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Sustainable play



GUIDE TO A TOY-FREE MONTH

Information about the guide

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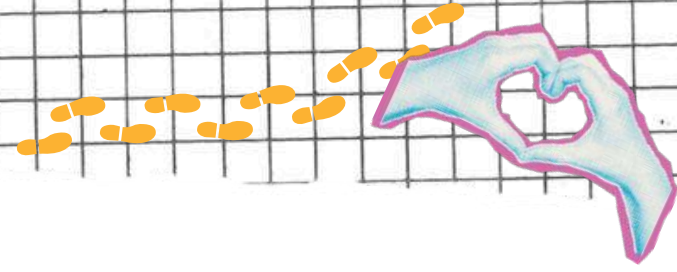
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INTRODUCTION



*In the forest, we gathered cones and sticks, and I made a magic wand out of them.
Then we could do magic. (A child from Kindergarten Dobrna)*



I appreciate that the kindergarten takes part in various projects and that the educators make an effort to bring them closer to the children. Based on what I've seen, I can say that the children had plenty of interesting "recycled" items available and that they truly enjoyed reusing them as toys. A particular favorite among the youngest was the slide for small objects, made from cardboard tubes. (Parent – Kindergarten Dobrna)

Imagine a playroom filled with laughter, creativity, and natural materials. No plastic toys, no batteries; just curious minds and open space. That's how Toy-Free Month began for us...

In this guide, we introduce you to an innovative and environmentally conscious practice: the Toy-Free Month (TFM). The concept behind TFM is simple, yet transformative: for one month (or longer), kindergartens remove conventional, pre-made toys from the playroom/classroom. Children are invited to engage in open-ended, creative play using sustainable or recycled materials and self-made toys, also from things that can be found in nature. This practice stimulates children's imagination and creativity, fosters cooperation and problem-solving skills, while also nurturing their awareness of environmental responsibility from an early age.

A shared journey

We designed this guide as a practical and inspiring handbook for kindergarten teachers. Born from the collaboration between passionate sustainability experts, early childhood educators, and hands-on kindergarten teachers, this guide grew out of a shared vision: to help fellow educators bring TFM to life in their own classrooms. Inside, you'll find step-by-step guidance, not just on how to plan and run it, but how to reflect meaningfully afterward. Along the way, we touch on ideas like sustainability, zero-waste living, and general ecology, all rooted in the broader goals of the SDGs and the European GreenComp. You'll also discover creative ways to craft your own eco-friendly toys - ideas that have inspired us and will hopefully inspire you too.

Our inspiration

The guide was created within the scope of Erasmus+ project “Toy-Free Month: Cultivating Creativity and Sustainability in Young Learners” inspired by the exemplary practice implemented by the dedicated and enthusiastic team of Kindergarten Dobrna from Slovenia. The TFM practice has been a vital part of life in this kindergarten since the school year 2014/15. Enriched by feedback from teachers, children and parents, this guide emphasizes the broader impact of sustainable education – not only on the individual, but also on community and society level.

Why Toy-Free?

This guide is an **open invitation to educators**: step into the Toy-Free Month journey and **welcome children into a world of imagination, open-ended play, and a gentle connection with nature**. When we involve families and communities in this experience, we plant habits that grow far beyond the playroom walls. We hope this guide feels like a companion - something you can return to, share with colleagues, and grow from together. Let the month without conventional toys become a month full of imagination, creative play, learning and care for our planet.



1. GLOSSARY



I really appreciate that you showed us how something beautiful can be made from natural and recycled materials. It meant a lot to my child too – he’s become more independent and imaginative. Now he brings home every little stone because he wants to make something out of it. (Parent - Kindergarten Dobrna)

Zero Waste is the conservation of all resources by means of responsible production, consumption, reuse and recovery of products, packaging and materials without burning, and with no discharges to land, water or air that threaten the environment or human health ([Zero Waste International Alliance](#), 2018).

Sustainability is the ability to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It involves balancing environmental health, economic viability, and social well-being to ensure long-term harmony between people and the planet.

SDGs are seventeen global goals set by the United Nations to build a more just, healthy, and sustainable world by 2030. For educators, the SDGs offer a framework to connect classroom activities – like caring for nature, promoting kindness, or reducing waste – to larger global values and shared responsibilities.

ESD – Education for Sustainable Development is an approach to teaching that helps children understand how their actions affect the world and encourages them to think critically, care deeply, and act responsibly. In practice, ESD means embedding sustainability into everyday learning—through nature play, storytelling, community involvement, and thoughtful reflection.

Circular Economy is a model of thinking and acting that encourages reducing waste and using resources wisely. In early education, this can mean reusing materials for play, repairing instead of discarding, and teaching children the value of caring for what we have. It shifts the focus from “take-make-throw away” to “reuse-rethink-recycle.”

Systems Thinking: A holistic approach to problem-solving that recognizes the interconnectedness and interdependence of elements within a whole system (e.g., how environment, society, and economy relate).

Microplastic is tiny plastic particles (<5mm) from the breakdown of larger plastics or intentionally added to products like cosmetics. Common sources include microbeads, synthetic clothing fibers, and plastic debris.

Play-Based Learning: An educational approach in which children learn through structured and unstructured play activities that foster development in multiple domains.

Experiential Learning: Learning through direct experience, often involving hands-on, inquiry-based, or project-driven activities.

Inquiry-Based Learning: An approach that encourages children to ask questions, investigate solutions, and construct understanding through exploration.

Free Play: Play that is child-initiated and child-directed, not structured by adults; vital for vocabulary development, creativity, and social skills.

Multi-sensory Experiences: Activities involving more than one sense (touch, smell, sound, sight, taste) to deepen understanding, especially of abstract concepts.

Nature-Based Learning: Outdoor education and activities that foster environmental connection and stewardship.

Eco-literacy: Understanding ecological concepts, natural systems, and human-environment interactions.

Environmental Stewardship: Responsible use and protection of the natural environment through sustainable practices and behaviours.

Holistic Development: Education that considers all aspects of a child's growth, cognitive, social, emotional, physical, moral, and creative.

Ethical Awareness: Recognizing and reflecting on moral issues like fairness, justice, and responsibility as part of learning





ONE PAGE SUMMARY



2. TOY INDUSTRY IMPACT ON THE HUMAN HEALTH AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The toy industry plays a significant role in the lives of children, shaping their development, play experiences, and imagination. However, beyond its benefits, the industry also raises important concerns about children's health and environmental sustainability. The negative impact of the toy industry on human health and the environment is manifested in:

- the use of **non-durable materials**, e.g. poor-quality plastic that is not recyclable and contains hazardous substances such as phthalates, lead and bisphenol A.
- **large ecological and carbon footprint** in the production of toys (especially those made of plastic - plastic is made from petroleum products, electricity consumption for production using non-renewable raw materials and water), air, water and soil pollution in the production of toys,
- generation of **large amounts of waste** through excessive packaging of toys.

The industry follows a "**take, make, waste**" model: extract oil, produce toys, then dispose of them. Even reused toys often end up as waste, since most aren't recyclable due to mixed materials and strict safety regulations. Europe is trying to move away from in favour of a circular economy, which aims to extend the life cycle of products through the use of durable, safe, recyclable materials and through repair, sharing and reuse of items.

What's most important, the toy sector has an outsized influence: it creates a culture of consumption and waste that spills over into other areas as kids grow up. Toys are often the first way children experience shopping and consumption, and thus, they set the standard for how kids interact with products and teach them to constantly look for the next new thing. That's why we need a sustainable and zero-waste approach to toys, starting from the earliest years of childhood and on into pre-school education.

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ONE PAGE SUMMARY



3. SDGS AND GREEN COMP BACKGROUND

The sustainable path of the world is set by the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** - a global blueprint adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. There are 17 interconnected goals, designed to address the world's most pressing challenges, ranging from poverty, inequality, and health to education, climate change, and environmental degradation.

Another essential tool for guiding early childhood educators and kindergarten teachers is The **GreenComp**, in nurturing sustainability from the earliest stages of development. While young children may not yet grasp complex global challenges, early childhood is a critical period for forming attitudes, values, and behaviours that support sustainable living.

GreenComp identifies sustainability as a key competence that enables individuals to act in favour of environmental integrity, social equity, and economic viability. The framework outlines four interrelated competence areas:

- **Embodying sustainability values,**
- **Embracing complexity in sustainability,**
- **Envisioning sustainable futures,**
- **Acting for sustainability.**

Each area includes specific competences that help individuals think critically, collaborate, and take informed, responsible action for sustainability in personal, educational, and professional contexts. GreenComp supports the **European Green Deal** and aligns with global efforts like the SDGs by fostering the skills needed for a just and green transition.

GreenComp is important for kindergarten teachers for specific roles:

1. Laying the Foundation for Lifelong Sustainability Values
2. Encouraging Systems Thinking at an Age-Appropriate Level
3. Nurturing Imagination and Hope
4. Fostering Action and Participation

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ONE PAGE SUMMARY



4. SUSTAINABLE EDUCATION

Why Sustainable Education Matters in Early Childhood

Early childhood is a uniquely critical period for shaping values and habits that last a lifetime. During this stage, children are highly receptive and open to new ways of understanding the world. **Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)** provides the foundation for lifelong environmental awareness, empathy, and social responsibility. By integrating sustainability into daily routines, play, and relationships, children learn about nature, fairness, cooperation, and caring for others. ESD empowers children as capable agents of change and aligns naturally with play-based, child-centred approaches to early education.

