



# NATIONAL CURRICULUM GUIDE FOR PRE-SCHOOLS

2003

## Advertisement of the Entry into Force of the National Curriculum Guide for Preschools No. 315/1999

### Article 1

With reference to Article 4 of the Preschool Act, No. 78/1994, the Minister of Education, Science and Culture hereby confirms the entry into force of the new National Curriculum Guide for Preschools, the Educational Policy, as of 1 July 1999. The Educational Programme for Preschools, first published in 1985 by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and reissued in April 1993, shall be repealed as of this same date.

### Article 2

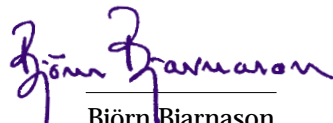
The National Curriculum Guide for Preschools is a professional policy guideline on the educational role of the preschool. It describes the objectives of preschool activities and ways to achieve these objectives.


The National Curriculum Guide will be published 1 July 1999 by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and distributed to local authorities.

### Article 3

This Advertisement shall enter into force at once.

Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 4 May 1999.

  
Björn Bjarnason

  
Guðríður Sigurðardóttir

# **National Curriculum Guide for Pre-schools**

**2003**

**Ministry of Education,  
Science and Culture**

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## INTRODUCTION

Pre-schools are the first educational level, so it is important to start off on the right foot. In this new National Curriculum Guide for Pre-schools, the first ever published in Iceland, the overriding concern is for children's welfare.

Concerted efforts have been devoted to strengthening the pre-school level. All education of pre-school teachers is now carried out at university level and pre-school teachers share a common determination to make good pre-schools even better. The same applies to the many other pre-school personnel. Right from the start they have made an invaluable contribution to the conception and development of the pre-school. This experience and knowledge should be utilised to the greatest extent possible.

In recent months, work has been underway, guided by the spirit of a new school policy, on compiling curriculum guides for each level of the Icelandic school system, in order to shape and reinforce effective efforts, both in the individual schools and in the school system as a whole. The curriculum guides aim at ensuring natural continuity and progression during the schooling process.

The Curriculum Guide for Pre-schools is a policy statement and guideline for educational work in pre-schools. It is based on the objectives described in the Pre-schools Act, the Regulation on Pre-school Activities and Educational Plan for Pre-schools of 1993. The Curriculum Guide is a guideline for everyone involved in caring for and educating children in pre-schools, setting out a flexible framework for their efforts. The Curriculum Guide also includes information and references for parents, to enable them to follow the efforts of the pre-schools and the success of their work.



Björn Bjarnason, Minister of Education, Science and Culture



## PRE-SCHOOL

### Goals of Pre-schools

According to Act No. 78/1994, local authorities bear the main responsibility for pre-school operation. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture formulates educational policy for pre-schools and ensures that their activities are evaluated. Pre-schools are not compulsory and are as a result in a special position as the first stage of schooling. While parents bear the primary responsibility for the education of their children, pre-school supplements the child's upbringing at home. Pre-schools are for all children, regardless of their mental or physical capacity, culture or faith.

According to the Pre-schools Act, the principal objectives of pre-school education are to:

- care for children, provide them with a healthy learning environment and secure play conditions;
- provide children with the opportunity to participate in work and play, and to enjoy varied learning opportunities in a group under the direction of a pre-school teacher;
- emphasise, in co-operation with their families, children's all-round development in accordance with the character and needs of each of them, and seek to support them mentally and physically in order that they may enjoy their childhood;
- encourage tolerance and open-mindedness in children and equalise their educational circumstances in all respects;
- to instil Christian ethics in children and lay the foundation to enable them to be independent, reflective, active and responsible citizens in a democratic society which is undergoing rapid and constant change;
- to develop children's creativity and communicative ability, in order to strengthen their self-image, security and ability to resolve questions in a peaceful manner.

## National Curriculum Guide - Educational Policy of Pre-schools

The National Curriculum Guide for Pre-schools is issued by the Minister of Education in the same manner as Regulations; it lays down guidelines for the work of pre-school teachers and operators. The Guide describes the common goals and requirements which apply to all pre-school activities. The National Curriculum Guide for Pre-schools is a policy statement guiding pre-school education and is intended to form a flexible framework for their operation. Each pre-school is to compile its own school curriculum guide based on the National Guide.

The National Curriculum Guide for Pre-schools

- is a professional policy guideline on the educational role of the pre-school;
- is based on a child-centred philosophy, with the child's maturity and needs as its core;
- is intended to co-ordinate the educating of children in Icelandic pre-schools;
- serves as reference for evaluation of pre-school activities and for pre-school teachers' education;
- is intended to ensure the quality of pre-schools and equalise children's educational circumstances.

### Ways to Achieve these Objectives

Pre-schools should emphasise children's creative work and play. This does not involve direct instruction, aiming at specific theoretical knowledge. Pre-school subjects are oriented more towards maturity than subject matter, emphasising children's play as a route to learning and maturing, discovery learning.

Pre-schools are to develop a child's all-round maturity, which includes physical and motor development, emotional development, cognitive development, language development, social development and social conscious-

ness, esthetical development and creativity, ethical development and morality. Pre-schools should cater to all these aspects of development, encourage them and stimulate their interaction. A child's life-skills and school achievement depend upon a balance among these developmental aspects.

Physical and motor development:

- provide a child with physical care;
- encourage healthy lifestyles, good hygiene and healthy eating habits;
- protect the child's health and teach it proper hygiene;
- encourage children to become self-dependent;
- encourage motor development and ability;
- train co-ordination;
- promote well-being and security.

