Tuscan approach to Lithuania

Towards innovation in ECEC services from

Institute for Innovation
Lifelong Learning Programme
Tuscan Approach Learning for Early childhood education and care
Summary

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 4

1. General presentation of the ECEC system in Lithuania ...... 5
   1.1 Legislation ........................................................................................................................................ 5
   1.2 Geographical distribution/cover rates ............................................................................................. 6
   1.3 Types of services and funding ........................................................................................................... 7
   1.4 Costs and fees ................................................................................................................................. 10
   1.5 Governance ..................................................................................................................................... 11
   1.6 Quality guidelines ........................................................................................................................... 12
   1.7 Professional qualification and development .................................................................................... 15
   1.8 Perspectives of development, innovation and experimentation in Lithuania ...... 16

2. Brief presentation of the services involved ......................... 17
   2.1 Nursery – kindergarten “Boruzele (Ladybird)” ........................................................................... 17
   2.2 Queen Morta’s Childhood Garden ................................................................................................. 19

Bibliography ...................................................................................................................................... 22
Introduction

The development of formal education system in Lithuania started from the end of the 14th century. The first known school was opened at Vilnius Cathedral more than 600 years ago (in 1397). In 1773, joint Lithuanian-Polish State educational institution, the Educational Commission, was formed. To use the contemporary terminology, it was the first ministry of education in Europe. Literary sources assume that the first preschool in Lithuania was founded in Klaipėda in 1847.

In the Republic of Lithuania, education is a priority supported by the State. It is based on the humanistic values of the nation and world culture, the democratic principles as well as the universally accepted human rights and freedoms. The national education policy is aimed at ensuring the welfare to all children living in Lithuania, including creation of conditions for every child to live a happy life, be protected against all forms of violence and exploitation, be properly cared for and able to participate in public life. The focus is on ensuring the access, continuity and social equity of education and expansion of pre-primary education provision, especially for disadvantaged and at-risk children through creation of an information and counseling system for parents, provision of equal start opportunities for their children’s compulsory schooling and development of the universally available pre-primary class education system by rendering a purposeful educational and cultural assistance for all social risk families with children.

The restructuring of the educational system in Lithuania, which started from the beginning of restoration of the country’s independence, created conditions to liberalise the formal pre-school education, develop preprimary preparatory education and encourage the family and the local community to get more actively involved in the process. The reformed content of education offered a choice of various trends and methods and also a variety of forms for organising pre-primary education. Pre-school educational institutions have started applying the Waldorf, Montessori, Suzuki, Step by Step methodology, preparing their own customised educational programmes and specialising in certain areas of their own choice, such as fortification of children’s health, their artistic education, development of critical thinking, ethnic culture, sporting activities, etc.
1. General presentation of the ECEC system in Lithuania

1.1 Legislation

Education policies development and implementation is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Science. The Ministry also defines the criteria for the allocation of financial resources. However, each of ten counties has a department of education to which certain ministerial duties are delegated. The main task of these county departments is organizing school inspection.

Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania formulates and implements the national policy on preschool and pre-primary education. Municipalities form the network of schools providing pre-school and pre-primary education, create conditions for provision of pre-school and pre-primary education, ensures quality of services.

The new version of the Law on Education specifies that pre-school education is provided to children from the moment they are born to the time they start attending pre-primary preparatory education settings or primary schools; the pre-school education curriculum is provided by pre-school education institutions and other schools, freelance teachers or other providers of education; families raising their child/children at home will be provided complex educational and social assistance and health care services, etc.

In Lithuania, early childhood education and care is composed of preschool (ikimokyklinis ugdymas) and pre-primary (priešmokyklinis ugdymas) education and is attributed to the type of non-formal education. Early childhood education and care is provided for children since their birth until they start primary education. Preschool education institutions fall under the authority of local governments. Attendance in most cases is optional.

Preschool sector is regulated by:

- The Law on Education of Republic of Lithuania (2011)\(^1\) issued by Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania. Topics covered: the goals of education in Lithuania, the key principles of the education system, the basic structure of its organisation, activities and relationships as well as the major commitments of the State in the field of education, the content of education (what is being taught and learned, how childrens achievements are assessed, what educational materials are used), purpose of preschool and pre-primary education, the programs of preschool and pre-primary education.

- Outline of Criteria for Preschool Education Curricula (2005, 2011)\(^2\) issued by Ministry of Education and Science. Based on the Outline of Criteria for Preschool Education Curriculum and taking into consideration the needs, traditions and also material and pedagogic potential, every pre-school establishment can develop its own programme, i.e. an original model meeting the needs of children and families and reflecting the regional characteristics. Each ECEC setting decides on its priorities, principles, goals, detailed content, teaching methods, educational materials, how to assess children's achievements and how to inform parents about it.

