



HAPPY HEDGEHOGS

DIDACTIC PROJECT

SCHOOL YEAR 2020-2021

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Index

AN UNUSUAL YEAR: BEING, BELONGING AND BECOMING	1
Being	1
Belonging	1
Becoming	2
HOW THE PROJECT WILL BE CARRIED OUT	3
The importance of the play	3
The importance of logical thinking	3
The happy hedgehogs' day	4
Being part of a group	4
Exploring materials together	4
Getting messy together	5
Exploring music and sounds together	5
Being energetic together	5
Role-play	6
Learning through stories together	6
Early Years' Google classroom	6
Meetings with teachers	7
USEFUL INFORMATION	8
What to bring	8
Reminders	8
OUR DAILY ROUTINES	9
Snack time	9
Lunch time	9
Afternoon nap	9
OUR DAILY SCHEDULE	10

AN UNUSUAL YEAR: BEING, BELONGING AND BECOMING

Smiling's goals are the well-being and happiness of the children. Although the times we are living through are uncertain, with the enthusiasm, creativity and professionalism of the teachers along with the support of families, we offer our children a well-organized and lively environment in which they can grow and become citizens of the world, ready to face new challenges.

Being

As part of the topic being, the children are going to explore the five senses: sight, sound, touch, smell and taste. It is through hands-on exploration that young children make connections and begin to make sense of the world around them. They also begin to understand who they are, their likes and dislikes. This project provides the children with lots of exciting activities – many of which child-led as they investigate nature, food, colours, shapes and materials. These different play opportunities and experiences help children build their own identity, which makes each one of them special.

Belonging

Spending time with a group of children of the same age often takes place at nursery school for the first time. The Happy Hedgehogs' classroom provides the perfect opportunity to interact and take important steps in this social phase of a child's development. This mini-project called 'Belonging' will help the children to develop communication skills in order to interact with others cooperatively. It will encourage them to begin to recognize and distinguish between different emotions. Through songs, stories, games and special activities, the teachers will help them to share, show empathy and be kind to

others, which will forge the way for creating bonds within the group. Most importantly, the project aims to help the Happy Hedgehogs have a sense of belonging and feel part of a group.

Becoming

As the children grow physically and become toddlers, they also begin to develop cognitively, socially and emotionally. This mini-project will trace the children's growth over the course of the year through a variety of fun and interactive activities. It will also encourage the children to develop different manual skills as they work with their fingers, wrists, arms and shoulders. The project will go on to focus on their whole bodies helping them to become confident movers indoors and outdoors.

HOW THE PROJECT WILL BE CARRIED OUT

The importance of the play

The project will evolve through different types of play because it is by playing that children discover the pleasure of reaching a goal and experience the effort necessary to achieve it. It is also through play that children experience reality and learn to distinguish it from fiction. Between the ages of two and three children begin to explore pretend play and often imitate real-life situations which they have seen at home such as cooking, looking after a baby or going shopping. At nursery, they begin to share these experiences and as they interact with others, they learn the rules which accompany play such as turn-taking and sharing. These different types of play enable children to discover, perceive, test, experiment and elaborate different solutions. Playing ultimately means learning.

The importance of logical thinking

Teachers plan activities and contexts with the areas of learning in mind, giving particular importance to the development of critical skills and logical reasoning. Young children discover meanings in the world as they explore new possibilities and make exciting connections between people, places and things. It is through such self-initiated investigations that children use their knowledge and skills to solve problems, generate questions and make connections. In order to develop logical thinking skills in the children, stimulating contexts are created in which the children can explore concepts by themselves and with the support of the teachers.

The Happy Hedgehogs' day

The day combines child-led play and adult-led activities. Routines also play an important part of their day, not only giving them emotional stability but also helping them to learn more about themselves. Structured activities, which are partially led by adults, allow plenty of freedom and creativity for each child and are inspired by their interests and needs. These activities take place each week and follow these themes:

Being part of a group

Daily life in the Happy Hedgehogs class gives the children numerous occasions to interact with peers and adults on both a physical and emotional level. Through these interactions, such as daily routines and structured play, the children develop confidence in their own abilities and they begin to feel part of a group as they discover the world around them. All free and structured activities are carried out in groups using various materials which help the children to develop cognitive, gross motor and language skills as well as encouraging social and emotional development.

Teachers organize specific activities to help the children recognize and distinguish between different emotions and to express them through speech and gestures. Such activities include role-playing, story-telling and sharing personal experiences.

Exploring materials together

Each child explore a wide range of materials that, from week to week, are laid out on the table, placed in small containers or on large sheets of paper on the floor in the centre of the classroom for the children to discover. They can smell,

touch and observe elements such as flour, polenta flour and cocoa powder. If they want, they can add objects or toys to the material thereby developing play further.

Getting messy together

The children are encouraged to get their hands dirty as they touch, feel and smell materials in different forms, as water or paint is added. As they develop the ability to take part in messy play, they discover how materials can change shape, consistency and colour just like magic! Using play-dough, cooked pasta and different messy mixtures, the children will be supported by the teachers in their discoveries.