Emotional development:

- provide a child with a secure, welcoming and stable environment;
- teach a child to respect itself and others;
- bolster a child's self-confidence and faith in its own abilities;
- provide a child with the freedom to express its emotions: anger, fear, joy and sorrow;
- provide a child with support in difficulties.

Cognitive development:

- provide a child with an instructive and stimulating environment;
- train a child's attentiveness, thinking, memory and ability to concentrate;
- listen to a child and answer its questions;
- develop the child's expression and understanding of concepts;
- ask a child questions which prompt critical thinking.

Language development:

- increase vocabulary;
- talk to children working and playing;
- encourage children to express themselves, describe events, talk to others;
- read for children, tell them stories and tales and recite rhymes and verses.

Social development and social consciousness:

- encourage positive and friendly exchanges between children;
- encourage a child's interaction with people of varying ages;
- steer a child towards group activities, and support them when necessary;
- help a child to resolve disputes in a positive manner;
- encourage a child to show respect and tolerance for others;
- encourage a child to respect the views of others;
- train a child to be neat and tidy, and treat facilities and premises with respect;
- endeavour to ensure that a child enjoys life, regardless of its mental or physical capacity, culture or faith;
- strengthen a child's awareness of equal rights;
- promote a child's understanding of the value of friendship.

Aesthetical development and creative ability:

- endeavour to provide a child with a variety of experiences, which stimulate its imagination and creative expression;
- stimulate a child's creative ability and joy in creation;
- provide a child with the circumstances and materials to stimulate free and creative expression;
- stimulate a child's aesthetic sense on both a small and large scale;
- provide a child with opportunities to enjoy the arts;
- awaken a child's interest in its environment and nature.

Ethical development and moral consciousness:

- stimulate a child to show concern and tolerance;
- encourage a child to be conciliatory and co-operative;
- help a child to understand that intractability and violence do not solve problems;
- encourage a child to be helpful and feel responsible for people and animals;
- teach a child to respect other persons regardless of their religious and ideological views, race, origin, culture or ability;
- instruct a child in Christian ethics.

By following the objective provisions of the Pre-schools Act, together with the above-mentioned measures, the intent is to promote healthy lifestyles and attitudes in a child and develop its life-skills and self-confidence.





## PLAY AND PRE-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

### Play

During its childhood years, play is a child's means of expression, its dominant activity and most important route to learning and development. Play is the cornerstone of pre-school activity and a child's means of expression and source of pleasure. Free and spontaneous play is a child's normal form of expression. In its play a child learns many things which no one can teach it. Which means that play involves extensive self-education – a mixture of fun and earnestness. A child's experience is reflected in its play. For its play to develop and progress, a child needs experiences, imagination and suitable materials. Spontaneous play differs from other behaviour because of its creativity: the child itself directs it.

In spontaneous play a child:

- is independent and makes its own decisions;
- is in control, and shapes the play out of its own experiences and imagination;
- takes decisions and solves problems;
- concentrates, forgetting the world around it;
- is absorbed by the moment, it is the process which matters;
- escapes from external rules, except for the ones it sets itself or in consultation with its companions.

In childhood play involves learning. New knowledge, new emotions, new behaviour and skills are derived from play. In its play the child expresses its emotions and finds an outlet for them. The need to create and imagination appear in a child's play. In their play, children learn the necessity of co-operation and consideration for each other. In its play, a child learns the rules of communication and respect

for the rights of others. Play is shaped by the child's maturity, its background and educational environment.

A child is not only eager to play, it is eager to learn and to work. A child has a great need to undertake projects which test its mental and physical abilities. Its strength, confidence and stamina grow with each passing year. A child can gradually concentrate for longer and longer periods on tasks and games. It is curious and wants to try demanding games and tasks. The pre-school should provide children with projects and surroundings suitable to their level of maturity, interests and abilities.

#### Play and creativity

Children's play is shaped by the richness of their imagination and creativity, i.e. their ability to see new connections, produce innovative ideas and depart from traditional patterns of thought.

A creative child is sensitive to its environment and this environment stimulates its thinking. It is interested in small things, in texture, shape and colours. This originality appears in a variety of ways: in dramatic expression, in words, visual creation, music and movement. A creative child often thinks and acts in unorthodox ways and it can take risks. Play reflects a child's world of experience, the culture and society in which it lives. In its mind the child takes part in events occurring around it. When playing, it relives what it has seen, heard and experienced, letting its imagination steer its course, transforming people and events to accord with its own understanding and emotions. Often the improvisation in its play develops through exchanges with its playmates.

#### Play conditions and materials

The arrangement and equipment of pre-schools should stimulate children's play, initiative and activity. Many

interrelated factors affect children's play in pre-schools: the composition of the peer group and their internal relations, the play conditions and materials both indoors and out.

The lighting and acoustics in a pre-school have a major effect on children's play and comfort. A warm and receptive environment encourages calm in children's exchanges while over-full playrooms can create agitation. There is a danger that a bare and unvaried environment will be neither stimulating nor conducive to development. A pre-school's organisation and surroundings affect children's play, and can both support it or hinder it.

The environment is sometimes referred to as the third educator in a pre-school, following the peer group and the pre-school teacher. Children need time to organise and set up their games and they need uninterrupted periods to develop these games and expand on them.

Which is why plenty of uninterrupted time should be devoted to play in the daily schedule of the pre-school. Children need a varied selection of quality toys and different types of material for creative work.

All playthings should be chosen in accordance with the children's maturity.

The principal playthings which should be available in every pre-school, include:

- materials for creative work;
- various types of tools;
- equipment for make-believe and role-playing games;
- blocks and other materials for building;
- musical instruments;
- computers;
- indoor and outdoor play equipment.