- Methodological recommendations for the development of preschool curriculum (2006)\(^3\) issued by the Ministry of Education and Science. Based on the Outline of Criteria for Preschool Education Curriculum and the Recommendations every preschool establishment may develop its own ECEC programme. The Methodological Recommendation refer to way of working in a team, how to agree on goals and objectives, principles, what is most important for this particular community, how to choose educational methods, to organize the environment, how to assess children’s achievements, how to involve parents, how to evaluate the quality of the program.

In the process of ECEC policy making, the Ministry of Education and Science always invites to participate in a working groups all interested groups and representatives of other ministries related to the specific issue (Ministry of Health, Ministry of Social Security and Labor, etc.), representatives from local authorities, parents organizations, higher education institutions, heads of educational institutions, etc. All drafts of the documents, projects are publicly discussed with trade unions, representatives of various associations (municipalities, heads of educational institutions, etc.).

### 1.2 Geographical distribution/cover rates

The management of pre-school education institutions is decentralized and its network depends on municipalities. There is a vivid differentiation between municipalities by the number of children attending pre-school education institutions. Among the factors majorly affecting the attendance figures of pre-school education institutions is the percentage of the urban population and employment rate within the municipality, or in other words, the larger the urban population of the municipality, the higher the number of children attending kindergartens, and, on the contrary, the larger the rural population or the poorer the municipality, the smaller the number of children attending kindergartens. Currently great attention in Lithuania is paid for efforts to increase accessibility of preschool and pre-primary education in rural areas in order to reduce social exclusion. One of the forms of improving accessibility is establishment and development of universal multi-functional centres in rural areas. One of the mandatory conditions for the establishment of such centers is the establishment of groups in which preschool or pre-primary educational program is implemented.

---

\(^2\) [http://www.smm.lt/ugdymas/docs/ikimokyklinio%20ugdymo%20programos%20kriteriju%20aprasas1%20%20g.doc](http://www.smm.lt/ugdymas/docs/ikimokyklinio%20ugdymo%20programos%20kriteriju%20aprasas1%20%20g.doc)

Peschool (birth-6 years) and pre-primary (6-7 years) groups are established mostly in nursery–kindergartens and kindergartens. Preschool and pre-primary groups in schools (schools–kindergartens, primary schools, general schools, etc.) are established mostly in rural areas. In pursuance of the Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania, compulsory education in the first grade starts at the age of 7 or earlier if a child reaches this age in the calendar year.

### Participation rates per setting and age, 2011/12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nursery – kindergarten</th>
<th>Kindergarten</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 1</td>
<td>0,1 %</td>
<td>0,0 %</td>
<td>0,0 %</td>
<td>0,1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 year old (i.e. from 1 to less than 2)</td>
<td>5,4 %</td>
<td>0,1 %</td>
<td>0,5 %</td>
<td>6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 year old</td>
<td>43,0 %</td>
<td>1,2 %</td>
<td>4,2 %</td>
<td>48,4 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 year old</td>
<td>58,9 %</td>
<td>4,2 %</td>
<td>8,3 %</td>
<td>71,4 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 year old</td>
<td>60,7 %</td>
<td>4,4 %</td>
<td>9,8 %</td>
<td>74,9 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 year old</td>
<td>60,4 %</td>
<td>4,5 %</td>
<td>12,2 %</td>
<td>77,1 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 year old</td>
<td>56,0 %</td>
<td>4,1 %</td>
<td>36,3 %</td>
<td>96,4 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 1.3 Types of services and funding

Preschool and pre-primary education services in Lithuania are provided mostly in state-run preschool establishments or general education schools. Such establishments are open five days a week. Their daily working time is 10.5 hours. Since 2010 the rules have been simplified to facilitate the establishment of private preschools, e.g. simplification of hygiene norms (2010), liberalisation of requirement for the use of buildings (2011) and premises for newly established ECEC settings and partial funding (not exceeding 20 hours per week) is offered. In order to facilitate the legal burden to the founder of a private ECEC institution, a new regulatory procedure came into force from October 12, 2012. It allowed the establishment of private kindergartens in residential buildings or premises without changing their intended use.

In Lithuania, the sector of private (non-state) education is not large, but has been gradually expanding. According to the data provided by the Open Information, Counselling and Guidance System AIKOS5, (Atvira informavimo, konsultavimo ir orientavimo sistema), in 2014, there were 72 private ECEC institutions.

---

Establishment of a non-state early childhood education and care institution or general education school is not difficult in Lithuania. If the founder has facilities that meet the established standards of hygiene, it has to register the non-state school with the Register of Legal Persons at the State Enterprise Centre of Registers and start the activities. The school founder is charged with the responsibility to ensure the quality of education in a non-state school.

Preschool institutions in Lithuania, 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutions</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Municipal</th>
<th>Private</th>
<th>Including</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total group</td>
<td>2852</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>2094</td>
<td>572</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total preschool</td>
<td>689</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>611</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Private Community Foreign Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>57 3 220</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At state level, investment funds necessary for the development of education (construction, renovation or restructuring of schools, development of human resources, etc.) are allocated in accordance and with programmes specified in the Law on Approval of Financial Indicators of the State Budget and Municipal Budgets. One-year or long-term investment programmes are developed by the Ministry of Education and Science subject to the Provisions of the National Education Strategy 2003-2012 and the Government Programme.