Exploring music and sounds together

Music is an important part of the Happy Hedgehogs' curriculum. They have music with the English music teacher twice a week where the children are encouraged to explore percussion instruments, move to music and different rhythms, to join in with action songs and to express themselves.

Being energetic together

Children need space and time to run and jump, even outside the hours dedicated to structured physical activity in the gym. A free time in which to release all the energy, vitality and joy they have inside. When the weather is favorable, the teachers go to the newly renovated school gardens, where races, role-playing and traditional games are organized such as 'Hide and Seek' and 'What's the Time Mr. Wolf?'. These activities encourage the children to interact with each other. On rainy days, specific moments are dedicated to physical activities indoors such as dance and movement games.

Role-play

Imitating adults is the game that children like most. Just like mums and dads, the children love to pretend to get dressed, cook, clean, get ready to go shopping or go to work. During role-play they nourish their imagination, develop comprehension skills, spoken language and often face their fears. The teachers set up areas to stimulate children to 'pretend' and read stories linked to the role-play area.

Learning through stories together

Stories are read to the children on a daily basis, in both Italian and English. This special moment often goes hand in hand with snack time or comes before lunch, when the children can relax and listen to a story. Often puppets and other instruments are used to tell the story.

Early Years' Google classroom

Didactic digital learning ('Didattica Digitale Integrata') has become an integrated part of the Italian national curriculum. At Smiling, each class has its own virtual classroom where teachers post photos of activities and special events. They can also share extra activities, songs or games, linked to class topics. This is ideal for families who would like to reinforce learning at home and take part in school life. Families are encouraged to visit the classroom regularly and are welcome to post comments or photos of work done by the children at home.

Meetings with teachers

These meetings are an ideal opportunity for families and school to work together and focus on the child and his/her learning journey. They are held online and can be booked by emailing or telephoning the office. Parents will be given a code in order to join the video conference on 'Meet', accessed by their child's account, which they receive when they enrol at Smiling.

These are the following times:

- *Cecilia Masina and Alessandra Pizzarulli: Thursday 1.30 p.m. - 2.30 p.m.*
- *Philippa Waterhouse & Deborah Ascani (Early Years Coordinators):
Thursdays 2.30 p.m. – 3.30 p.m.*

USEFUL INFORMATION

What to bring

- A soft bag with a couple of changes of clothing to be left at school. The school uniform needs to be included as well as: a pair of comfortable trousers, a t-shirt, pants, knickers and socks suitable for the season;
- A cloth bib and carrying case;
- Nappies, wet-wipes and nappy-rash cream (if used at home);
- Dummy and a dummy case, if still used;
- A change of shoes to use in an emergency;
- For children who sleep in the afternoon, a soft bag which contains a small flame-resistant pillow (25x40x5) with a pillow case and a flame-resistant cover/blanket (75x100) suitable for the season.

Reminders

- School uniform is compulsory
- Shoes without laces and trousers without buttons/fastenings to allow children to move freely during activities and to encourage autonomy
- Toys, soft toys and books are not allowed
- For safety reasons, bracelets, necklaces and jewellery in general are not allowed.

OUR DAILY ROUTINES

Snack time

At 9.45 a.m. and 3.45 p.m. a healthy snack is provided by school for the children. Snack consists of fresh, seasonal fruit, crackers or biscuits and sometimes a cake or yoghurt. It is also a time to sit down together as a class and chat. On Friday afternoons there is a special snack prepared by our cook. Please do not bring food to school.

Lunch time

The Hedgehogs eat lunch at 11.50 a.m. in their classroom. The school cook prepares all meals in the kitchen in Porta Mare. Lunch consists of a first course and a second course, followed by fresh fruit or a desert. The menu, which can be found on the school's website, provides a variety of well-balanced and healthy dishes which also includes regional cuisine. International festivals are also celebrated and children are encouraged to try dishes from different countries.

Bibs will be given home each Friday to be washed and should be returned on the following Monday.

Afternoon nap

The Hedgehogs are encouraged to take an afternoon nap from 1 p.m. to 3.30 p.m. The child can bring a dummy (if needed) in a clearly labelled carrying case. This will be given home each day to be cleaned. The teachers often read a story and put on calming music to create a relaxing environment.

The bottom sheet that covers each child's bed is washed by the school. Pillows, sheets and covers will be sent home every Friday and should be returned on the following Monday.

OUR DAILY SCHEDULE

Parents are asked to please bring and collect their child on time to avoid crowding outside the school and to keep classes separate.

8.20 – 8.30	First arrival time - gym door
9.00 – 9.10	Second arrival time - gym door
8.20 – 9.30	Free-play in class/garden
9.30 – 9.45	Toilet
9.45 – 10.15	Snack
10.15 – 10.30	Who's here today? Class register song and activity
10.30 – 11.00	Didactic activities
11.00 – 11.30	Garden
11.30 – 11.50	Toilet
11.50 – 12.10	Lunch
12.30 – 13.00	Garden or free-play in class
12.30	Children who do not stay in the afternoon can be collected - main door
13.00 – 15.30	Toilet & sleep time
15.30 – 15.45	Toilet & snack
15.45 – 16.15	Structured activities (story-time and songs) or free play (construction play, drawings)
16.40 – 16.50	Home time – gym door