Benefits of ESD for Young Learners:

- Cognitive Development
- Socio-Emotional Growth
- Environmental Awareness
- Physical Development
- Moral and Ethical Awareness

Effective Pedagogical Approaches for ESD

ESD is a holistic, integrated way of teaching and living. The following approaches show how educators can embed sustainability in daily practice:

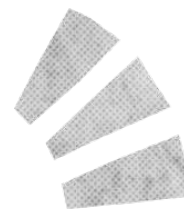
- **Play-based and experiential learning:** inquiry projects, storytelling, creative arts, and free play that encourage curiosity and self-expression.
- **Nature-based and outdoor education:** regular walks, gardening, observing insects, and using natural materials for exploration and art.
- **Integration across the curriculum:** embed sustainability into everyday routines such as water use during handwashing, sorting recycling after meals, and mindful energy use.
- **Systems thinking:** help children see the links between caring for nature, fairness, and wise resource use, fostering holistic perspectives.
- **Teacher's role:** act as a facilitator, observer, and reflective guide who encourages curiosity, resilience, and open exploration rather than directing every activity.

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ONE PAGE SUMMARY



5. TOY-FREE MONTH GUIDELINES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

With an open mindset, good preparation, and teamwork, the TFM becomes a meaningful experience for children, teachers, and families.

1. Inspiration, Shared Vision & Practical Planning

Present the TFM concept and its benefits to colleagues. Form TFM team. Discuss vision, possible challenges and connect the initiative to the curriculum.

2. Playroom Setup: Creating an Inspiring Environment

Involve children and staff. Remove toys and explain the change to children with care. Create inviting play areas. Ensure safety, comfort, and variety.

3. Preparing the Children: ABC of TFM

-  Acknowledge the change honestly and empathetically.
-  Build excitement through stories or mystery materials.
-  Co-create rules for safe, respectful play.
-  Trust their creativity and give them space to experiment.
-  Frame every discovery as a win – focus on learning, not perfection.
-  Make it meaningful – connect play to empathy and care for nature.

4. Preparing the Materials: Gather & Organize

Start collecting and sorting materials early with help from staff, parents, and the local community. Focus on reuse. Quality matters more than quantity.

5. Creating Sustainable Toys

Involve children in making play materials – it builds ownership, creativity, and problem-solving. Encourage multi-use and open-ended designs.

6. Involving Parents

Present TFM as an opportunity for children to grow socially, emotionally, and creatively. Invite parents to actively contribute. Reflect and learn together.

7. Engaging the Local Community

Connect with local artisans, organizations, or businesses. Encourage continued collaboration so the TFM practice becomes a shared tradition.

GO TO THE CHAPTER



2. TOY INDUSTRY IMPACT ON THE HUMAN HEALTH AND THE ENVIRONMENT



The workshops were a wonderful experience for us parents too – simple, but full of ideas. Watching my child joyfully create something from what we'd usually throw away was truly special. (Parent – Kindergarten Dobrna)

The toy industry plays a significant role in the lives of children, shaping their development, play experiences, and imagination.

However, beyond its benefits, the industry also raises important concerns about children's health and environmental sustainability.

Many mass-produced toys, especially inexpensive plastic ones, **contain toxic substances** that can be harmful to young children. Because children often explore the world through touch, taste, and close interaction with toys, their exposure to these chemicals can be especially high.

Some of the most concerning substances include:

- Phthalates – used to make plastic flexible but linked to hormone disruption.
- Lead – found in some paints and electronics, can cause developmental delays and cognitive problems.
- Bisphenol A (BPA) – associated with hormone interference and long-term health risks.
- Flame retardants – while added for safety, these chemicals can negatively affect brain development.

Even though many countries have regulations on toy safety, some toys, particularly those sold through unregulated online platforms, may not meet safety standards, putting children at risk.

Plastic or synthetic toys can also pose **physical dangers**, such as:

- Choking hazards from small or detachable parts,
- Sharp or fragile components that can break and cause injury.
- Battery-related incidents, such as chemical burns or serious internal injuries from swallowed button

Environmental Footprint of the Toy Industry

Toys don't just impact individual health – they also contribute to broader environmental problems through the ways they're produced, packaged, and discarded.



Plastic Overload

The toy industry relies heavily on plastic – over 90% of toys are made from plastic materials, many of which are non-recyclable (World Sustainable Toy Day, 2023). This leads to:

- **Plastic and microplastic pollution**, especially as broken or unused toys are thrown away.
- **Short product lifespans**, as toys often become outdated due to changing trends or children's rapid development.
- **Growing waste volumes**, since most discarded toys end up in landfills or incinerators, contributing to the global waste crisis.

High Carbon Footprint

Toy production is **resource-intensive**, involving:

- Oil-based plastic manufacturing,
- Long-distance shipping from overseas factories,
- Energy-heavy processes that release significant greenhouse gas emissions.

Manufacturing the plastic for toys generates roughly 25 million tonnes of CO₂ annually, with an additional 20% resulting from transportation – totalling ~26 million tonnes of CO₂ per year (compared to fashion industry 280 billion tonnes), and around 0.8–1% of global plastic production goes into toys (World Sustainable Toy Day, 2023).

Excessive Packaging Waste

Many toys are overpackaged in layers of plastic and cardboard. This packaging creates large volumes of waste, often disposed of immediately, and it is frequently non-recyclable, further polluting the environment.

Electronic Waste (E-Waste)

With the rise of digital and battery-operated toys, the toy industry is increasingly contributing to e-waste, one of the world's fastest-growing waste streams. These toys often contain hazardous materials and are difficult to recycle due to their complex components. Frequently, they end up in landfills or poorly managed recycling facilities, where they pose health and safety risks to both workers and local communities.

The above information confirms that the overproduction of toys has negative consequences for the environment and human health. These impacts are compounded by the fact that there is an enormous waste of environmental resources (including non-renewable raw materials, oil, water, and energy) required for the manufacture of toys that often have very short life cycles.

Statistics show that kids lose interest in 25% of their toys within just one week. That's why still, 80% of toys end up in landfills, incinerators, or the ocean, where they contribute to microplastic pollution (World Sustainable Toy Day, 2023).

The industry follows a **"take, make, waste"** model: extract oil, produce toys, then dispose of them. Even reused toys often end up as waste, since most aren't recyclable due to mixed materials and strict safety regulations.

Though not the largest industry, the toy sector has an outsized influence: **it creates a culture of consumption and waste** that spills over into other areas as kids grow up. Toys are often the first way children experience shopping and consumption, and thus they set the standard for how kids interact with products and teach them to constantly look the next new thing.

This is why we need a sustainable and zero-waste approach to toys, starting from the earliest years of childhood and on into pre-school education.

So, is there a concept of sustainable and zero waste?

Sustainability is the ability to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It involves balancing environmental health, economic viability, and social well-being to ensure long-term harmony between people and the planet. In practice, sustainability means using resources wisely, reducing environmental impact, supporting fair labour, and protecting ecosystems.

In early childhood settings, this includes:

- **Ecological Sustainability:** Minimizing environmental impact through reduced resource use, waste generation, and carbon footprint.
- **Social Sustainability:** Promoting community values, cooperation, and equitable access to opportunities and resources.
- **Economic Sustainability:** Encouraging resourcefulness and low-cost, long-term solutions.



"THE TOY INDUSTRY PUNCHES ABOVE ITS WEIGHT IN TERMS OF IMPORTANCE, AND AS SUCH, WE HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO
THE KIDS WHO ARE OUR CUSTOMERS AND
THE FUTURE OF THE PLANET IN WHICH THEY'LL LIVE AS ADULTS."

WORLD SUSTAINABLE TOY DAY, 2023

According to Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), children should learn about sustainability not just theoretically, but through lived experiences and daily practices.

Zero Waste is the conservation of all resources by means of responsible production, consumption, reuse and recovery of products, packaging and materials without burning, and with no discharges to land, water or air that threaten the environment or human health ([Zero Waste International Alliance](#), 2018).

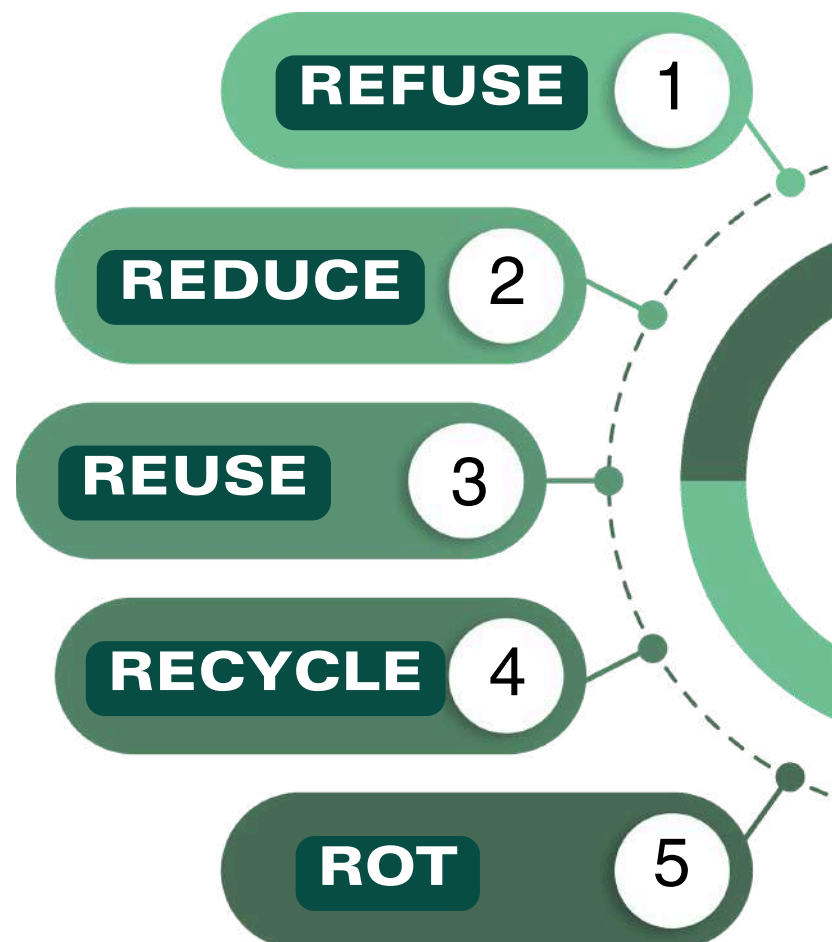
Zero-waste means 'no waste' and it appears as a new sustainability paradigm to address the global waste problem. Zero-waste opposes the view of waste as a valueless and unavoidable by-product at the end of a product's lifecycle (Zaman, 2022).