### Role of the pre-school teacher in children's play

Although children need to play on their own terms, the pre-school teacher should not remain passive. There is a great difference between inaction and control. A pre-school teacher should follow children's play and always be prepared to provide stimulation or take part in the play, on the children's terms in such case. By so doing, pre-school teachers provide security, can spark interest, reply to questions, ask questions or instruct the children. A game often becomes more fun if the pre-school teacher joins in, jesting and laughing along with the children.

A pre-school teacher needs to be sensitive to the mental and physical needs of the child and to pay close attention to children at play. In so doing the teacher gets to know the children better and can understand what the game may reflect. Children usually pursue a game or task for a longer period if a pre-school teacher is nearby. The teacher's presence gives the children support and security. Children are quick to sense interest in their play and endeavour to have the person in question take part. A pre-school teacher needs to allow time for educational observations and registering a child's behaviour, both on its own and in a group.

### The Peer Group

Group play and group work are important aspects of pre-school activity. A child needs to learn to play and work in the peer group to which it belongs. In group play, a child acquires an understanding of the value of co-operation and develops feelings of solidarity and responsibility. A child learns different things and in different ways in its relations with other children than through its exchanges with adults. In a group of contemporaries, children have an opportunity to make themselves heard, to show initiative, to play and work and share their pleasure with others. They mimic one another, help each other and friendships

form. Children's social development and life-skills increase through their exchanges with other children.

As a participant in a peer group – whether large or small – a child acquires a variety of social experiences. It needs to feel that it has a role to fulfil there and belongs to the group. A child should have a variety of opportunities to enjoy the company of others and share their happiness. Group work and individual development are anything but opposites. Positive group work stimulates an individual's development, and the individual's development enriches the group's work. Materials and projects should stimulate group play. At the same time children need a chance to play quietly and undisturbed with personnel nearby.

A pre-school teacher must take note of how each child feels and of changes in its behaviour, note the pattern of relations in a peer group and take care to preserve balance and equality. Co-operation between children should be stimulated, as it increases their feelings of solidarity and responsibility. There must be a clear policy on control and sufficient discipline in a pre-school and in children's exchanges.

### Special Needs of Children

Children vary in their abilities, experience and development. They need to interact with other children, both of the same age as well as older and younger children. The pre-school must show consideration for the needs of each individual child, to ensure that it can reach its potential in a peer group on its own premises. Special consideration must be shown to a child who is handicapped in any way or has emotional and/or social difficulties. It needs to be provided with special assistance to compensate for the limitations which its handicap imposes on it. The same applies to a child which is deaf or has a hearing disability, a blind child or one which is visually impaired. Each child needs to be occupied with tasks suited to its capabilities. Care must be taken to ensure

that a child is not isolated but adapts well to the group and enjoys normal social relationships. A child's self-image should be reinforced. A child needs to win victories, and this applies equally to a child which has to struggle with a handicap, limitation or illness and to a healthy child. The pre-school should help children from other cultures to become active participants in their new society without losing their connections with their own culture, language and faith. They need to acquire self-confidence in the new environment and feel that they are welcome there. In that way they keep their self-respect and strengthen their self-confidence.

A child suffering from chronic illness shall be given the opportunity to attend pre-school to the extent its condition and strength allow. Companionship and participation in play and work is highly necessary for it, as it reduces its anxiety and helps it in its difficulties. Such a child needs to be shown special warmth and consideration because its strength and stamina are often limited. The instruction and support provided needs to be based on the needs of each child and determined in close consultation with its parents. Various types of events and difficulties in a child's life can be traumatic for it and deeply influence its behaviour and well-being. The pre-school must help the child overcome its fears and insecurity.

### Life-skills

Life-skills are based on a child's overall development, its ability to communicate, logical expression and ability to respect its environment. In pre-school a child's life-skills should be developed by encouraging the developmental aspects listed in the section on ways to achieve the objectives. A child should be taught democratic practices in pre-school. It should take part in planning, making decisions and evaluation. Various plans which concern the child and its interests should be discussed with the child. It must feel that consideration is given to its desires and views.

Life-skills include respect for rules. A pre-school must set rules which apply to the group of children and explain their purpose to the children. It is normal for older children to be involved in setting some of the rules for the group of children and discussing them. This is the beginning of democratic working methods which children gradually need to learn to apply. Children need support in obeying the rules and the opportunity to resolve their own issues and arguments in a peaceful manner. In all pre-school relations, everyone must respect the rights of others.

To acquire life-skills the child must learn:

- the basic aspects of healthy life styles and attitudes together with its peers in work and play;
- to respect others;
- to show tolerance for other views, different cultures and experiences;
- to know itself and strengthen its self-confidence;
- to increase its ability to communicate and interact with companions;
- to think logically, ask questions and seek answers;
- to respect the values, habits and customs which prevail in the pre-school and in the society;
- that in dealings between people it is necessary to have rules which should be respected;
- to respect nature - the environment, animals and plants.

### Day-to-day Life in a Pre-school

Day-to-day life in a pre-school is characterised by regular activities focusing on the physical needs of the children and their health. At specific times the children eat, wash, rest and sleep. The daily schedule should be designed with a view to the children's needs, their development, age, the composition of the peer group, the length of their stay and other external requirements. In the arrangement of pre-school activities there must be a balance between the various aspects, between spontaneous and organised play,

indoor and outdoor play, between social exchanges and individual tasks and between rest and participation in work and play. The arrangement and fixed timing of daily tasks provides stability for pre-school activities and ensures a suitable and continuous stretch of time for play and creative work.