At municipal level, investment funds necessary for the development of education are allocated in accordance with programmes specified in budgets approved by municipal councils. Municipal investment programmes are developed with regard to state investment programmes pursuant to the strategic plan of the municipality concerned.

The issue of financing pre-school education at the municipal level has acquired a particular importance. Municipalities are forced to economise their funds in a number of different ways but the trade unions of the teaching staff in pre-school institutions oppose that and offer to look for other forms of saving and seek agreements with social partners. After assessment of the country’s pre-school funding problem, the Ministry of Education and Science decided to introduce the ‘pupil’s basket’ for children attending institutions of early childhood education and care: to adjust the long-term programme for increasing the teachers’ salaries by giving priority to increasing the salaries to educators of pre-school educational institutions through allocation of additional funds; and to ensure target financing of pre-school education.

ECEC settings are financed from state budget (20 hours per week - the pupil’s basket), municipal budgets (or other founder) and parents fees (parents pay for the meals, and if founder provide, additional services).

To fund formal education programmes of state, municipal and private schools from state and municipal budgets, the principle of allocating funds per pupil – the pupil’s basket – is applied. The pupil’s basket principle for funding education for pupils following the primary, basic and secondary curricula has been applied since 2002. In 2003, it also started to be applied for learners following the pre-primary curriculum.

6 http://www.aikos.smm.lt/aikos/Statistika/Ins4_1.html
Since 2011, the pupil’s basket principle has been introduced in pre-school (early childhood education and care) provision.

As a public subsidy, it is allocated to municipalities depending on the number of children attending a pre-school education institution, irrespective of its subordination – public or private. The pre-school basket promoted the development of ECEC provision and created economic conditions for the establishment of private ECEC institutions. That is seen as a way to promote the diversity of educational organisation forms and a healthy competition between municipal and private education institutions thus improving the quality of ECEC provision in Lithuania.

The pupil’s basket is comprised of funds on remuneration for the work of staff according to the teaching plan (including payment for pre-school and pre-primary education contact hours funded from the pupil’s basket), organisation and management of the education process in schools, remuneration for the work of school librarians, provision of psychological, special-pedagogical, special and social-pedagogical assistance, acquisition of textbooks and other teaching materials, development of pupils’ cognitive activities, provision of vocational guidance, continuing professional development of teachers and other participants of the educational process, implementation and use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), including access to the Internet, development and management of databases and school electronic diaries, remuneration for the work of ICT administrators and other ICT-related expenditures. The methodology specifies that schools must devote at least 60 per cent of the funds for the above-listed components other than salaries. Schools are entirely autonomous in the use of the pupil’s basket funds for their intended purpose, i.e. the school community is to decide how much and what teaching materials to acquire, what teacher training events to choose for their teachers’ continuing professional development and so on.

The school is accountable for the purpose-specific use of the pupil’s basket funds to the school founder. The founder also has the right to check whether the school uses the received pupil’s basket funds according to their intended destination. In municipal schools, this function is performed by the Internal Audit Service.

Funds for the upkeep and maintenance of schools are allocated by the founder of the school in line with its own established procedure. Subject to the procedure established by the Government, health care in schools is funded from the budget of the compulsory State Health Insurance Fund, state and municipal budgets and other funds.
The proportion of children enrolled into public and publically subsidised private settings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nursery – kindergarten</th>
<th>Kindergarten</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>TOTAL (average)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public settings</td>
<td>99,3 %</td>
<td>88,6 %</td>
<td>98,6 %</td>
<td>98,7 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publically subsidised private settings</td>
<td>0,7 %</td>
<td>11,4 %</td>
<td>1,4 %</td>
<td>1,3 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Education of pupils in private institutions of early childhood education and care and general education schools is also funded through the pupil’s basket. Every year, private and general education schools have to report on the use of the pupil’s basket funds to the Ministry of Education and Science. The National Audit Office of Lithuania checks how effectively private schools use the pupil’s basket state funds received and whether they are used according to their intended destination.

Despite the fact that private schools receive the pupil’s basket for their pupils’ education, they may charge fees for covering other education-related costs. The amount of this additional contribution is determined by the school founder. The fee is paid on a contractual basis.

1.4 Costs and fees

ECEC settings are financed from state budget (20 hours per week - the pupil’s basket), municipal budgets (or other founder) and parents fees (parents pay for the meals, and if founder provide, additional services). Most commonly paid fee in public settings per month (5 days per week) is 60 EUR. The size of the fees depends on the number of meals provided for child per day. Daily length of the provision (in hours) usually is 10.30 h.