It is very closely related to circular economies, as the zero-waste approach adopts a closed-loop strategy in which all resources are conserved through responsible production, consumption, reuse, and recovery. The goal is to reuse raw materials as many times as possible throughout a product's life cycle, preventing waste from being sent to incineration or landfills and avoiding harmful discharges to water or air (Bogusz et al., 2021).

The goal of zero waste is to close the loop, mimicking natural systems where all outputs become inputs for something else.

The "5Rs" of Zero Waste – Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, and Rot – provide a simple framework for kindergarten activities and policies.

This guide supports educators, kindergarten teachers in implementing zero waste rules and SDGs, and allows them to acquire and extend green competences in their professional pathway.



3. SDGS AND GREEN COMP BACKGROUND



We believe this is a great idea, and it's truly amazing what can be created from recycled materials. It seems to us that our daughter found it very interesting and explored your creations with great curiosity. (Parent – Kindergarten Dobrna)

The Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)) are a global blueprint adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. There are **17 interconnected goals, designed to address the world's most pressing challenges**, ranging from poverty, inequality, and health to education, climate change, and environmental degradation.

Each SDG has specific targets (169 in total) and indicators to measure progress. These goals aim to **achieve a balance among economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection**, with a central focus on leaving no one behind. The SDGs provide a universal language and framework for governments, businesses, educators, and civil society to align efforts toward a sustainable future.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



GreenComp identifies sustainability as a key competence that enables individuals to act in favour of environmental integrity, social equity, and economic viability. The **framework outlines four interrelated competence areas:**

- Embodying sustainability values,
- Embracing complexity in sustainability,
- Envisioning sustainable futures,
- Acting for sustainability.

Each area includes **specific competences** that help individuals think critically, collaborate, and take informed, responsible action for sustainability in personal, educational, and professional contexts. GreenComp supports the European Green Deal and aligns with global efforts like the SDGs by fostering the skills needed for a just and green transition.

The GreenComp is an essential tool for guiding early childhood educators, especially kindergarten teachers, in nurturing sustainability from the earliest stages of development. While young children may not yet grasp complex global challenges, early childhood is a critical period for forming attitudes, values, and behaviours that support sustainable living.

GreenComp is important for kindergarten teachers for specific roles:

1. Laying the Foundation for Lifelong Sustainability Values

GreenComp emphasizes "embodying sustainability values," which helps teachers instil respect for nature, empathy, care, and responsibility in young learners. By integrating simple, everyday practices like recycling, caring for plants, or conserving water, teachers can foster habits and values that last a lifetime.

2. Encouraging Systems Thinking at an Age-Appropriate Level

Through "embracing complexity in sustainability," GreenComp helps teachers guide children to observe and understand basic relationships in nature (e.g., how sunlight helps plants grow or how animals depend on clean environments). These experiences develop early systems thinking and curiosity.

3. Nurturing Imagination and Hope

The competence area "envisioning sustainable futures" supports creative activities where children imagine a better world – such as cleaner parks or happy animals. These activities cultivate hope, agency, and creativity, which are vital for building a positive outlook on the future and for developing problem-solving skills.



4. Fostering Action and Participation

Under "acting for sustainability," GreenComp encourages young children to take part in simple, meaningful actions, like planting trees, sorting waste, or turning off lights. Kindergarten teachers can guide these actions through playful, participatory learning, helping children feel empowered and involved.

5. Supporting Teachers' Professional Growth

GreenComp also provides a structured framework for kindergarten teachers to develop their own sustainability competences. It encourages reflective teaching, collaboration with families and communities, and the creation of sustainable learning environments both indoors and outdoors.

By applying the GreenComp framework, kindergarten teachers become key agents of change, helping to shape a new generation that is more connected to the environment, more socially responsible, and more equipped to contribute to a sustainable future. Early childhood education, enriched with GreenComp values, is not just about learning; it's about living sustainability from the very start.



4. SUSTAINABLE EDUCATION



I'm really happy that the kindergarten encourages play without pre-made toys. I think my child has learned more about cooperation, communication, and playing together during this time than ever before. We also do more creative activities at home now. (Parent – Kindergarten Dobrna)

Sustainable development encompasses three interdependent dimensions: **environmental, economic, and social**. Within the social dimension, Sustainable Education, or better yet, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) plays a crucial role by empowering individuals to contribute actively to a more sustainable future. According to UNESCO, ESD is "education that allows every human being to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values necessary to shape a sustainable future" (UNESCO, 2020).

For young children in kindergarten, ESD is particularly important as it is both developmentally appropriate and foundational. Early childhood is a time of rapid brain development, social learning, and emotional growth. It is also a time when children form their understanding of the world. Research shows that experiences during this formative period have long-lasting effects on values and behaviour. Integrating sustainable education promotes essential competencies such as critical thinking, empathy, collaboration, and environmental awareness that contribute to lifelong environmentally responsible behaviour (Pratiwi et al., 2025).

Early exposure to these concepts nurtures **a generation better equipped to respond to complex global challenges**, including climate change, biodiversity loss, and social injustice.

ESD goals align with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG Target 4.7, which emphasizes improving education quality to prepare learners for global challenges. A core learning outcome within ESD is cultivating agency, the capacity for children to act independently and make choices. ESD encourages children to make informed decisions, take action, recognize problems and search for solutions, and make changes in their local environment (Kahriman-Pamuk & Pramling-Samuelsson, 2024). This transforms children from **passive recipients of information into active participants and decision-makers**.

Additionally, sustainability concepts can be integrated into daily classroom activities and everyday moments (Kahriman-Pamuk & Pramling-Samuelsson, 2024). Sustainable behaviours are normalized through simple routines such as mindful water use, minimizing food waste, or sorting recycling. The aim is not just teaching lessons about sustainability but making sustainable practices ingrained, unconscious habits. This approach demonstrates that **ESD is about shaping the entire learning environment and daily practice to reflect sustainable values** (Sneddon & Pettit, 2024).





4.1 WHY SUSTAINABLE EDUCATION MATTERS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

Early childhood represents a uniquely critical period for introducing Education for Sustainable Development. This stage is not just an opportune moment but a pivotal developmental window for instilling foundational principles that will shape individuals throughout their lives.

A Pivotal Stage for Lifelong Values

Young children are naturally curious and highly impressionable, making **early childhood a crucial period for cultivating environmental awareness and instilling sustainable values** (Samuelsson, 2011). Research shows that the first five years of life are a “*window of opportunity*” when values, attitudes, and behaviours are deeply shaped, impacting lifelong actions (Pratiwi et al., 2025). During this sensitive developmental phase, children's brains are highly plastic and receptive, enabling them to form enduring patterns of thought and behaviour. Introducing sustainability at this stage through everyday activities, like examining the life cycle of a plant or investigating the local environment, takes advantage of children's openness to learning. These experiences help imprint sustainable behaviours and mindsets likely to last a lifetime (Nian, 2024).

Empowering Young Children as Agents of Change

ESD empowers children as active agents of change, not passive recipients. According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, children are citizens and rights holders who should have meaningful participation in shaping their present and future in sustainable ways. They are competent, ready to construct their own identities and lives. Evidence shows that **ESD should be present in early childhood both as a subject of learning and as a pedagogical approach**, as even preschool-aged children can develop some understanding of global problems and their consequences.

ESD shifts the focus from protecting children's innocence to empowering them as capable participants in helping shape a sustainable future (Pramling-Samuelsson, 2011). Rather than shielding them from complex issues, ESD allows children to engage with these topics in age-appropriate ways, developing **critical thinking, problem-solving, and agency. These skills are essential for future change-makers**, and it's the task of kindergarten educators to nurture them (Collins & Garrity, 2023; Kahrman-Pamuk & Pramling-Samuelsson, 2024).



Compatibility with Early Childhood Pedagogies

ESD aligns naturally with play-based, child-centred, and experiential learning approaches familiar to kindergarten teachers. ESD is not a standalone subject but is integrated across all activities and routines (Pratiwi et al., 2025). Constructivist approaches, project-based investigations, and storytelling all help children grasp abstract concepts like sustainability in hands-on, age-appropriate ways (Collins & Garrity, 2023). ESD supports the **concretization of abstract concepts through tangible, practical experiences**, such as planting seeds, caring for living things or exploring the community, which is key for young learners. It also promotes safe, inclusive learning environments and responsive educator–child relationships, central to developmentally appropriate practices in kindergarten (Chang Rundgren, 2023).



4.2 BENEFITS OF ESD FOR YOUNG LEARNERS

Integrating Education for Sustainable Development into early childhood curricula offers several developmental advantages for kindergarten children, spanning cognitive, socio-emotional, environmental, and ethical dimensions.

1. Cognitive Development

ESD actively promotes core 21st-century competencies such as systems thinking, critical thinking, and problem-solving. Through **inquiry-based learning, hands-on activities, and collaborative projects**, children are encouraged to explore complex issues and develop innovative solutions (Sharma, 2023). ESD also cultivates collaborative decision-making and a sense of intergenerational responsibility, future-ready skills needed in an ever-changing world. By analysing interconnected challenges, working effectively in groups, and reflecting on the long-term consequences of their choices, young children develop adaptive thinking abilities that go beyond traditional academic learning of environmental education (Collins & Garrity, 2023).

2. Socio-Emotional Growth

ESD is key in building crucial social skills, empathy, and emotional intelligence. It emphasizes inclusivity, human rights and shared responsibility, helping to create classroom environments that celebrate diversity and promote a strong sense of community (Pratiwi et al., 2025).

Activities involving collaborative play enable children **to practice sharing, cooperation, and understanding others' perspectives**. These ESD approaches build children's emotional resilience and strong interpersonal skills, preparing them to flourish in diverse communities (Sharma, 2023).