When the children and pre-school teachers sit down to eat together, this provides a good opportunity to encourage good table manners and to chat with the children. By eating meals with the children pre-school teachers create an atmosphere of calm and stability. Food placed before the children should be attractive, as well as healthy and nutritious. When children have become mature enough they should help with the preparation of meals and in cleaning up afterwards. This strengthens the children's social consciousness and they learn to appreciate the value of co-operations. The child's hygiene practices should be re-enforced in pre-school. Rest periods provide an opportunity to form connections to each individual child and to the group of children as a whole. In the pre-school cloakroom the child gradually learns to dress and undress itself and to arrange its clothes neatly, with children helping one another.

A child needs to feel that it is welcome every day in the pre-school. This can affect how the child feels during the entire day. Goodbye should be said to each child when it heads for home.



## PRE-SCHOOL LEARNING AREAS

### Learning Areas

Pre-school learning areas are aspects of emphasis in pre-school education.

These include motor development, language development, artistic creation, music, nature and environment, culture and society. The learning areas overlap and are an integral part of basic pre-school activities: play, daily care and general life-skills.

### Motor Development

Children have a great need to be able to move freely and without restraint. Which means that pre-schools should emphasise children's movements and development of motor skills. All motion supports mental and physical well-being. Play activities which are physically strenuous provide a release for energy.

Children are in constant motion and they soon learn to express themselves through their movements. Movement has a positive effect on health, reflexes and stamina. A child becomes conscious of its body and gradually acquires more control of its movements. Through active play children acquire an understanding of their strength and capability and their self-confidence grows. The child's co-ordination, balance and security increases.

In active play, a child learns to evaluate its circumstances. It learns to choose, reject and be daring. Emphasis should be placed on having the child learn various positional concepts, and to understand space, distance and directions. Various running games make substantial demands on a child's strength and endurance, stimulate heartbeat and circulation. When resting and relaxing after such games, the child experiences the difference between tension and

relaxation. By watching a child's movement, the pre-school teacher can see its maturity and progress.

### Outdoor activities

Motor development and outdoor activities go hand in hand.

Outdoors children come into contact with nature, they experience their immediate environment directly and learn to appreciate it. Outdoors children are free to play more wildly, to shout and call out. There they can run, hop, jump and climb. Pre-school playground areas should be suitable for all sorts of active play, both independent and organised.

### Language Development

Language is mankind's most important means of communication. A common language – mother tongue – joins people together and strengthens their feeling of solidarity. Language is a major factor in the culture of nations and ethnic groups. Our language and literary heritage links the Icelandic nation of today with its past. Which is why developing language ability is important, be it in conversation, by asking demanding questions, by reading for children, telling them stories and teaching them poems and rhymes. The child also needs to be encouraged to ask questions, to relate and to listen attentively. Language stimulation should be integrated into as many aspects of pre-school activities as possible. Play should be used especially for this purpose, but innumerable other everyday activities are well suited to stimulating language use.

### Conversation

The child should be encouraged to talk about events and other things which are important to it, and should be listened to attentively. Conversations, based on open-ended questions where the answers require reflection, stimulate critical thinking. Children need to be encouraged to give

reasons for their opinions. Children often ask philosophical questions, with one question often leading to another. Their answers and thoughts should be listened to carefully. The dialogue method used in philosophy for youngsters is well-suited to pre-school work. Care must be taken to ensure that each child has an opportunity to contribute to the discussion.

### Children's books, stories and fairy tales

Children's books are a vital part of pre-school work, both for language stimulation and to communicate knowledge and experience. Books must be a part of children's everyday environment in order for them to learn to enjoy them. In pre-schools, great emphasis should be placed on reading aloud for children works which are suitable to their age and level of maturity. Children should also be told improvised stories and fairy tales. This is a personal means of expression which often catches children's attention better than reading from a book. The narrator is in closer contact with the children and the story is often more alive than one which is read.

Reading for children trains them in listening and they should be given an opportunity to discuss the events and characters of the story. Stories can also help children to understand their own emotions and those of others.

For older children, visits to libraries should be a standard item on the agenda of pre-school children. In so doing they become acquainted with the world of books, learn how to borrow books and that these must be returned.

### Vocabulary, reading and writing

At an early age children's interest is aroused in written language, and later in reading and writing. Pre-schools should provide conditions which encourage a child to explore the secrets of written language and stimulate its desire to learn to read and write.



The child's first encounter with written language is often through its play. Many types of play and toys in pre-schools prepare the child naturally for learning to read and write. Various games in connecting and arranging, as well as computer games, sharpen the child's conception of form. Games using rhyme, tone and rhythm also increase its ability to distinguish sounds. Gradually the child learns the names of the letters, comes to understand the direction of reading and that words are comprised of familiar sounds. It develops interest in the words of books and links this to spoken language. This interest grows as the pre-school child grows older.

Various children's games, such as handling and paging through books, using pencils and crayons, and pretending to read and write, involve encouragement to learn to read and write.

Written language should be given a prominent place in pre-schools, e.g. by printing a child's name beside its picture, writing down what it has said and then reading this back to the child. It thus understands better that a written text is a symbol of spoken language and can record spoken words. This is an encouragement to the child to learn to read.

### Vocabulary and concepts

Children have their first experience of concepts linked to place, time and size, in many aspects of their daily lives. These phenomena and the concepts linked to them are used here as examples for increasing children's vocabulary and their understanding of concepts. A child acquires these concepts from various everyday experiences. It gradually begins to understand the dimension of time and time concepts and to learn words for them. The daily arrangement of pre-school activities involves a regular time schedule of different activities. The child's attention and interest should be drawn to the division of time into hours, days,

weeks, months and years. A child becomes acquainted with the clock in connection with the time scheduling of activities. It becomes acquainted with the calendar, the names of the days and divisions into weeks and months; it learns of seasonal changes from changes in the weather.