The payment for the children’s upkeep in pre-school institutions (except private ones) is reduced by 50% in the event that: the child (children) has (have) only one of the parents, or the family is raising three and more children or the child’s father is conscripted or the child grows in a family of students where one of the parents is a full-time student of the day department of an educational institution.

The fees may be reduced depending on the social status of children and their parents (foster parents or guardians) by decision of founder or additional fees for educational materials or for additional services provided at the parents’ request (such as extended day groups, after school care, studies, clubs, extracurricular activity groups, camps, excursions, etc.) are determined by the school founder.

http://db1.stat.gov.lt/statbank/default.asp?w=1680
In 2013, the Lithuanian Government canceled the regulation on fee reduction for parents based on certain criteria on national level. Currently the fees may be reduced by decision of founder which criteria for fee reduction will be used (for example: the child/children has /have only one of the parents, or the family is raising three and more children or the child’s father is conscripted or the child grows in a family of students, etc.). Founder decides which size of reduction will be applied (50 per cent., 20 per cent., etc.)\(^8\).

**Length of paid maternity, paternity and parental leaves**

Lithuania has a long tradition of institutional early childhood education, but at the same time, the belief in keeping children at home as long as possible is also strong. The maternal leave is for 8 weeks after the delivery (mother receives 100% of her prior earnings) and the paternal leave is for 4 weeks (1 month) from the date of child’s birth (father receives 100% of his prior earnings). Parents can choose the length and the amount of the parental leave. The amount of parental allowance depends on the chosen receipt duration of the allowance: if the insured person chooses to receive the allowance until the child turns 1 year old, the amount of the allowance is 100% of the allowance beneficiary’s compensatory wage; if the person chooses to receive the allowance until the child turns 2 years old – the allowance until the child turns 1 year old is 70 % and 40 % of the allowance beneficiary’s compensatory wage until the child turns 2 years old. Family decides who (mother or father) will use the right for parental leave. A parent or foster-parent is paid a benefit equivalent to his/her full salary until the child is 1 year old. In addition, fathers are entitled to a benefit equivalent to 100% salary for one month’s leave after the child is born.

### 1.5 Governance

The founder of an educational institution carries the supervision of the institution’s management and pedagogical activities. The supervision is regulated by the General Regulations of Supervision of Educational Institutions (Bendrieji švietimo įstaigų priežiūros nuostatai) adopted in 2000.

According to the Law on Education of Republic of Lithuania the School Council is the school’s highest self-governance body, representing the pupils, teachers, parents (foster parents, guardians) and local community. Self-governance bodies of the school collectively discuss issues of school activity and funding and, within the scope of their competence, defined in the by-laws (statute of the school), adopt decisions and influence decisions of the head of the school and perform public supervision of the school’s management (discuss the school’s income and expenditure, submit proposals to the head-teacher assessing his and other employees performance, etc.).

---

The Outline of a Model Description of an Educator’s Job (2005) specifies the range of professional activities carried out by educators engaged in the implementation of the pre-school education curriculum.

At the national level it is established that the head of the ECEC setting must meet the following requirements:
– to have a university higher education degree (or equivalent education), the necessary professional qualification and at least 3 years of teaching experience, both key and leadership competences, no less than one year’s experience of managing a group of people, be able to work with information technologies and have a good command of Lithuanian and know at least one foreign language at level B1 or higher.
Any applicant for appointment as a head of an ECEC provider must have his/her competences assessed by the National School Evaluation Agency according to a unified methodology applicable to all candidates. Only heads of small ECEC settings (1–3 groups) are involved in direct pedagogical/educational activities with children. In such cases, they usually are involved in direct pedagogical/educational activities with children 3 hours per day.

According to the regulations approved by the Minister of Education, assistance of professional specialists (speech therapists, surdopedagogues, typhlopedagogues, psychologists, kinesitherapeutists, social pedagogues, etc.) for preschool and pre-primary age children and their parents can be provided in ECEC setting, in Local pedagogical–psychological services or at home. It depends on the number of children with special educational needs in ECEC setting (for example ECEC setting has one speech therapist if there are at least 25-30 children who need assistance). If there is no possibility to provide professional assistance by specialists directly in ECEC setting, such assistance is provided in Local pedagogical–psychological services. In some cases, for example if a child has limited mobility, motor and support apparatus dysfunctions, according to the regulations approved by the Minister of Education, professional assistance by specialists is provided at home.

1.6 Quality guidelines

Focusing on the goals of the European education policy, Lithuania seeks to improve the quality of education provided to children and their families in line with the principles of equality of opportunities, accessibility, inclusive education and promotion of high quality education.

The goal of pre-school education is to meet and develop child’s social and cognitive needs. It is offered within nurseries, nursery-kindergartens, kindergartens, kindergarten-schools, etc. The pre-primary education is designed to assist the child to prepare for school. The curriculum for this stage is offered at schools of general education or by other education providers. The curriculum of pre-primary education is standardized, while the curriculum of pre-school education is more individualized, designed by pre-schools/kindergartens.

http://www.nmva.smm.lt/
There has been a change in the general public attitude towards the childhood-related quality criteria: earlier, high quality childhood was primarily related to good care. Now parents increasingly focus on the overall teaching and learning and on the education environment that would meet not only the requirements of statutory hygiene norms but also those specified for the implementation of a modern education curriculum.