3. Environmental Awareness

By integrating ESD, children cultivate "**eco-literacy**", an understanding of ecological concepts, biodiversity, and interconnected natural systems. **Hands-on experiences** like gardening, observing local wildlife, and exploring outdoor spaces deepen both knowledge and emotional connection to nature, fostering enduring respect for the environment (Sharma, 2023). **Practical projects** such as recycling, tree planting, and community clean-ups nurture environmental stewardship, reinforced by positive role modelling from teachers and classmates (Pratiwi et al., 2025).



4. Physical Development and Motor Skills

Nature-based, movement-rich ESD activities significantly enhance children's physical development. **Outdoor exploration and sensory play** strengthen gross and fine motor skills, while collecting and sorting natural materials, planting seeds, or creating environmental art all build **hand-eye coordination, dexterity, and grip precision** vital for later academic tasks. This active engagement in nature not only benefits children's physical health but also fosters a meaningful connection with the environment, reinforcing sustainability principles (Sharma, 2023).



5. Moral and Ethical Awareness

ESD in early childhood is a powerful tool for developing a **strong ethical foundation for global citizenship**. By introducing age-appropriate discussions about justice, fairness, and equity (UNESCO, 2020), and using stories that address environmental and social challenges, educators help children build moral awareness from an early age. These experiences encourage **informed decision-making and compassionate contributions** to their communities, instilling an enduring sense of intergenerational responsibility (Pratiwi et al., 2025).

4.3 EFFECTIVE PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES FOR IMPLEMENTING ESD IN KINDERGARTEN

Play-based, experiential, and hands-on learning play lies at the heart of early childhood learning, offering children with invaluable opportunities to make sense of themselves and their world. **ESD flourishes when integrated into active, interdisciplinary approaches** such as storytelling, play-based activities, and project-based investigations (Sharma, 2023; Pratiwi et al., 2025). Free, unstructured play, supported by teachers, boosts vocabulary, strengthens social-emotional skills, and fosters creativity. As play evolves, children are challenged cognitively and socially, preparing them for complex problem-solving (Santer et al., 2007).

Kindergarten educators should prioritize hands-on activities over rote tasks, using **inquiry-based projects** to spark curiosity and innovative thinking. For example:

Gardening: Letting children plant, observe growth, and harvest.

Art from recyclables: Creating creative projects using waste materials.

Dramatic play: Role-playing as community helpers focused on sustainability.

Storytelling: Using books and oral stories to explore topics of environmental protection (Pratiwi et al., 2025).

Multi-sensory learning, through touch, sight, sound, smell, and even taste, makes abstract sustainability concepts real. Children might:

- Feel the textures of leaves and soil.
- Smell compost or flowers.
- Listen to birds and natural sounds.
- Physically sort items for recycling.

These rich, sensory experiences help children **internalize sustainability as something tangible** (Kahriman-Pamuk & Pramling-Samuelsson, 2024).



Nature-Based and Outdoor Education

Outdoor play is a powerful medium for ESD, immersing children in nature and laying foundations for environmental stewardship. Engaging directly with the outdoors, such as nature walks, observing insects, collecting natural objects, etc., cultivates curiosity, wonder, and a sense of connection to the earth. In addition to developing appreciation for the natural world, these activities strengthen motor skills and coordination.

Kindergarten teachers can:

- **Schedule regular outdoor exploration.**
- **Encourage observation and collection of natural objects.**
- **Organize eco-art projects using leaves, rocks, or twigs.**
- **Emphasize sensory experiences with natural materials.**

Such approaches stimulate creativity and reinforce core sustainability values (Kahriman-Pamuk & Pramling-Samuelsson, 2024; Sharma, 2023).

Integration across All Curriculum Areas

ESD is most effective when it is embedded holistically into every aspect of the curriculum and daily classroom life, rather than treated as a stand-alone topic. Integrate sustainability into routine activities and discussions:

- **Talk about water conservation during handwashing,**
- **Minimize and discuss food waste after snack time,**
- **Sort waste for recycling and composting** (Kahriman-Pamuk & Pramling-Samuelsson, 2024).



Adopt a “systems thinking” approach by helping children see the connections between caring for nature, fairness, and wise resource use. For example, guide them to understand how environmental, social, and economic factors are linked. Educators are key agents for this transformation, employing intentional strategies and reflective practice (UNESCO, 2020). **Practical techniques** include:

- Using picture books and storytelling to address sustainability or fairness.
- Embedding recycling and gardening in play and routines.
- Posing open-ended questions (e.g., “What happens if we use too much water?”).
- Facilitating group problem-solving to promote cooperation and collective responsibility (Kahriman-Pamuk & Pramling-Samuelsson, 2024).

5. TOY-FREE MONTH GUIDELINES FOR IMPLEMENTATION



I was really impressed with the workshop for parents, where we created things from recycled and natural materials. I saw my child so engaged for the first time, without even realizing he was learning. Now at home he often makes things out of boxes and tubes – the creativity just flows. (Parent – Kindergarten Dobrna)

Toy-Free Month (TFM) is a chance to invite **creativity, imagination, and sustainability** into the playroom or classroom. Preparation is key to creating a playful and meaningful experience for children, educators, and families. When implemented in a holistic, step-by-step manner, guided by openness, curiosity, patience, and kindness toward children, TFM can have a lasting and profound impact.

There isn't a single "recipe" or one right way to implement the TFM. **There are many ways to plan and implement the TFM activities.** What truly matters is connecting it to the kindergarten's vision and values and working together with motivated staff who is eager to implement the TFM with enthusiasm, openness and a willingness to learn. So let the flexibility and courage be your guide and see the guidelines as recommendations and ideas that you can shape and adapt to your own situation and experiences.

1. Inspiration, Shared vision & Practical Planning

Inform and inspire: Present the concept of TFM and its benefits to the kindergarten staff colleagues: cognitive development, socio-emotional growth, environmental awareness and physical well-being, moral and ethical awareness, and development of fine motor skill (see more in the chapter Benefits of ESD for Young Learners).

Highlight the importance and benefits of free, imaginative and pretend play, as well as experiential learning. When children explore, experience and try things on their own, they learn more deeply. Mistakes also become an opportunity to learn, and asking questions opens their minds, building creativity and curiosity. Think about the current trends in society and your local environment (e.g. the fast pace of lives, rising levels of stress, individualism, consumerism etc.) and how TFM may be an opportunity to slow down, focus on free play, develop social and emotional skills, learn to be present mindfully "here and now", and care for the nature.

You can start by thinking about and discussing the following questions:

- What do we believe in as individuals and as a kindergarten team?
- Why do we want to invest in strengthening sustainability values?
- Why do we want to implement TFM practice (and similar projects, initiatives) in our kindergarten? What is the purpose? How does it connect with the values, priorities and vision of our kindergarten?
- What are the benefits for our children, parents/families, kindergarten staff and the local community?
- What skills and abilities do we want to nurture in our children? What knowledge or experiences should they gain? Which values do we aim to strengthen?
- What kind of play do we want to encourage?

Include staff in trial activities, such as creating a few DIY toys together to boost interest and engagement.

Form the TFM team and assign roles: Implementing activities is easier and more effective with a supportive team. Discuss roles and responsibilities (e.g., space transformation, materials coordination, family communication) and create a plan (at least a draft version) of the implementation (when, how long, which groups of children).

Think about challenges: Discuss concerns and potential obstacles (e.g., children's reactions, parental doubts) and brainstorm proactive responses and ways to overcome them.



Address the role of teachers in the TFM process and implementation. The TFM approach encourages a shift: from teachers acting as animators or leaders of structured activities to teachers becoming guides who observe, support, and monitor children's learning. This can be challenging for some teachers at first. That's why it's important to discuss such challenges as a team and work together with the leadership (principal, head of kindergarten, staff manager) and/or the kindergarten counselling team (e.g. psychologists, social pedagogues) to ensure support for the teachers.

This may include:

- Inviting an expert to give a lecture or workshop on observation and monitoring in kindergarten,
- offering intervention or supervision sessions,
- planning regular support meetings where teachers can share experiences and help each other.

Connect to curricula: Link TFM with existing educational goals, developmental milestones, national standards or teaching/learning topics.

Consider and discuss various practices in your kindergarten: How sustainable are they, and how can you introduce meaningful changes that would further support the TFM approach?

For example:

Food and meals

How do we approach daily meals?

Could we reduce packaging waste and serve more local/seasonal food?

How can we involve children in discussions about food waste?

Teaching and learning materials

How can we integrate more natural, recycled, and open-ended resources instead of relying mainly on shop-bought items?

What could we reduce or eliminate to encourage free and imaginative play?

How do we treat used or semi-used materials (e.g. colouring pencils, crayons, paper)?

How can we involve children in creating their own learning/play materials?

Waste management

How do we sort and reduce waste in our kindergarten?

Could we set up simple recycling or composting practices where children can actively take part?

Energy and resources

Are lights, heating, or digital devices used mindfully?

How could children be involved in simple “energy-saving helpers” routines?

Celebrations and events

Do we rely on disposable materials and decorations or single-use items?

How could we shift toward reusable, handmade, or nature-inspired alternatives?

How can we invite children and families to help us rethink our approach, making the event (even) more sustainable?

Community connections

How do we engage with local businesses, artisans, or families?

Could partnerships support sustainability (e.g., sourcing leftover fabrics from a tailor, wood scraps from a carpenter, or inviting parents to share their own sustainable practices)?

How can we take a step further in promoting sustainability as a value and way of life in cooperation with the local community?



2. Playroom Setup: Creating an Inspiring Environment

Change the space with care: Remove conventional toys and explain the change to children with empathy and clarity. This part can be done either together with children or in advance without their active participation. In either case, it is important to talk with children and prepare them for the change.

Create zones/corners for exploration:

E.g., you can set up areas for building, role play, sensory activities, nature-based materials, and creative expression. There is no need to redesign the entire playroom. You can keep the idea/concept/structure as it usually is and just change the toys and activities, so that they fit the TFM approach.