A variety of opportunities can be used, for example in active play, building games and visual art, to encourage the child's understanding of concepts connected with number, quantity, weight, height, length and width.

A child gradually gains a clearer understanding of space and the spatial volume of objects and substances and learns the words for them.

### Artistic Creation

Artistic creation is an important means of expression. Children have a great need to express themselves through visual images. Children's free and creative visual art, for instance in drawings, is shaped by their level of maturity, experience and the conditions in which they grow up. Creative image formation reinforces the child's self-confidence.

Pre-schools should provide a child with widely varied opportunities to express itself in images and through various sorts of formable materials. Children need to explore various materials, learn their nature and qualities and experiment freely. They need experience in co-ordinating their eyes and hands, training fine motor movements and learning to use simple equipment and tools. A child enjoys creating and seeing what it can produce. Its own experience and creative force appear in drawings, craft objects, etc. In its creative work, a child develops concentration and gains practice step by step with solving ever more complicated assignments. It learns to communicate its ideas and emotions to others through images and various types of symbols.



Children find it easy to express their emotions through artistic creation, e.g. drawing, working with clay or by other means. Children's need to create is great; they draw, paint or shape objects freely according to their own ideas in their special way. Their artwork expresses both the most remarkable things they experience and what they are most occupied with. Primary emphasis should be placed on the creative process itself, which is an important aspect of children's general maturity. This is why independent artistic creation should be encouraged, while avoiding having all children work alike.

A pre-school should provide a child with varied materials for artistic creation, instruct it and encourage it to independent endeavour. A child needs plenty of continuous time and facilities for artistic creation. In group artistic creation, the child and its fellows will share the joy in their common production.

To experience and understand art is an ability which the child develops. The pre-school should see to it that the child comes into contact with various types of art and craft work. Going to art exhibitions and galleries, or even visiting the studios of artists and craftsmen, is a highly instructive experience for a child. Such trips need to be well prepared so that the child can receive guidance in enjoying them.

A pre-school teacher must be open for opportunities arising in the surrounding environment which can serve as inspiration for children's art works.

The teacher must be imaginative in providing a variety of materials to work with and create conditions under which they can be utilised. A pre-school teacher must be ready to take part in the creative process along with the child and share in its pleasure.

## Music

Emphasis should be placed on giving all pre-school children plenty of opportunity to enjoy music and to produce it themselves. The main aspects of children's musical activity in pre-school should be singing, movement, listening and playing with sound sources. Efforts shall be made to integrate music into a child's spontaneous play, combining sound, rhythm and movement.

Music education in pre-schools should encourage a child to develop:

- a feeling for sound, movement and rhythm;
- initiative and free, creative expression and interpretation of music.

## Singing

In their play children sing, chant and hum in pure happiness and joy of life. It is important to pay attention to and encourage such spontaneous singing and chanting by children. Children also greatly enjoy all sorts of improvised singing, which links them together in an involved group; group singing increases children's solidarity.

Emphasis should be placed on a varied selection of songs which are suitable to the children's singing voices and maturity, and on lyrics which catch their interest. Furthermore, the creative aspects of singing should not be ignored. Children should be encouraged to take turns singing utterances, i.e. "talking to each other" in music. This they often do freely of their own accord in their play and other relations. Children should also be encouraged to compose music.

## Movement and rhythm

A child often connects sounds and tones with regular body movements, it moves in time with music, turns in circles, rocks back and forth, and hops. It is natural for a child to link vocal sounds with movement and rhythm. Many



types of movement in children's play cause them to chant or sing. A child's free interpretation and creative movement, through which it can express the emotions and effects the music inspires should be encouraged.

A child acquires the basic aspects of music through the combination of tone and movement. A child can describe with movement the varying tone length, pitch, character, volume and form of the music it hears.

### Sound sources and musical instruments

A child gradually senses and distinguishes between many types of sounds in its environment and their variety. It develops a feeling for pitch, length and volume by playing with sound sources. With increased experience and encouragement, a child begins to listen more carefully and to reflect on its musical experience.

Various sound sources can be used in children's musical education. A child needs to have access to a variety of instruments and emphasis should be placed on the quality of the sounds they produce. Stories and fairy tales come alive when musical instruments are used to interpret various characters in the story. Playing of instruments by children must be based on their interest and desire to experiment with sounds and express themselves through them.

### Listening

Part of musical education is to listen to a variety of sounds. A child explores its sound world, listens to its environment and to nature. Pre-schools must emphasise children's active listening. Their interest should be awakened to various sounds in nature, e.g. birdsong, the babbling of streams and pounding of surf, as well as all sorts of sounds in their surrounding environment, such as footsteps of children and adults. Children need to learn to listen, not just watch.

Directed listening helps a child to understand a musical work and distinguish its character.

It also learns to listen for and distinguish patterns, phrases and themes. When a child is given sufficient and repeated opportunities to listen to music, whether live music or recorded, it soon understands the various different qualities of music. The child gradually learns to distinguish various musical instruments, recognise their sounds and name them. It is very important that children have the possibility of listening to music on their own premises.

### Nature and the Environment

Mankind is dependent upon nature and natural forces for its existence, life and health. A knowledge of nature and natural phenomena is thus vitally important for people. In addition to which nature is a never-ending source of surprises. Children need to become acquainted with the great variety in nature, to come into direct contact with it and enjoy it. A child's eyes need to be opened for natural beauty and respect instilled in it for nature and responsibility towards it. The child's experience of nature is generally an integral part of its play and artistic creation.