In 2005, the Outline of Criteria for Pre-School Education Curriculum approved by an order of the Ministry of Education and Science initiated changes in pre-school education. It essentially changed the approach to designing the curriculum of pre-school education as the national curriculum was replaced by a process of designing decentralised curricula at the level of pre-school institutions. A dynamic understanding of the content of teaching and learning was put forward, which meant that the educational content was not considered to be finite and that the teacher was free to alter it in response to children's experience, needs, interests and capabilities. Teachers were offered a creative and interpretative way of implementing the curriculum and a pathway for an evolutionary improvement of the curriculum content and methods through making the curriculum more individualised.

Curricula of pre-school education institutions must comply with the following general requirements: education provisions must adhere to the principles of humanistic and constructive pedagogy; define the status of the family and the pre-school institution and outline possibilities for their interaction; set out the key benchmarks of the education content and also methods and measures for its implementation; outline the main achievements/outcomes and ways to assess them; and also provide reference literature and other sources.

At the national level the quality of preschool and pre-primary education is ensured through the following regulations:

- Established maximum group size per adult, hygiene, and safe environment requirements. The number of children in the group from birth to one and a half years old cannot exceed 10, in the groups from one and a half to three years – 15, and from three to seven years – 20 children.
- Maximum number of children per staff: if children are under 1 year old – maximum 3 children per 1 teacher; for 1 year old children - maximum 10 children per 1 teacher; for 2 year old children - maximum 15 children per 1 teacher; for 3 year old children - maximum 20 children per 1 teacher.
- Premises and equipment: the classrooms for children up to 3 years old must be on the ground floor with a separate entrance to the yard (according to the regulations, 2 times daily children should play outside if the temperature is not lower than minus 12 C); it must be at least 4,3 square meters per child up to 3 years of age and no less than 4 square meters per child for group of children of 3-7 age group; having a child with special needs - 5 square meters per child (spaces in the toilet washroom and kitchenette rooms not counted).
In 2005, important documents concerning the evaluation of the education system were approved. They include the National List of Education Performance Indicators (Nacionalinių švietimo būklės rodiklių sąrašas) and the Procedure for Monitoring the State of Education (Švietimo būklės stebėsenos tvarka).

The Internal Audit Methodology for Schools of Pre-primary Education (2005) regulates the internal audit model, organization, and use of school self-evaluation procedures and requirements for the internal audit conducted at schools of pre-primary education. The Methodology is applied in institutions of preschool education, including nurseries, nursery-kindergartens, kindergartens, kindergarten-schools and other providers of education implementing preschool and pre-primary curriculum. Areas of activity for the evaluation of schools include the school ethos, learning and education of a child, his/her learning achievements, assistance to children and families, resources, and school management. Every area of evaluation includes activity indicators and ancillary indicators that help to reveal more thoroughly different aspects of the areas undergoing evaluation and indicate the outcomes to be achieved. The Methodology sets out self-evaluation of a school to be performed in two stages, by carrying out the ‘broad’ and ‘in depth’ audits. The internal audit is initiated by the head of the school which is responsible for the performance of the internal audit at school and the use of its findings. Director of a preschool institution carries out self-evaluation and planning of the institution’s activity. Internal audit in kindergarten-schools [“Mokykla-darželis”] is organized and performed by the kindergarten-school; it is based on the development plan worked out and the methodology of organizing the internal audit. The internal audit is organized by the director of the institution and coordinated by the deputy director. The kindergarten-school council assesses the managerial performance of the heads of the educational establishment and offers their opinions during their appraisal process.

In view of the needs, traditions and also material and pedagogic potential, every preschool institution develops its own programme based on the Outline of Criteria for Pre-School Education Curriculum to produce an original model reflecting the needs of children and their families and characteristics of the region. Since September 1, 2007, all pre-school education providers have been working according to their own programmes.

Teachers have a right to freely choose educational activities and methods consistent with the regulations of reformed pre-school education. Teachers are obliged to improve the content of education and the relating teaching forms and methods tailoring them to the changing needs of education. In groups of children with special needs, teachers are obliged to tune the necessary education methods and choose the relating teaching aids.

When applying new methods of upbringing, it is necessary to take account of the following: 1) the pedagogues should take responsibility for the results of the newly applied methods and supply parents with objective information on the merits and shortcomings of the new methods; 2) the newly chosen method should not run counter the innovative direction in upbringing; 3) the programme of education is narrowed, extended or altered only based on the Outline of Criteria for Pre-School Education Curriculum.
Educators constantly observe the children and assess their progress in line with the procedure established by the council of the preschool educational institution concerned. It can be portfolio assessment - collection of children’s learning evidence over a period of time, children’s diary etc. The assessment results are regularly discussed with the children’s parents (foster parents and guardians).