Use open-ended materials – natural, leftover or recycled (recyclable), such as baskets of cardboard, fabric scraps, wood pieces, buttons, leaves, paper rolls, stones etc. It goes without saying that all materials need to be clean, safe, age-appropriate, and varied.



Collaborate and involve others: Be kind to yourself! There is no need to prepare everything in advance and on your own. You can collect and create materials and sustainable toys together with children, parents and kindergarten colleagues. Also, try to keep it nice and cosy: add some cushions or other soft, pleasant-to-touch materials, and natural lighting to support calm and collaborative play.

“Playroom” in nature? For sure!

Taking children outdoors regularly, in all kinds of weather, provides invaluable opportunities for free play, exploration, and connection with the natural world. Rain, wind, or sunshine each offer unique experiences that spark curiosity, creativity, and resilience. Out in nature, children can discover textures, shapes, and living things, while learning to care for the environment (e.g., collecting leaves, observing insects, or gently handling plants). Outdoor play encourages collaboration, problem-solving, and physical activity and motor development, while nurturing respect for the world around them. By supporting children in these experiences, we help them develop a sense of responsibility, wonder, and a lifelong connection to nature.



3. Preparing the Children: ABC of TFM

Children need time, clarity, reassurance, and support when routines change. A TFM can feel exciting, but it is also something new, unconventional, and can be unsettling or unpleasant (especially for children who rely heavily on familiar, conventional toys).

Preparing them in a gradual and supportive way helps to minimize resistance and encourages openness, curiosity, and willingness to try new things. This preparation stage is not just about telling children what will happen, but about involving them in the journey from the very beginning. When children understand the “why” behind the change, when their voices are heard, and when they can contribute meaningfully, they are far more likely to embrace the experience with joy, creativity, and ownership.

You can follow the **ABC** of the **TFM** approach:



Acknowledge

- Explain the TFM in simple, honest, age-appropriate language. **Talk openly about the change.**
“We will explore what we can create without our usual toys.”
“For a while, we won’t use our usual toys. Instead, we will create new games and adventures together!”
- Use stories, puppets, drawings or games to introduce the idea. **Reassure children** that play, fun, curiosity, creativity, friendship will still be central.
- **Accept all emotions and reactions.** Validate them and provide emotional support. Discuss with children what could help them feel more of the pleasant emotions (e.g., excitement, curiosity, joy) or what could help them handle worry, hesitation, sadness or even anger.



Build Excitement

- **Try to turn anticipation into enthusiasm.** Introduce the idea through a story, create a “mystery box”, a “materials museum” with unusual objects or a “makers’ corner”.
- **Ask open-ended questions:** *“What could this become?”*, *“How can we play with this?”* or *“How can we use this (differently)?”*
- Focus on introducing **small challenges** to help children imagine new ways to play.



Co-create Rules and Space

- Children adapt more easily when they feel **informed, included, and trusted**. Empower them by making them part of the process.
- **Involve children** in setting simple, respectful rules for sharing, using, and playing with materials and sustainable toys.
- Encourage them to visualise their new space for playing and learning and invite them to **participate in the creation** of the TFM playroom/classroom. In this way, it is not only about announcing TFM but inviting children to co-own the process which contributes to the smoother transition and more powerful learning outcomes.
- **Ask questions**, such as: *“What do we need to play kindly and safely?”* or *“What do you imagine having in your new TFM playroom?”*.
- Let children create simple rule posters. Reinforce the idea: ***This is our TFM month that we create together.***



Trust Their Creativity

- Children are natural inventors with boundless imagination. Often, they see possibilities in ordinary objects that adults overlook. **Trusting their creativity** means allowing them time, space, and freedom to explore without constant adult direction. Help them **build confidence and courage** to explore freely in a more unstructured and open environment, situations. Show them that **their ideas are valuable and worth exploring**, boosting confidence and independence.
- Empower yourself in a **child-centred teaching approach**, where learning grows from questions, problems, or real-life scenarios rather than direct instruction and ready-made answers. Encourage children to ask questions, to be curious. Be mindful that you should respond with openness and support, inviting them to be even more curious, brave, bold, and innovative. May the brainstorming principles guide you: *“No idea is bad or crazy, let’s explore in an open, curious and unlimited way.”*
- **Resist the urge to intervene too quickly when children seem “stuck.”** Sometimes a pause (as well as experiencing frustration) is part of the creative and learning process. Boredom can be difficult to experience, but it can so often spark imagination, creativity, innovation, and fun. Ask open-ended questions (*“What else could this be?”* or *“How can you use that in a new way?”*) instead of offering ready-made solutions.
- **Celebrate interesting, unusual or “unexpected” uses of materials or toys**, since these are signs of flexible, innovative thinking. Encourage creativity, “crazy” ideas and unconventional approach to play. Remember: messy, chaotic play can be just as (or even more) valuable as neat, structured outcomes.



Frame Every Discovery as a Win

- Not every creation will “work,” and that’s okay. **Mistakes are rich learning opportunities.**
- Teachers can model a growth mindset by framing challenges and experiments as successes in learning. Focus on **effort, perseverance, collaboration, and courage** rather than perfect results. Examples:
 - When a cardboard tower collapses: *“You tried something new—what else could we build together?”*
 - Highlight collaboration: *“You listened to each other’s ideas so well.”*
 - Reflect together: *“What surprised you today? What did you discover?”*
- Display children’s creations, even if unfinished, to **validate the process over the product**. This approach teaches resilience, problem-solving, and pride in effort - skills that extend far beyond playtime.



Make it Meaningful

- TFM is not just about playing without conventional toys, it’s about **linking play to bigger values and real-world connections**, like caring for the planet and each other. When children understand why they are doing this, their play becomes more purposeful. Making TFM meaningful ensures that children don’t just learn how to play differently, but also why it matters for their community, for relationships, and for the environment.
- **Examples for meaningful connections:**
 - Connect play to sustainability: *“By using these materials, we are helping the planet.”*
 - Link to empathy, relationships, and social and emotional skills: *“How can we play in a way that makes everyone feel included?”*, *“How did you feel when you worked together today?”* or *“What can we do when we feel frustrated when something doesn’t go the way we wanted?”*
 - Encourage storytelling: invite children to give names, roles, or adventures to their creations, integrating emotional and social meaning into play.
 - Involve reflection: *“How did it feel to make something yourself?”* or *“What did you learn about sharing today?”* or *“How did you help nature today?”*
 - Create conditions for children to explore ideas, opportunities, and possibilities, helping them learn about their world, lives, and values. Encourage them to discover new ways to create, play, connect, and grow.
 - And always remember there is no single “right” way to implement the TFM.

4. Preparing the Materials: Gather & Organize

Start with the preparation of the concept and key guidelines for the collection of materials. Link it with the planned curricula, educational goals and activities. The idea “**less is more**” can be a useful guideline to follow in this phase.

Start collecting early: Remember, there is no need to do everything on your own. Invite staff, families, and your local network to contribute clean, safe, leftover or natural items.

Store creatively: Use labelled boxes, baskets or similar options for storage (e.g., textiles, wood pieces, nature treasures) to keep the space tidy and inspiring. Include children in storing the materials in the designated spaces in the playground.

Quality over quantity: A few diverse materials often lead to richer play than an excess of options. The most important thing to have in mind is that nothing should be purchased since TFM is about rethinking, reusing and not replacing.



5. Creating Sustainable Toys: General Guidelines

Involve children: Let them create/help to create their own toys and games from the materials. It strengthens exploration, creativity, learning, and ownership.

Follow the guideline: “**Less perfection, more participation.**” Imperfect toys made by little hands are full of meaning and have benefits. Also, there is no need to create many toys and games, remember: “Less is more” and “Quality over quantity” are the guiding principles. Focus on free and imaginative play, cooperation, development of social and emotional skills, and reflection.

Moreover, think about how you can **involve children in deciding** what to do with their creations after the end of an activity, game or an exhibition (e.g., at a school event). Explore together how these activities can connect and build upon one another, creating a sense of continuity and shared purpose.

Safety always matters: Follow all the safety rules as you do at your work and in your kindergarten. If materials are brought by children, parents or others, always check them thoroughly.

Think and foster multi-use: encourage open-ended designs, diversity and innovative/non-typical use of materials. For example, a simple cardboard box can become a bus, a house, a boat, or even a stage backdrop for theatre plays. Let children explore opportunities and possibilities, encourage them to find new ideas and ways of play. Offer concrete ideas or directions only when truly necessary. Be the mindful, attentive observer who asks open questions instead of a teacher who gives instructions and leads structured and goal-oriented tasks.



6. Involving Parents

Parents are important partners in making TFM successful. Their support helps children feel confident and motivated, while also extending the values of sustainability and creativity beyond the playroom and into their homes and everyday lives. However, parents may sometimes feel uncertain or sceptical, so clear communication, transparency, and inspiration are vital.

Communication and values

Communicate clearly and early and explain the “why”: **Share the goals of TFM** (curiosity, creativity, collaboration, care for nature, problem-solving, improved focus, motor skills, sustainability and eco-conscious thinking) rather than focusing only on removing toys.



Use simple, relatable language: Instead of focusing only on general educational goals and abstract educational and sustainability terms, connect TFM to things that parents already value, care about. This may vary since parents are a diverse group, but in general you can focus on:

- **Creativity and future skills:** Unstructured play develops resilience, flexibility, and problem-solving, preparing children for school and life.
- **Eco-consciousness:** TFM reduces waste, avoids consumerism, and teaches children to care for the planet.
- **Well-being and relationships:** Toy-free play fosters social and emotional skills, teamwork, and better peer relationships.

