children – The Reggio Emilia Approach, Advanced Reflections. London: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 49-97.

35. Maleš, D., Milanović, M., Stričević, D. (2003), *Živjeti i učiti prava, Odgoj za ljudska prava u sustavu predškolskog odgoja*. Zagreb: Filozofski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, Istraživačko-obrazovni centar za ljudska prava i demokratsko građanstvo.

36. Maleš, D. (ed.) (2011): *Nove paradigme ranoga odgoja*. Zagreb: Filozofski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, Zavod za pedagogiju.

37. Marjanović, A. (1987), *Dečji vrtić kao otvoreni sistem*. In: Petrov, N. (ed.), Predškolsko dete. Beograd: Savez pedagoških društava Jugoslavije, str. 57-67.

38. Maxwell, J. C. (2003), *17 neospornih pravila za uspješan timski rad*. Varaždin: Katarina Zrinski.

39. Miljak, A. (1996), *Humanistički pristup teoriji i praksi predškolskog odgoja*. Velika Gorica: Persona.

40. Miljak, A. (2009), *Življenje djece u vrtiću*. Zagreb: SM Naklada.

41. Moran, M. J. (1998), *The Project Approach Framework for Teacher Education: A Case for Collaborative Learning and Reflective Practice*. In: Edwards, C. P., Gandini, L., Forman, G. (eds.): The Hundred Languages of Children – The Reggio Emilia Approach, Advanced Reflections. London: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 405-418.

42. Muraja, J. (ed.) (2008), *Vodič za provedbu samovrjednovanja u osnovnim školama*. Zagreb: Nacionalni centar za vanjsko vrednovanje obrazovanja.

43. *National Curriculum Framework for Preschool Education, General Compulsory and Secondary Education*, Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, 2010.

44. Pešić, M. (1987), *Vrednovanje predškolskih vaspitnih programa*. Beograd: Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva.

45. Petrović-Sočo, B. (2007), *Kontekst ustanove za rani odgoj i obrazovanje – holistički pristup*. Zagreb: Mali profesor.

46. Petrović-Sočo, B. (2009), *Mijenjanje konteksta i odgojne prakse dječjih vrtića*. Zagreb: Mali profesor.

47. *The Education Sector Development Plan 2005 – 2010,* Ministry of Science, Education and Sports of the Republic of Croatia, 2005.

48. Prosser, J. (ed.) (1999), *School Culture.* London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

49. Rankin, B. (1998), *Education as Collaboration – Learning from and Building on Dewey, Vygotski, and Piaget*. In: Edwards, C. P., Gandini, L., Forman, G. (eds.), The Hundred Languages of Children – The Reggio Emilia Approach, Advanced Reflections. London: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 70-83.

50. Rinaldi, C. (2002), *Infant – Toddler Centers and Preschools as Places of Culture.* In: Giudici, C., Rinaldi, C. (eds.), Making Learning Visible – Children as Individual and Group Learners. Reggio Children, 38-46.

51. Rinaldi, C. (2006), *Dialogue with Reggio Emilia*. London, New York: Routledge

52. Roberts, C., Thomson, S. B. (2002), *Naš je program kvalitete neuspješan*. In: Senge et al. (ed.), Peta disciplina u praksi, Zagreb: Mozaik knjiga, 351-357.

53. Rogers, B. (2006), *I Get by with a Little Help – Colleague Support in Schools*. London. Paul Chapman Publishing, Thousand Oaks: Sage.

54. Ross, D, D., Bondy, E., Kyle, D. W. (1993)*, Reflective Reaching for Student Empowerment*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

55. Senge, P. M. (2003), *Peta disciplina – principi i praksa učeće organizacije*. Zagreb: Mozaik knjiga.

56. Senge, P., Kleiner, A., Roberts, C., Ross, R., Roth, G., Smith, B. (2003), *Ples promjene*. Zagreb: Mozaik knjiga.

57. Senge, P., Scharmer, C., O., Jaworski, J., Flowers, B. (2007), *Prisustvo – Ljudska svrha i polje budućnosti*. Zagreb: Društvo za organizacijsko učenje Hrvatske.

58. Slunjski, E. (2006), *Stvaranje predškolskog kurikuluma u vrtiću – organizaciji koja uči*. Čakovec, Zagreb: Mali profesor, Visoka učiteljska škola.

59. Slunjski, E., Šagud, M., Brajša-Žganec, A. (2006), *Kompetencije odgajatelja u vrtiću – organizaciji koja uči*. Pedagogijska istraživanja 3, vol 1, 45-59.

60. Slunjski, E. (2011), *Kurikulum ranog odgoja – istraživanje i konstrukcija*. Zagreb: Školska knjiga.

61. Spodek, B. (1973), *Early Children Education*. New Jersey. Prentice – Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs.