Pre-schools should instruct children on nature, the environment and conservation. This can be done by discussing animals, plants, seasons, climate, cultivation, treatment of nature, etc.

### A child's connection with nature

A pre-school teacher should take children on nature study excursions. Children are sensitive and notice small things around them, an ability which should be exploited. Natural variety is an endless source of new ideas, games, subjects for discussion and investigations.

In natural surroundings the child investigates various phenomena, examining and experimenting. It looks for connections between different phenomena and learns to draw conclusions from them. Close attention should be paid to the child's interest and its experiments can later be further developed in a variety of ways. It is necessary to listen closely to the child's questions about nature and to encourage it to investigate phenomena independently and seek answers to its questions.

### Natural objects, equipment and experiments

Nature and science can be given a special place in the playroom, where various natural objects, substances and equipment can be placed with which children can play and gain knowledge and pleasure from, e.g. various animals or stones. It is recommended that children themselves bring objects to their pre-school which they have found, such as leg bones, jaw bones, horns and various types of bones which children used to have as playthings.

It is also highly suitable to create opportunities and facilities in the pre-school for experiments and investigations by the children.

Pre-schools should have various equipment for this purpose. Children enjoy, for instance, seeing how objects stick to a magnet, how a magnifying glass can make small things larger and how a thermometer rises and falls. Experiments with hot and cold water are both enjoyable and instructive. In such a way a child gradually acquires an understanding of nature and various natural phenomena.

### Culture and Society

A child gradually becomes acquainted with the society in which it lives. Pre-schools have different industrial, social

and cultural environments depending upon their location – in the city, in a town, in fishing or farming communities. Pre-school activities in each location are naturally shaped by these external conditions. A pre-school should take advantage of the cultural and social opportunities presented by its environment and location.

Children have different educational situations, come from different types of families and have different backgrounds. A pre-school should take this into consideration in its work and its own pre-school curriculum guide, and should encourage each child to feel it belongs to the society and is a part of it. A variety of exchanges with activities outside the pre-school can be part of this effort.

### Excursions – the vicinity

At an early age children become interested in their surroundings and in what goes on there. They are curious and attentive. Their interest and attention should be encouraged and their focus and horizons expanded through excursions in the vicinity of the pre-school and through a variety of visits to service and cultural institutions.

The vicinity of the pre-school should be put to good advantage for walks, games, nature study and all sorts of investigations. On these excursions the children gradually gain an increased sense of distance and the journeys strengthen their connections with and understanding of society and its culture.

Emphasis should be placed on rules applying to traffic and to being cautious on the streets. Children need to become acquainted with traffic and learn how to behave and follow traffic rules as soon as they are mature enough to do so. This enhances their own safety and helps them react correctly in traffic.

### Computers

Computers are becoming steadily more prominent in people's everyday lives: at work, at school and in leisure time. Pre-school children need to become acquainted with computers and learn to use them in their own way. There should thus be computers in pre-schools, e.g. in a playroom where quiet play takes place, near a book corner or reading area. Here there is an opportunity to discuss and play together in peace and quiet.

The selection of programs shall be made in consideration of the pre-school's educational policy. The most suitable programs are those which require some thinking and not merely mechanical responses. Emphasis should be placed on children's co-operation in computer work, since they readily accept advice and help from their companions and to share their experiences with them. Children shall be encouraged to act independently, to act on their own and try various ways of doing things. Efforts shall be made to keep a suitable balance between boys and girls in computer play.

Only some of the children have access to a computer in their homes. Children's computer usage in pre-schools thus helps to equalise their educational conditions. Which is why care should be taken to ensure that all children use a computer.

### Holidays and traditions

In Icelandic life there are various holidays and traditions which children become acquainted with and participate in at home and also to some extent in pre-schools. Pre-schools need to support this cultural heritage and encourage children to respect it. It strengthens their sense of national identity.

Various current events should also be taken up for discussion in pre-schools in various ways. Special customs are

generally followed in pre-schools when there is reason to celebrate, such as on children's birthdays.

### Exchanges with other nations

Iceland is one member nation of a very varied world society. Children's interest in other nations is awakened at an early age and should be encouraged. Relations and connections between nations and different cultural regions are becoming ever more frequent and closer. With increased communications, travel and migration of people between countries and continents, children's knowledge of the lives of distant peoples is increasing. Public visits by foreign heads of state or well-known figures provide an opportunity to instruct children about the country and people concerned.

Each year the UN encourages a number of international efforts, e.g. with the "Year of the Ocean" or "Year of the Tree". Work on such theme projects increases children's understanding and sense of responsibility. Sharing common goals and interests increase feelings of solidarity between nations.

Children need to learn that each nation has its own unique characteristics and culture, which should be respected and valued. Despite the fact that the nations of the world have different customs and habits they should be able to live together in peace and concord as part of the global society. Pre-schools should instill in children a respect for others, whatever their origin, opinions, language or religion may be.



## CO-OPERATION BETWEEN HOMES AND PRE-SCHOOLS

### Parental co-operation

Parents bear the primary responsibility for the education and welfare of their children, while a pre-school should provide parents with support in raising children. It is important to develop close co-operation and mutual trust between homes and pre-schools. Parents know their children best, since they have known them since they were born and followed their developmental progress and emotional situation. A pre-school teacher becomes acquainted with a child through pre-school activities and knows how it is maturing, developing skills and responding in a group environment.

A pre-school director is obliged by the Pre-schools Act and the Regulation on Pre-school Activities, to encourage co-operation between homes and pre-schools.