Sample messages for parents:

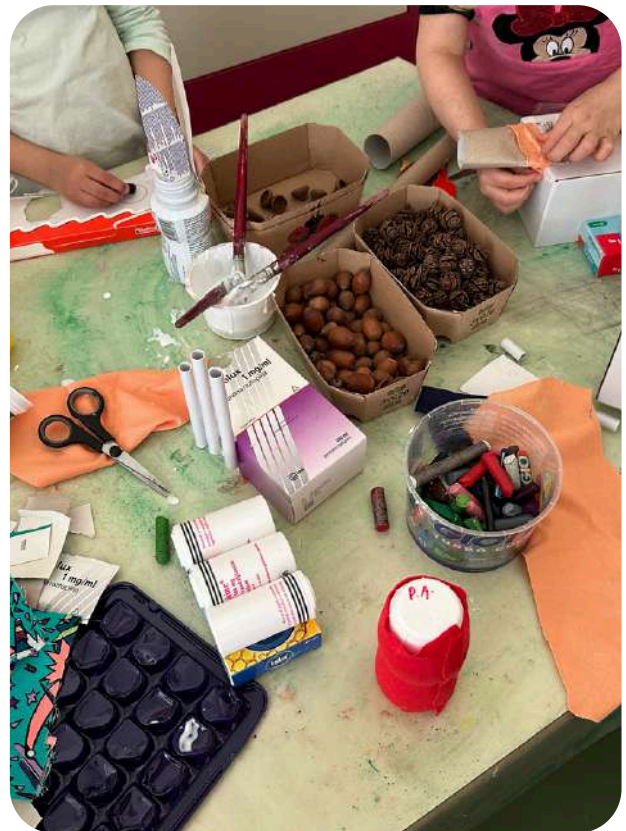
- *Children will learn to play together, cooperate and use their imagination and creativity.*
- *This helps them learn through challenges and they can become resourceful and confident problem-solvers.*
- *We're supporting environmental awareness in playful and meaningful ways.*

Approach parents with openness and empathy. Both, children and parents, need reassurance. Acknowledge their concerns, listen actively, and frame TFM as a partnership and an adventure they and their children can share.

Address common concerns upfront: Prepare for possible questions and reluctant behaviour. Give them space and time to think about the TFM and create a safe atmosphere where parents can share their concerns.

Prepare answers for the questions you expect to hear from parents, e. g.:

- *Will my child miss their toys?*
- *How will you handle unpleasant emotions of children?*
- *How safe is it to bring these materials into the playroom?*





Explain the process and **emphasize that children will be supported, safe, and engaged**. Share good and successful outcomes of other similar activities, programs or practices from your own or other kindergartens (see also chapters 6 and 7 – presentation of the TFM practice in kindergartens in Slovenia and Austria).

Be creative in informing parents:

- Organize interactive sessions or DIY workshops where children and parents create toys together from scratch.
- Send a friendly letter or invitation to join TFM, crafted together with children.
- Encourage parents to view TFM as an opportunity to share learning, creativity, and fun with their children.

- Organize a parent-teacher meeting (or individual “conversational minutes”) to invite parents to reflect on their children. Ask questions such as: *“What do you hope your child will learn?”*, *“What are your child’s strengths and virtues, and in which areas could they grow further?”*. Use these reflections to highlight the value of observing children during open-ended play, and emphasize the importance of the learning process, effort, and creativity rather than focusing only on outcomes. Encourage discussions about how children learn through problem-solving, experimentation, working with others, and learning from mistakes.

Consider possible ways to **encourage parents to embrace the TFM approach** and sustainability practices, not only within the kindergarten, but also at home and in their everyday lives.

Inspiration

Inspire parents to contribute, as they are more likely to support TFM if they feel involved rather than excluded. Teachers have different ways of working with parents, so choose the approach that best suits you and the parents of children from your group. Be courageous to try something new or interesting, but make sure that you feel safe and confident with the approach you choose.

Invite parents to collect safe leftover materials (cardboard, fabric, jars, natural items). Present this as an opportunity to upcycle rather than throwing things away.

If possible, **organise story-sharing events**: Invite parents to share childhood games they played without toys (e.g., jump rope, hide-and-seek, homemade dolls). This connects the TFM idea with parents' pleasant emotions, memories or nostalgia, while offering children the opportunity to learn and connect with their parents differently. You can include TFM ideas, activities and DIY toy-making workshops in the regular parent-teacher meetings, conferences or events (e.g., Christmas bazaar).



Sharing the process and celebrating “small wins” together

Keep parents informed about the TFM practice:

- **Provide weekly updates:** Share photos, short videos, or a “toy-free diary” highlighting what children have created and learned.
- **Celebrate progress visually:** Set up a display board like a “Wall of TFM Creativity” at drop-off/pick-up or prepare small TFM-themed gifts for parents together with the children.

This way, parents can see and appreciate how children are exploring, creating, and thriving through toy-free play. E.g., you can prepare weekly updates (send photos, short videos or a toy-free diary showing what children created and learned) and celebrate progress (create a display board such as “Wall of TFM creativity” to show how children are engaging in toy-free play that parents can see at drop-off/pick-up, prepare TFM gifts for parents together with children).

Encourage parents to reflect on TFM with children, invite them to ask their child:

- *What did you create/invent today?*
- *Who did you play with?*
- *What was the most interesting/curious/new/fun part of your day?*

Think about a parent-child play day:

Host a morning or afternoon where parents join their children in toy-free play, experiencing the fun and creativity first-hand.

Organize a closing event or exhibition

at the end of TFM. It can be a small “Toy-Free Fair” where children showcase their creations and games, play with parents in a way that they guide the process etc. Invite parents and the local community as well (if possible).



7. Engaging the Local Community

Use TFM as an opportunity to **connect with your local community** and to build long-term, meaningful relationships, not only with parents and families of the children, but also with other individuals and local organisations.

Reach out to the community: Seek for partners – ask local businesses, craftspeople, or environmental groups for leftover materials or invite them to present their work and efforts toward a more sustainable future or lead a short workshop for children, parents or kindergarten staff.

Organize a TFM event for the local community: Host an event where you celebrate the TFM idea and principles. Prepare an exhibition of children's creations, demonstration of TFM activities and play, DIY workshops for the creation of sustainable toys.

Build partnerships: Find partner organisations and companies who support sustainability goals and are willing to contribute meaningfully to the education of children. Think about making such events a tradition – encourage local stakeholders to see this as a yearly opportunity for awareness and connection.



6. TOY-FREE MONTH IN KINDERGARTEN DOBRNA (SLOVENIA)



We put cardboard tubes on a chair and dropped little stones and cones through them. We competed to see which one goes down faster. It was so much fun!

(A child from Kindergarten Dobrna)

6.1 TOY-FREE MONTH AT KINDERGARTEN DOBRNA

Gašper Žagar, Assistant Principal for Kindergarten Dobrna

In today's world, where children are increasingly surrounded by pre-structured or catalogue-bought plastic toys, digital devices and flashing screens, experts are increasingly asking: What happens if we take away conventional toys from children for a certain time? We also wanted something different for our kindergarten. Something more authentic, something that would give children the chance to once again become what they truly are: creative, curious, and full of imagination.

That's why we decided to carry out the Toy-Free Month (TFM), a pedagogical practice based on the idea that **children develop the most creativity and social potential when they are required to create play on their own**, without pre-made materials. And let me tell you, this wasn't just a pedagogical decision. It was a decision of the heart, a courageous step outside our comfort zone. A decision to trust our children, and a reflection on what truly matters in early childhood education.

At Kindergarten Dobrna we have been implementing the Toy-Free Month every April for several consecutive years, as part of a broader effort to promote creativity, independence, and intrinsic motivation in children. The TFM is based on modern pedagogical concepts that highlight the importance of symbolic play, free choice, intrinsic motivation, and independent learning (Piaget, Vygotsky, Montessori, Pikler). Using unstructured materials creates an open, developmentally **stimulating environment where the child is a co-creator of activities** and the educator takes on the role of facilitator and observer.



April, the month we chose for the project, was perfect because of its awakening nature. It inspires simplicity and an authentic experience of the world around us, offering many opportunities to connect with the outdoors. Warmer days and blossoming nature provided children with additional stimuli: natural materials, outdoor activities, and numerous opportunities for experiential play in the forest, park, or kindergarten playground. Moreover, April coincides with many environmental and cultural days (Earth Day, Book Week, Health Day), aligning perfectly with our emphasis on minimalism, sustainable thinking, and community culture.

When I first watched children in a nearly empty playroom exploring boxes, cloth, natural materials, and “junk,” I asked myself: *Do we really need all those materials?* Within just a few days, the children learned to cooperate, communicate, invent their own rules, and even create their own toys. **The teachers became gentle facilitators, observers. Everything slowed down. It deepened.**



Every day, the children brought new ideas, leaves, twigs, cloth, and boxes were transformed into whole new worlds. The outdoor environment and our local community became our teachers and co-creators. Exhibitions, events and collaborations showed that a **kindergarten can be the true heart of a community**, a place of connection across generations.

Community Engagement

Our staff believes in the **power of connecting with the local community**. That's why we extended the Toy- Free Month beyond the walls of our playrooms and shared it through exhibitions, events, and collaborations with local associations and individuals.

- The Dobrna Beekeeping Association enabled presentation about bees and the creation of traditional bee panels from scrap wood, which the children decorated using natural dyes.
- With the Tourist Association Dobrna, we landscaped the kindergarten's surroundings and planted a linden tree – a symbol of connection, growth, and sustainability – at the entrance.
- Children's creations from unstructured materials, enriched with their descriptions, were exhibited in the local library and Tourist Association premises.

- A local beekeeper visited to explain the role of bees and demonstrate beekeeping equipment, linking this to the symbolism of the linden tree and ecological awareness.
- At a family event, children and parents worked together in playrooms to create items from unstructured materials. Some were taken home, while others were displayed in the kindergarten lobby.
- The lobby became an exhibition space – in addition to children's works, we also displayed didactic games made by our professional staff.
- We linked the TFM with the parallel project Cultural Heritage of Dobrna – each class created its own cultural corner using unstructured materials. Playroom facades represented historic buildings in Dobrna, such as mansions, mills, old hotels, and the spa. Children thus explored local history and demonstrated what imagination and recycled materials can achieve.
- In cooperation with the Blažiš Antique Collection and Mr. Polenek's House of Cultural Heritage, children discovered what life was like in the past and how children used to play without modern toys.