1.7 Professional qualification and development

According to the Law on Education of Republic of Lithuania and the qualification requirements for teachers approved by the Minister of Education, since September 1, 2013 only pre-school teachers who has Bachelor degree and qualification of preschool teachers can work as a preschool teacher, and only educators who has Bachelor degree and qualification of preschool teacher or qualification of primary teacher can work as a pre-primary teacher.

A preschool education programme provider is a preschool teacher with advanced vocational or higher education who meets the requirements for preschool teachers established by the Minister of Education and Science. A pre-primary education provider is a pre-primary teacher with advanced vocational or higher education who meets the requirements for preschool or/and primary teachers established by the Minister of Education and Science. The training needed for such qualifications lasts from three to four years;

If a person has a Bachelor degree, a qualification of educator and a qualification of subject teacher (for example history teacher, or Lithuanian language teacher or primary teacher, etc.) he/she has an opportunity to gain additional qualification after passing 90 credits module at a higher education institution. Psychologists, special education pedagogues, teachers of languages and music, social pedagogues, nurses, kinesthetic therapists, and other specialists are encouraged to work for preschool and pre-primary establishments.

According to the Law on Education of Republic of Lithuania (2011), each teacher must upgrade his/her qualification. Each teacher is entitled to at least a five-day paid annual leave of absence for his/her professional development. Professional development (five days yearly) is mandatory for preschool and pre-primary teachers, as is teacher attestation, which takes place every five years and represents the assessment of teacher’s practice according to criteria set by the Minister of Education and Science. The attestation is also the procedure for granting a respective qualification category, that of senior teacher, teacher methodologist, or teacher expert.

The quality of teacher’s practice is ensured through the attestation system of pedagogues. The same procedure is applied when the teacher is seeking a higher qualification status, of a senior teacher, teacher methodologist, and teacher expert. All teachers must go through attestation process. The results of every teacher’s practice are assessed every five years on basis of criteria established by the Minister of Education and Science yet the teacher may select which qualification category he or she pursues. The assessment is performed by an attestation commission, set up by the educational institution or the founder. Upon the commission’s approval that
teacher’s practice meets the requirements associated with a particular category, the teacher receives a respective qualification and has to prove his or her compliance to its requirements every five years or seek a next higher step of qualification. The quality of teacher training is assessed by the Centre of Quality Assessment in Higher Education responsible for the assessment and accreditation of study programmes.

1.8 Perspectives of development, innovation and experimentation in Lithuania

As within the TALE project based on the “Tuscan Approach” to Early Childhood Education and Care a cycle of experimental learning and training will benefit educators, trainers and managers coming from Bulgaria, Lithuania, and Slovenia we hope that the participation in this project activities will contribute to qualitative changes in very important Lithuanian educational system areas as follows:

- Better accommodation to the learning needs of individual learners; planning educational experiences.
- Focusing on the process instead on the results; the process analysis and the documentation as tools to reflect and to update permanently ideas and proposals.
- Deeper understanding of the importance of reflection in early childhood education and care services based on observation and documentation; the effective use of observation results for planning and helping parents to gain knowledge about children’s development and reinforce their confidence and energy as educators.
- Observation and documentation as permanent instruments to ensure the quality of the educational project, as essential tools to get to know children’s potential and skills and to guide organizational decisions and the preparation of context in its broadest meaning.
- Greater attention given to quality space and design in Lithuanian preschools so that it supports and stimulates children’s desire to explore and learn, experience education to beauty every day, progressively enriching their experiences, and encouraging more and more their ability to learn.
- Further development of family involvement in preschool life through new solutions for cooperation with families, ways for real partnership aiming to define, implement and evaluate the educational project of the service.
- Promote possibility to provide quality services for children younger than 1 year old.
- Provide opportunity for cooperation among private and non private preschools.
- Provoke changes in higher education by implementation and dissemination of quality practices in Lithuanian preschools.
- Enrichment of professional development activities for Lithuanian teachers with new urgent and relevant for today topics on the basis of theory and practice provided by partners in the project from Italy, Bulgaria and Slovenia.
2. Brief presentation of the services involved

2.1 Nursery – kindergarten “Boruzele (Ladybird)”

Nursery – kindergarten "Boruzele" is located in a cozy, one of the oldest districts of the city of Vilnius. It is surrounded by beautiful nature. Currently, 280 children aged from 1,5 to 7 years are enrolled in our preschool. Children are divided into 12 groups according to the age in the following way:

1. 2 nursery groups (1,5 - 3 years),
2. 8 preschool groups (3 - 6 years) and
3. 2 preprimary groups (6 – 7 years).