The objective of parental co-operation is to:

- provide parents with information on the pre-school's activities;
- provide parents with information on their child's development and its situation at the pre-school;
- gather information on the circumstances and educational views of parents;
- encourage parental participation in pre-school activities;
- foster co-operation and exchange between the pre-school and homes;
- create a forum for discussion and exchange of views on children's education.

### Presentation of the pre-school

Co-operation between the home and the pre-school begins before a child begins at a pre-school. A pre-school director and pre-school teacher should introduce parents to the pre-

school and its activities. They should be acquainted with the National Curriculum Guide for Pre-schools, the school curriculum guide, the premises, materials/equipment and play areas. Parents should also be introduced to school staff. Parents should become acquainted with the main traditions and customs which apply at the pre-school and receive information on the pre-school's parents' association and its activities.

### **Period of adaptation**

When a child commences its pre-school attendance it should be given plenty of time to get used to the pre-school. This period of adaptation has to be arranged in consultation with parents. Forming close ties with a specific pre-school teacher is important for the child's positive adaptation. The same pre-school teacher who is to be responsible for the child's adaptation should preferably introduce it and its parents to the pre-school. During the adaptation period parents should have the opportunity of staying with their child and, in so doing, getting acquainted with the pre-school and its operating practices.

### **Co-operation and interviews with parents**

Parents must provide the pre-school teacher with information on the child's circumstances while themselves learning of the activities of its pre-school section. The pre-school teacher must have an overall picture of the child's maturity right from the start. A pre-school teacher should follow a child's behaviour and its progress in work and play, indoors and out.

### **Daily relations**

Parents need to know the main aspects of what has occurred during the child's stay at the pre-school each day and the pre-school teacher has to know about important occurrences in the child's life outside of pre-school, such as journeys, trips to the theatre and birthdays, about which

the child can enjoy telling. It is important for parents to let the pre-school teacher know of any changes in the child's circumstances or family life. Children are sensitive to any changes and changes can affect their well-being and behaviour.

### **Parental interviews**

Parents should have the opportunity of discussing the child's situation with a pre-school teacher if they so request. Parents need information on the child's situation and experience of the pre-school. In such case a pre-school teacher will base the information provided on the child on his or her knowledge of its abilities and maturity, together with recorded notes and comments on the child at work and play. Conversations between parents and pre-school teachers need to be well prepared by both parties. A pre-school teacher is responsible for regular discussions with parents. All information on the child should be treated as confidential.

### **General information and instruction**

A pre-school should provide children's parents with information and instruction on pre-school activities by means of daily information on a notice board, in newsletters or on the pre-school's home page, and through meetings with parents. This will ensure that all parents have access to the same information from the pre-school.

### **Parental meetings, parents' association and parental participation in pre-school activities**

Each pre-school is to have a parents' association, with parental meetings held regularly where parents are consulted concerning their preparation. Parents can participate in pre-school activities by various means. They can observe and take part in a full day's or partial day's activities. They can also follow along on pre-school excursions and take part in organising them.

### Open house

Children's parents and families should occasionally be invited to pay a special visit to the pre-school, for instance in connection with presentations and celebrations at the pre-school. In this way parents and families get acquainted with their children's activities.



## CONNECTIONS BETWEEN PRE-SCHOOL AND COMPULSORY SCHOOL

Co-operation between pre-schools and compulsory schools is important in order to encourage a continuous progression in a child's education and so that it will experience compulsory school as a natural continuation of pre-school.

### Co-operation of School Leaders, Staff and Parents

Compulsory school principals and pre-school directors are strongly encouraged to co-operate in and take responsibility for organising joint efforts between the two school levels.

Pre-school teachers and compulsory school teachers must be knowledgeable about each others' ideas and practices. They need to discuss issues and exchange views on the children themselves, their education, study and instruction, and on how the demands made of children at various levels of maturity should be defined. The educational emphases of both school levels should be presented and discussed. Ways of helping the child undergo the changes occurring in its educational and school life when it leaves pre-school to attend compulsory school also need to be discussed. It is no less useful for parents' associations or groups at both school levels to consult and co-operate with each other.

### Pupils' Visits and Joint Projects

Exchanges of visits by the pupils of pre-schools and compulsory schools are one good way of linking the two school levels together in the mind of the child. A pre-school child should get to know the compulsory school's buildings,



playground and classrooms. Connections can be made between the oldest pre-school children and the youngest compulsory school children through joint projects connected with their immediate environment.



## EVALUATION OF PRE-SCHOOL WORK

The Regulation on pre-school activities states that each pre-school shall develop means of evaluating its educational work, administration and personal relations, both internally and externally. Evaluation is to be carried out with reference to the Act on Pre-schools, the Regulation and the National Curriculum Guide for Pre-schools. A special account shall be given of the implementation and conclusions of the evaluation.

Evaluation of pre-school operations is divided into internal and external evaluation. Internal evaluation refers to self-evaluation by the pre-school and is to be carried out by its personnel. External evaluation refers to an assessment of the pre-school's activities carried out by an external party.

### Self-evaluation

Self-evaluation provides a professional foundation for improvements to pre-school activities and is a method of systematically working on improving the quality of the pre-school's work and making it more effective. Self-evaluation is to be based on the objectives and policy of the pre-school and shall include a description of the ways in which they are to be achieved. The evaluation should reveal whether these objectives have been achieved or whether changes are necessary. In addition, self-evaluation makes it easier for personnel to work towards the pre-school's objectives.

Self-evaluation involves an extensive gathering of information on the pre-school's activities as a whole or individual aspects of it. Self-evaluation is thus also a way of disseminating knowledge and information on pre-school operations. Pre-schools themselves can determine what methods they apply in self-evaluation.