We also shared the project in local media, the municipal newsletter, and online platforms. In the future, we plan to exchange experiences with other kindergartens in Slovenia and beyond.



“ Personal Experience

As the Assistant Principal for Kindergarten Dobrna, I became more deeply involved with the Toy-Free Month through the Erasmus+ project Toy-Free Month: Cultivating Creativity and Sustainability in Young Learners. For me, this project was a turning point. Not only as a headteacher, but also as an educator and as a person, I began to see childhood, play, and the role of the kindergarten in a different light.

I realized that sometimes the greatest gift we can give a child is a space with no instructions, where they are free to imagine the world in their own way. It was a new and enriching experience that strengthened me professionally. I was inspired by how children responded to the new environment, how educators embraced the role of observers and co-creators, and how the entire community supported the idea of open-ended play.



Additionally, the study visit of international partners and learning-teaching activity held in April 2025 hosted in our kindergarten in the scope of Erasmus+ project was truly useful and inspiring. It showed that kindergartens can be innovators in education, if the staff dares to be different, trust children, and value the process over the outcome. Our international guests were impressed by the TFM implementation, the exhibitions, the reflective practices of our staff, and the integration of cultural heritage and play in the natural environment. The project went beyond play; it became a model of best practice in collaboration, innovation, and intergenerational connection.

This project opened doors for future cooperation, exchange of practices, and joint efforts toward higher-quality early childhood education. That's why I can say that I am extremely proud of this TFM practice and project, not only because of its success, but also because of the courage and openness of our entire team. **I'm proud of the team that embraced the challenge, of the children who amazed us with their creativity, and of the parents and community** whose support showed that a kindergarten is not just an educational institution, but a hub of local life.

The Toy-Free Month project at Kindergarten Dobrna proves that children don't need a multitude of toys for quality play. They mainly need **time, space, a safe environment**, and adults who trust them. Through play without structured tools, imagination, cooperation, independence, and intrinsic motivation are strengthened – values that are foundational for healthy psychosocial development. We can proudly say that April 2025 was a month of wealth in our kindergarten, not material wealth, but human, creative, and communal.



So, I sincerely encourage you to try the TFM practice. At first, it may feel unusual and you might wonder how the children will respond. But believe me: their response will move you. You'll discover just how capable children are when given freedom. How creative they can be with nothing but imagination, and how wonderfully a kindergarten can become a hub of community life when it opens itself to the world around it.

Toy-Free Month is not just a project. **It's a journey that changes children, educators and families alike.** And if, as a kindergarten leader, you're looking to do something truly meaningful for your team and the children – you won't regret choosing this path.



6.2 TOY-FREE MONTH IN THE FIRST AGE GROUP (1-2 YEARS)

Irena Cesar, Kindergarten teacher, Kindergarten Dobrna



Summary

The Toy-Free Month project can be implemented successfully even with the youngest age group. In fact, it may even be easier than with older children due to the natural curiosity and sense of wonder young children have, along with their joy in exploration. Even just a single box offers the group countless opportunities for play, movement, and sensory discovery – literally with all their senses. Sensory perception is foundational and crucial for understanding the world, especially in early childhood.

This project provides children with the **chance to step outside the usual boundaries and discover new ways to play and create**. At the same time, it reveals to adults how rich and fascinating a child's world can be if only we give them the space and time for imagination. And with proper preparation, children will not miss commercial toys. Although the youngest children may not yet grasp concepts such as recycling, caring for the planet, or reducing waste, they can begin to internalize these values through play with non-traditional materials. Through personal experience and exploration, children learn that play depends not on objects but on their own curiosity and imagination.

Introduction

Any object a child transforms into a plaything during play can become a toy. A child's body parts are their first toys, followed by nearby objects. As the child's play develops, toys become more structured.

For the youngest children, **toys made from natural and waste materials** (paper, plastic packaging, reusable materials) **are particularly meaningful because they:**

- encourage imagination,
- spark creativity,
- arouse curiosity,
- are simple and adaptable for various uses, further promoting development,
- offer safe and engaging experiences,
- stimulate the senses,
- teach cause-and-effect relationships,
- improve motor skills,
- foster fine motor development,
- introduce mathematical concepts,
- enhance spatial orientation,
- expand vocabulary,
- improve concentration,
- strengthen self-image and self-confidence.



STEP BY STEP - WEEKLY THEMES, DAILY ACTIVITY PLANNING AND EXAMPLES OF ACTIVITIES

WEEK 1

Day 1: REMOVAL OF COMMERCIAL TOYS FROM THE PLAYROOM

Children help remove the usual toys and store them in a designated area, promoting responsibility and order. Toys are cleaned and disinfected for future safe use. An ecological corner is set up with simple, illustrative photos depicting themes like ecology, waste, and recycling. Children explore and name elements in this corner, boosting environmental awareness.

Days 2–5: COLLECTING MATERIALS & SETTING UP NEW CORNERS

Parents are informed about the collection of materials via email and with a notice on the bulletin board in front of the playroom. Educators prepare materials in advance for varied activities. Collected waste and natural materials are sorted into boxes and organized in play corners to ensure easy access. **Toys are made with children during activities**, or we make them during rest times. Educators observe spontaneous play, with a special role in guiding young children, who need safety, acceptance, and support.

Playroom corners include:

- **Kitchen Corner:** Equipped with food packaging, safe utensils, and visual materials for symbolic cooking play.
- **Sensory Corner:** Features sensory bottles (with water, oil, glitter, seeds, sand) to calm, entertain, and develop focus and sensory awareness.
- **Construction Corner:** Includes boxes, tubes, reels, and blocks for creative building and imaginative use.
- **Book & Puppet Corner:** Offers books, picture stories, children's magazines, and puppets to promote language, storytelling, and social interaction. Activities include naming materials, story hours, and logical sequencing games.



During this week, focus is placed on **language and social development**. Children explore new materials independently. Educators observe and guide usage. It's important to note that young children often explore using their mouths and hands, so items may get damaged, which is something to accept.

Children's Reactions to the Toy Removal: Young children easily engage with unstructured materials, drawn to varied textures and shapes. These provoke more imagination and creativity than standard toys. Increased cooperation, verbal interaction, and deeper, more meaningful play are observed.



WEEK 2

PLANNING VARIED PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES

The focus shifts to **movement and motor development**. Activities indoors and outdoors emphasize solving motor challenges independently. Planning with only recycled materials is more difficult due to safety concerns. Materials must be stable, non-sharp, and safe for climbing, jumping, and similar tasks. Soft, sturdy, and large items are prioritized. Sometimes basic sports props are added to ensure quality and safety.



Popular activities:

- Inserting rolls into box holes to improve grip and coordination,
- Elastic bands for obstacle challenges, Sensory pads for tossing and targeting, Large tunnel for crawling,
- Movement dice for animal motions, yoga, colour hunting,
- Balance games using boxes (e.g “bear walk”), pads on heads, walking lines.
- These games offer movement, cooperation, and joyful space and material exploration.

WEEK 3

FOCUS ON SENSORY EXPERIENCES

The third week highlights **nature through the senses and art**, which are intertwined. Children explore natural materials by touching, smelling, observing, and comparing textures like bark, moss, and leaves, indoors and outside.

Activities include:

- Sensory boxes and paths,
- Sorting natural items,
- Mystery boxes for touch-based discovery,
- Nature walks.

These encourage curiosity, focus, and respect for living and non-living nature.



In art, children express themselves through:

- Sculpting and kneading wax and salt dough,
- Printing with textured recycled items,
- Creating paper collages (enhancing creativity, motor skills, and composition).





In music, they sing children's songs with homemade instruments (e.g., rattles and sticks), developing hearing, rhythm, and joy of group music-making. Children discover that sensory bottles can make music.



In dance, children use scarves to express emotions and move with music, enhancing spatial awareness and connection with others.



In drama, they role-play with handmade puppets, enriching vocabulary, imagination, and interpersonal relationships.



WEEK 4

USE OF DIDACTIC TOYS

This week focuses on **mathematics and fine motor development**.

Activities:

- Sorting materials by colour,
- comparing quantities,
- Matching objects with dots in a “Turtle Game”,
- Memory games for visual recall.

To link math with fine motor skills:

- Filling cardboard rolls with corn to create a tree canopy (precision and persistence), Filling bottles and containers with cones, stones, or nuts,
- Inserting pompoms into egg cartons in “Help the Bees Fill the Hive with Pollen”.



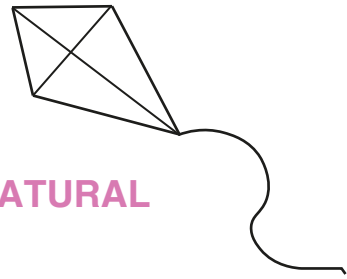
All activities are safe, engaging, and designed to develop counting, comparison, and hand coordination in a playful, natural way.

We try to hold as many activities as possible outdoors, transitioning them from the playroom to the playground. Young children need repetition, so space changes add interest and variety. Thus, playing with recycled materials becomes even more creative and rich.





THE EDUCATOR'S CREATIVITY IN USING RECYCLED AND NATURAL MATERIALS IS CRUCIAL.



Creativity helps recognize the potential for play and learning in ordinary or discarded objects. Instead of relying on purchased and high-structured toys, educators use cardboard, fabric, bottles, buttons, pinecones etc. to create developmental tools that are both interesting and stimulating for children. **This nurtures not only the environment but also children's imagination, resourcefulness, and ability to see the world differently** – promoting sustainability and showing that new isn't always necessary. All it takes is an open mind and a bit of imagination.