"Boruzele" is proud of its staff which is qualified, knowledgeable and constantly looking for innovations. They are able to justify their practice, to systematize and share their best experiences. "Boruzele" is famous as an expert in successful family involvement, accommodation of learning needs for the individual learners and as an institution open for sharing knowledge with educators from Vilnius and other regions of Lithuania. It is a modern, safe and open for further improvement institution, where the creative and professional teachers value the child's life here and now and help children to develop as free and responsible persons.

»Boruzele« closely cooperates with Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences, Department of Childhood Studies. It gives possibility to influence preparation of future preschool teachers, because students have pedagogical practice in the preschool and can learn from experienced teachers.

Since September 1, 1996 the "Ladybird" participates in implementation of the international program "Step by Step" which promotes child and family-centered approach in early childhood education. The methodology implemented in the preschool is based on the belief that children develop the best when they have opportunity to choose their own way for constructing new knowledge. The educators provide the learning environment that encourages children to explore, to be creative and to take appropriate risks for development and learning. Understanding the importance of play as the best way for development and learning, educators organize the space into logically defined interest areas that support possibility for children to play individually in small groups and with the whole group of children. Twice a year teachers evaluate the quality of their work in accordance with the Principles of Quality Pedagogy (ISSA’s Definition of Quality Pedagogy) and develops individual professional development plans. They have the possibility to ask for the help from more experienced colleagues (mentors) from same institution or invite consultants from the Center for Innovative Education.
In close cooperation with parents, "Boruzele" teaching staff seeks to help children to become:

- thinkers, able to reflect on their experiences and connect new knowledge with their previous knowledge and experiences, able to form, express and justify their opinions;
- decision-makers, able to take challenges as an opportunity to discover new solutions in difficult situations;
- responsible members of society, able to take personal responsibility in caring for the environment, other people, and country.

Since 2007, based on the Outline of Criteria for Preschool Education Curriculum and taking into consideration the needs, traditions and pedagogical potential, "Boruzele" develops its own Curriculum, focused on the sustainable development of the personality that encourages teachers to humanize, differentiate, individualize educational process, and creatively integrate ideas of ecology, healthy lifestyle. The Curriculum promotes respect for the children’s right to be accepted as a competent member of the society.

**Serving children from 1,5 to 3 years old and their families**

Particular attention is given to the transition of newly enrolled children from home to nursery groups. Parents may stay with their children and observe how their child adapts to the new environment. It can take one week or even one month.

The educators provide a variety of opportunities for families to be involved in children's learning and development. Family involvement is a process of mutual communication and cooperation. It is partnership based on mutual respect and understanding, so not only parents are learning from teachers, but teachers are learning from parents and parents are learning from one another.

The educators use systematic observations as the basic way to learn about the educational needs of children. Teachers, together with the families collect information about the child and create the conditions for each child to develop upon his strengths, individual needs and interests. Once a month teachers and parents meet to share their information regarding child progress and together create individual goals. Child's portfolio is filled with comments by both sides: teachers and family members.

The emotional and physical environment is designed in a way that children can freely play, act in different ways, make choices, interact with other children and adults. Particular emphasis is placed on actions with objects, toys contributing to child's sensory and physical development, provides opportunities to learn about health care and strengthens language development.

Thanks to the beautiful natural environment a lot of activities take place in the yard of the preschool. Children enjoy playing with water and sand, planting flowers, observing butterflies and birds.

The motto of the Nursery – kindergarten “Boruzele (Ladybird)” is: “Looking for happiness for others makes your self happy”.
2.2 Queen Morta's Childhood Garden

Pre-School „Vaikystės Sodas“ was established in June, 2010. Over the period of four years the company has opened 13 branches in the largest cities of Lithuania (Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda and Panevėžys) and now is the biggest chain of pre-schools in the country. The company is still developing and expanding: “Karalienės Mortos Mokykla” primary school was opened in September, 2013. Furthermore, the first pre-school „Eureka International Pre-School“ will be opened in Riga, Latvia, in September, 2014.

„Vaikystės Sodas“ is a pre-school for children aged 1-6 years. 500 kids (150 toddlers and 350 elder children) from all around Lithuania are now attending “Vaikystės Sodas“. 117 teachers, 4 psychologists and 4 speech therapists are working in the company today.

The pro-active teachers, progressiveness and creativity are most appreciated in „Vaikystės Sodas“. Children are encouraged to be self-confident, tolerant, brave, empathetic, responsible, and teacher’s duty is to help them take a step forward, to support, advise and motivate.

Teachers in „Vaikystės Sodas“ are encouraged to care about new and advanced curricula, to travel, attend conferences, share the good experiences with teachers in similar institutions. Company’s administration is regularly organising quality improvement events – seminars and lectures which are based on important themes, dissemination of useful information, introducing new scientific studies related to education. Teachers have many opportunities to go abroad and observe methods of working of experienced teacher. „Vaikystės Sodas“ is collaborating with pre-schools and international schools in Finland, Sweden, United Kingdom, Latvia and Belgium.