Self-evaluation by pre-schools should be a co-operative effort of all persons involved in their work. The person directing the evaluation assigns the tasks, organises the reporting and gives suggestions and proposals to the group carrying out the evaluation. A decision must be taken as to what is to be examined in each instance, e.g. personal relations, attitudes or organisation. Information is then gathered on those aspects which are being investigated.

To ensure that the evaluation work proceeds effectively it is necessary to

- set fixed dates for the beginning and end of the evaluation period;
- fix the dates and times for meetings and their duration;
- decide what aspects are to be examined;
- decide in how much detail these should be investigated;
- decide how much time is to be spent on each aspect;
- determine the division of responsibility and prioritisation of tasks.

Self-evaluation must conclude with a report. In carrying out a self-evaluation it is necessary to decide on the arrangements for data collection and reporting.

A self-evaluation report must indicate

- for whom the report is intended,
- the principal conclusions of the evaluation,
- strengths and weaknesses of the activities,
- proposals or suggestions for changes and improvements.

### Criteria for Self-evaluation

There are a number of aspects which the Ministry of Education regards as important criteria in self-evaluation work.

**Formal.** The evaluation shall be based on systematic methods which are described in the self-evaluation report. It must also indicate how the work was conducted and by whom.

**Comprehensive.** The evaluation shall cover all the main aspects of pre-school activities. An evaluation must be made of its objectives, administration, implementation of educational and learning areas, the progress and well-being of the children, co-operation among personnel and co-operation with children's families.

**Reliable.** The evaluation must be based on dependable documentation from the pre-school, in addition to opinion surveys carried out among parents, children and personnel.

**Co-operative.** Everyone who works in the pre-school must be involved in the evaluation. The division of responsibility and channels of communication need to be clear. In organising and preparing the self-evaluation, personnel must be informed of the scope of the project and a consensus obtained on its implementation. Consideration must be given as to how parents and other stakeholders should be involved in the self-evaluation.

**Improvement-oriented.** Following the evaluation, a plan must be drawn up for improvements to and development of activities. It should also be indicated how the objectives of the improvement plan are to be achieved and define how success is to be measured.

**Institutionally and individually oriented.** The evaluation must cover both the pre-school as a whole and the individuals who work there.

**Descriptive.** The self-evaluation report must briefly describe the activities of the pre-school in written form, with illustrations and tables.

**Analytical.** The evaluation shall give a clear analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of individual aspects of the pre-school's activities.

**Public.** It must be decided who should have access to specific aspects of the self-evaluation, but the self-evalua-



tion report itself must be made public. In this respect care must be taken to comply with the provisions of current legislation, for instance, on the treatment of personal information.

### External Evaluation

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, in accordance with the Pre-schools Act, is to have an external evaluation carried out of at least one pre-school each year. The body responsible for a pre-school's operations can also have such an evaluation carried out. This evaluation is intended to ensure that pre-school activities are in accordance with the Act and the Regulation, and conform with the National Curriculum Guide for Pre-schools. An evaluation specialist with knowledge of issues concerning children of pre-school age may be entrusted with such an evaluation, or an evaluation group. The evaluating party or group can avail themselves of the pre-school's self-evaluation report. The self-evaluation is then examined more closely, in addition to which the evaluating party carries out its own examination of the pre-school's activities, its school curriculum guide, organisation, internal personal relations and relations with parents, to mention but a few examples. Gathering of data can take the form of private or group interviews, on-site investigations and questionnaires. The evaluating party or group shall deliver its conclusions in a report, describing the pre-school's unique characteristics, its strengths and weaknesses, and making proposals and suggestions for changes. The conclusions of the evaluation should result in increased knowledge and development of the pre-school's activities.

## Evaluation Aspects

Self-evaluation of pre-school activities must include an examination of the following aspects:

- |                                       |  |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Children:</b>                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- gender</li><li>- age</li><li>- age distribution</li><li>- number</li><li>- number of full-time places</li><li>- group work</li></ul>                                     |
| <b>Staff</b>                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- number of positions</li><li>- education</li><li>- experience</li><li>- working hours</li><li>- continuing education</li><li>- expectations</li><li>- attitudes</li></ul> |
| <b>Relations</b>                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- among staff</li><li>- with children</li><li>- with parents</li><li>- with operating bodies</li><li>- with external parties</li></ul>                                     |
| <b>Satisfaction</b>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- of children</li><li>- of staff</li><li>- of parents</li></ul>  |
| <b>Play and pre-school activities</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- play</li><li>- the children as a group</li><li>- special needs of children</li><li>- life-skills</li><li>- everyday life at the pre-school</li></ul>                     |

**Pre-school learning areas**

- motor development
- language development
- artistic creation
- music
- nature and the environment
- culture and society

**School curriculum guide**

- whether work is in accordance with the National Curriculum Guide for Pre-schools
- whether work is in accordance with the pre-school's own curriculum guide
- whether work conforms to specific curriculum guides

**Administration**

- meetings
- channels of communication
- co-operation
- division of tasks
- areas of responsibility
- staff interviews
- professional support/assistance

**External relations and connections**

- presentation of the pre-school
- connections with advisory services
- connections with psychology and special education services
- connections with other pre-schools
- connections with compulsory schools

**Co-operative and development efforts**

- with another pre-school/other pre-schools
- with compulsory school/schools
- with district organisations/sports and social activities groups
- in international relations
- in pre-school development projects

**Premises /outdoor facilities, playground and equipment**

- facilities and child security
- facilities and personnel security

**Co-operation between home and pre-school**

- information flow
- meetings and interviews
- participation of parents
- attitudes
- expectations







**Ministry of Education,  
Science and Culture**