62. Staničić, J. (2006), *Menadžment u obrazovanju*. Rijeka, vlastita naklada.

63. Stoll, L. (1999), *School Culture: Black Hole or Fertile Garden for School Improvement?* In: Prosser, J. (eds.), School Culture. London: Paul Chapman Publishing, 30-47.

64. Stoll, L., Fink, D. (2000), *Mijenjajmo naše škole – Kako unaprijediti djelotvornost i kvalitetu naših škola*. Zagreb: Educa.

65. Strozzi, P. (2002), *Daily Life at School: Seeing the Extraordinary in the Ordinary*. In: Giudici, C., Rinaldi, C. (eds.), Making Learning Visible – Children as Individual and Group Learners. Reggio Children, 58-77.

66. Sušanj, Z. (2005), *Organizacijska klima i kultura.* Zagreb: Profil.

67. Šagud, M. (2006), *Odgajatelj kao refleksivni praktičar*. Petrinja: Visoka učiteljska škola u Petrinji.

68. Šagud, M. (2011), *Profesionalno usavršavanje i razvoj odgajatelja*. In: Maleš, D. (ed.), Nove paradigme ranoga odgoja. Zagreb: Filozofski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, Zavod za pedagogiju, 267-291.

69. Valli, L., Hawley, W. D. (2002), *Designing and Implementing School – Based Professional Development*. In: Hawley, L. (eds.), The Keys to Effective Schools – Educational Reform as Continuous Improvement. California, Corwin Press, Inc., Thousand Oaks, 86-96.

70. Vujičić, L. (2011). *Novi pristup istraživanju kulture vrtića.* In: Maleš, D. (ed.), Nove paradigme ranoga odgoja. Zagreb: Filozofski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, Zavod za pedagogiju, 209-236.

71. Vujičić, L. (2011). *Istraživanje kulture odgojno-obrazovne ustanove*. Rijeka: Sveučilište u Rijeci, Zagreb: Mali profesor.

72. *The Primary and Secondary Education Act,* Official Gazette, No. 87/08 and 86/09.

73. *The Preschool Education Act,* Official Gazette, No. 10/97 and 107/07.

FINAL_Prirucnik za samovrednovanje ENG_CS6.indd   128   21.8.2013.   14:45:54

Websites:

74. http://www.northcotecreche.org.nz/pdf/whariki.pdf

75. www.ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/indic/back_en.html

76. http://www.naeyc.org/academy/primary/standardsintro

77. HM Inspectorate of Education, How good is our school?, 2002, http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/Images/ HMIEREPORTFINAL2005C_tcm4-712739.pdf (visited 4 March 2013).

Besides the Handbook for Self-Evaluation of Early Childhood and Preschool Education Institutions, for the purposes of the self-evaluation of early education institutions, the following documents have been prepared:

1. Questionnaire for principals

2. Questionnaire for governing council members

3. Questionnaire for expert team members

4. Questionnaire for educators

5. Questionnaire for administrative, technical and support staff

6. Questionnaire for parents

7. Guide for conducting questionnaires

8. Guide for the interpretation of results and preparation of a self-evaluation report

9. Self-evaluation report form

In the contemporary approach to the quality of early education institutions, quality is determined by an appreciation of its integral elements, in the formation of the education process and in the process of quality improvement. Every institution consists of a set of interdependent elements whose continuous interactions define its features and none of these elements is comprehensible or explainable without the understanding of all other elements which influence it. That paradigm is the starting point of this handbook.

The publication of this handbook will enrich the entire literature in the area of early childhood and preschool education. The text is written on the basis of contemporary scientific knowledge, with an emphasis on the development aspects, especially those associated with practical work. Namely, as the authors of the handbook claim, professional partnership among all professionals in the institution is characterised by the culture of two-way, reciprocal and respectful communication among educators and all other subjects, as well as by giving mutual support concerning questions which are directly or indirectly related to the education process, which is clearly seen through this entire text and in the idea of the self-evaluation of early childhood and preschool education institutions. The described self-evaluation process is directed towards shared reflection, realisation and evaluation of the education process, with the goal of constantly increasing its quality, so every institution in the self-evaluation process can be open to a pluralism of pedagogical ideas and concepts, based on humanistic thoughts and developmentally appropriate practice.

A. Brajša-Žganec

Early childhood and preschool education, as an integral part of the education system in the Republic of Croatia, is a highly modern system which develops in accordance with homogenous systems in numerous developed European countries. This handbook transparently and clearly shows the achievements of education practice which should be indicators of quality and development for all early childhood and preschool education institutions in the Republic of Croatia. The handbook discusses all key areas of quality, using various arguments and referring to foreign sources as well as local authors who have questioned and developed their theory in collaboration with practitioners: educators, principals, expert associates and parents. This handbook is exceptionally valuable for the further promotion of contemporary knowledge of early childhood and preschool education.

L. Vujičić