One of the main believes in “Vaikystės Sodas” is that when choosing to work in an educational organization people have to have a call for the profession. The employee is learning a lot during the first year in this pre-school: he or she shadows an experienced teacher (mentor), attends “Teachers Academy”, and participates in seminars. The large pedagogical library with over 620 books in both Lithuanian and English languages is accessible for all the teachers and parents of our school who want to improve their skills and knowledge in variety of fields.

“Vaikystės Sodas“ is open for teachers from all around Lithuania. They have an opportunity to see the teachers of „Vaikystės Sodas“ work and collaborate with children and their parents, and get introduced to the school’s philosophy, principles and values as well as the methods of education. The teachers from other schools may also observe the classroom environment, and the whole classroom activity planning and accomplishment process.

The teachers` work is observed and evaluated by a team of proficient Quality Control and Supervision Team who visits classrooms regularly and monitors the teachers,
record children’s progress, realization of the curriculum, and the ability to work in a team.

Not only teachers and pupils are the main actors in „Vaikystės Sodas“. Parents are actively involved in the entire educational process, too. Every month or two a seminar on a relevant subject is held, and a number of other events such as individual meetings with the founder of „Vaikystės Sodas“, dr. Austėja Landsbergienė or parent-teacher conferences take place.

Teachers communicate and collaborate with parents a lot. The children’s day book which informs the parents about the activities and their students’ accomplishments is being filled out on a daily basis. An e-mail for all the parents is being sent out, and re-news is posted on the online photo album regularly every week. Parents are often invited to volunteer in their kid’s or another classroom as well as choose an activity that is interesting for both them and children to perform: this may include cooking, carrying the experiments out, reading a book before the nap time, etc. Parents may accompany the teachers and the students on field trips, too.

The curriculum of „Vaikystės Sodas“ is based on the contextual learning. It is made especially for the pre-school of „Vaikystės Sodas“ considering the most modern pedagogical methods and the newest scientific studies as well as the experiences of the most prestigious educational organizations and methods by the famous early-years studies scientists. The significant elements in the contextual curriculum of „Vaikystės Sodas“ are taken from the Reggio Emilia theory and practice, H.Gardner’s “Multiple Intelligence“ theory, L. Vygotsky theory, Sweden National early years curriculum, International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program (IB PYP) and International Primary Curriculum.

„Vaikystės Sodas“ curriculum is based on four main fields:
- Literacy;
- Mathematics;
- Science and IT;
- Emotional Intelligence.

Literacy is „Vaikystės Sodas“ is the programme „VVS“ (everyone reads in Vaikystės Sodas ). The reading activity takes at least 20 minutes everyday, and the chosen texts vary from fairy-tales, stories, poems, encyclopedia research to reading e-books on iPads. Kids learn to read and write through play and while exploring new topics. Teachers and children constantly look for the letters in the environment and name them. A number of finger-games recommended by the speech therapists are played everyday, and songs which develop pronunciation are sung on a regular basis. Kids also use sensory tables to develop their fine motor skills.

Mathematics is an integral part of everyday learning. Teachers follow the „Everyday Mathematics“ programme and count everything they are surrounded by – stairs they are climbing, breadsticks in their snack boxes, clouds in the sky, friends who attend the classroom. Chioldren explore the weight measurements while cooking every Friday in the kitchen, or every other day drawing graphics, making puzzles, recycling or doing other fun exercises.
Science is a field which really entertains the young explorers. Everyday children and teachers follow weather results and discuss their changes through different seasons. They make researches about the growth of the plants by planting their own greenhouses in the class and/or outside. Exploring various topics helps kids get to know about flora, fauna and natural phenomena of Lithuania more and more everyday. Children also learn a lot about the whole world this way, too.

IT skills are necessary for a 21st century child. There are iPads in every classroom. Teachers are regularly re-newing the educational applications: children are drawing, learning the alphabet, numbers and colours, and/or making movies. The elder students are learning to write e-mails and to use the internet search.

Emotional Intelligence is taken seriously in “Vaikystės Sodas”. Everyday children are encouraged to talk about their feelings, emotions and behaviour. Teachers are using the Kimochis educational program using toys that each has its own characteristics and predictable behaviour. While role playing with the characters of Kimochis, children get to know how to identify their feelings, what behaviour is acceptable and what is not, etc.

Children of „Vaikystės Sodas“ grow in a safe and friendly environment, they feel loved and always supported, heard and commended.
I. Bibliography

- http://www.smm.lt/ugdymas/docs/ikimokyklinio%20ugdymo%20programos%20krit
  eriju%20aprasas1%20g.doc
- http://www.ikimokyklinis.lt/index.php/biblioteka/vaiku-ugdymas/metodines-
  rekomendacijos-ikimokyklinio-ugdymo-programai-rengti/743
- http://www.smm.lt/
- http://www.aikos.smm.lt/aikos/Statistika/Ins4_1.html
- http://www.nmva.smm.lt/