My Personal Opinion about the Project

I support and implement the practice of Toy-Free Month because it brings children closer to the essence of play – imagination, exploration, and connection. Through this approach, I've seen how children, especially in the first age group, naturally gravitate toward open-ended materials that stimulate their senses and creativity. Without the structure and expectation of commercial toys, their play becomes richer, more cooperative, and more meaningful.

What I've learned from this experience is that children don't need complex or expensive toys to be engaged or to develop key skills. In fact, with fewer distractions and more natural, waste or recycled materials, they show greater curiosity, persistence, and inventiveness. They find joy in simple objects – a cardboard box becomes a tunnel, a kitchen or a drum. **Their communication, problem-solving, and social interactions also grow in surprising ways.**

This practice has also deepened my role as an educator. It challenges me to be more intentional and creative in designing the environment and activities. It reminds me to observe more, intervene less, and trust in the child's ability to lead their own learning journey.

I recommend this approach to other teachers because it fosters sustainability, creativity, and a deeper understanding of child development. It reduces dependence on consumer goods and encourages a mindset of resourcefulness and environmental awareness both for educators and children from an early age. Most importantly, it brings back the magic of childhood where anything can be something, and every day offers a new adventure in learning through play.

6.3 TOY-FREE MONTH IN THE AGE GROUP 5-6 YEARS



Mojca Krajšek, Kindergarten teacher, Kindergarten Dobrna

Summary

The Toy-Free Month project has been carried out for more than 10 years on a whole-kindergarten level. It started with activities related to Earth protection and later expanded to ecology and sustainability. Over the years, we noticed that children increasingly played less with natural materials and showed a decline in creativity and imagination. In modern educational environments, symbolic and social play is becoming less frequent. Children are less likely to engage spontaneously in cooperative play and show reduced imaginative thinking and creative expression.

One of the main contributing factors is the dominant use of industrially made functionally limited toys. These toys are often single purpose, based on predetermined use scenarios, and do not allow for open-ended exploration, improvisation, or assuming different social roles. As a result, children's play tends to revolve around repeating fixed patterns, which hinders the development of divergent thinking, symbolic play, and social skills – all essential for holistic development.



By removing industrial and commercial toys from the playroom, children are encouraged to explore, create, and learn using natural and recycled materials. **The project helps children understand the importance of sustainability, waste reduction, and recycling through hands-on learning and imaginative play.**

Duration: 1 month with daily activities and weekly themes.

Learning objectives:

- To encourage children to use creativity in making toys and play with objects from natural and recycled materials.
- To develop problem-solving skills through creating and playing with non-traditional materials.
- Establish habits of reducing, reusing, and recycling in daily life.
- To strengthen social interactions and teamwork among children through group projects and play.
- To provide sensory experiences using a variety of natural materials.

Materials:

- Recycled materials (cardboard, plastic bottles, buttons, fabric scraps)
- Natural materials (sticks, leaves, stones, seeds)
- Art supplies Visual aids Sorting containers
- Basic tools (hammers, nails, string)
- Gardening tools (seeds, soil, pots)
- Storytelling books and puppets



Benefits of play with unstructured, waste, and natural materials:

- Encourages creativity and imagination.
- Develops problem-solving and critical thinking.
- Stimulates sensory and motor development.
- Strengthens social skills and collaboration.
- Supports sustainable thinking.
- Fosters intrinsic motivation and prolonged engagement in play.
- Promotes symbolic play and role-taking.



STEP BY STEP – WEEKLY THEMES, DAILY ACTIVITY PLANNING AND EXAMPLES OF ACTIVITIES



This is just one example of how Toy-Free Month can be implemented. Adapt it to your own group based on your children's needs and abilities. Collaborate with the children and allow them to guide the process. This increases motivation and active participation. Your role is to observe and support their exploration.



ACTIVITIES BEFORE THE PROJECT BEGINS

Planning Activities:

- Educational teams within each group.
- Professional team for the older age group.
- Whole kindergarten teaching staff.

Collecting Materials:

- Informative letter to parents. Whole kindergarten teaching staff.
- Conversation with children; ask them to bring recycled, natural and waste materials from home. Collaboration with local companies that produce useful waste (e.g., printers, shops, tailors).

Material Preparation:

- Workshops for parents (e.g., making games, puppets).
- Workshops for grandparents. Teachers pre-sort and prepare materials.

Preparing the Playroom:

- Talk with the children about what Toy-Free Month means and why it's important.
- Clean and store away all the usual toys together with children.
- Clean and prepare the room for new materials.





WEEK 1

DAY 1: INTRODUCTION

- Show videos and pictures about waste, recycling, and sustainability.
- Discuss what children already know and build the knowledge from the known to the unknown.
- Read books or perform a story-based puppet show related to ecology.
- Explain the goals and planned activities for the whole month.

DAYS 2-5: PLAYROOM PREPARATION

- Organize materials by category for easier access.
- Set up role-play corners with the children.
- Let children handle and explore various materials.
- Introduce the concept of waste separation, recycling, and reuse.
- Create sensory paths using available materials.



WEEK 2

CREATING AND EXPLORING

- Start from children's wishes – which games they miss and how they could make them.
- Encourage them to create their favorite toys from the collected materials.
- Offer support and guidance as they explore different construction methods.
- Children make artworks from natural and recycled materials.



WEEK 3

DIDACTIC GAMES AND LEARNING TOOLS

- Introduce educational games made from recycled materials (e.g., sorting games, matching games, memory).
- Use games to teach numbers, shapes, and colours.
- Create learning tools that raise awareness of sustainability and ecology.



WEEK 4

EXPLORING NATURE AND OUTDOOR PLAY

- Explore nature.
- Read books/e-books or use puppets for storytelling on environmental themes.
- Learn about the life cycles of animals and plants.
- Visit an ecological waste collection site.



CONCLUSION

- Sort the materials and dispose of them properly.
- Store the materials that can still be reused.
- Set up an exhibition of children's artwork.
- Children take some of their creations home.
- Inform parents.
- Prepare the playroom for the new month.



CORE AREAS OF ACTIVITY

Language: Encouraging moral and ethical expression, as well as the development of non-verbal communication.

Mathematics: Developing logical thinking, classification, and pattern recognition.

Art: Using a variety of techniques and materials to foster creativity and artistic expression.

Nature: Promoting a respectful attitude toward living and non-living nature and understanding the importance of waste and recycling.

Movement: Raising body awareness, encouraging relaxed movement, and developing motor skills.

Society: Fostering cooperation, safe behaviour, and understanding the functioning of a community.



My Personal Opinion about the Project

I have been implementing this project for many years. I was part of the team that grew alongside the idea. Personally, sustainability and ecology are closely aligned with my life philosophy, which is why this topic has also become very dear to me professionally. I admit that in the beginning, it was quite a challenge to bring the topic closer to children and to parents. **The key is to start from the children – their wishes, interests, and ideas.** Only then do they become active participants, eager to explore, discover, and play. All these small steps are leading them into the big world – and we are here to guide them. That, after all, is our mission.





Parents' Opinion on the Toy-Free Month Project

“As a mother of a child attending Kindergarten Dobrna, I am truly impressed with the Toy-Free Month project. I find it extremely innovative and very relevant for today’s world. My son comes home full of enthusiasm, sharing stories about all the exciting activities they’ve been doing at kindergarten – how they’ve been making toys together, exploring nature, and creating things from materials that would otherwise be thrown away. The project hasn’t only influenced him, but our whole family as well.

At home, we’ve started separating waste more diligently, as our son now reminds us how important it is for the environment. He also frequently suggests ideas for how we could reuse certain waste materials – for example, turning packaging into storage boxes or making puppets from old fabric scraps. I love that this project encourages imagination, creativity, and at the same time strengthens environmental awareness from an early age. In my opinion, activities like this are essential for shaping responsible and thoughtful individuals. My sincere compliments to the entire kindergarten team for such an excellent implementation!”



“The Toy-Free Month project is fresh, imaginative, and pedagogically very powerful. I really appreciate that the teachers are finding new ways to encourage children to think creatively and to develop a responsible attitude toward the environment. My daughter often reminds me of what we can do for our planet – from separating waste properly to reducing unnecessary consumption. We’ve had to double-check our recycling routine more than once, because she now knows exactly where everything belongs. What fascinated me most was when she showed me some of the games, they played outdoors using natural materials. She even taught me how pinecones, pebbles, or sticks can be turned into a fun game – and she clearly enjoyed every moment of it. For me, the greatest sign of the project’s success is that children bring these values home and start applying them in everyday life. Thank you to everyone involved in this project for making such a strong impact – not only on the children, but on us parents as well.”



Children's feedback

"I liked it when we could hammer and drive nails like Dad at home."

"I liked it when Andrej and I made a real car, and the teacher allowed us to race around the playground."

"We all have to take care of the Earth, so it doesn't get sick, because I don't like to get sick either."



7. TOY-FREE MONTH IN SCHMETTERLING KINDERGARTEN (AUSTRIA)



The best part was that we came up with everything ourselves. Every day we played different games. And we built a house out of boxes. (A child from Kindergarten Dobrna)

Elvira Lhotka, location manager

Information about kindergarten

- Bilingual Private Kindergarten Schmetterling Dornbach (Vienna)
- 2 toddler groups with 15 children each, aged 1-3 years,
- 1 family group with 20 children, aged 2-6 years,
- 1 kindergarten group with 25 children, aged 3-6 years,
- 15 staff members caring for the 75 entrusted children.

Starting Point & Motivation

In the summer of 2023, we observed that the children were handling toys and various materials for play in the groups quite carelessly. Many were broken, and some books could no longer be used or repaired. As an association, Schmetterling works on themes related to the Austrian Environmental Label, and we have set ourselves the goal of gradually becoming more mindful and sustainable in our interaction with the environment and available resources. This was a key reason for deciding on the toy-free kindergarten.

Another motivation for this project was the summer period, during which we needed to support the children and prepare the space and concept for the upcoming kindergarten year. We planned to spend 8 weeks with the children in a toy-free period, giving them space for creativity and social interaction and to prepare together for the upcoming year. **We wanted the children to consciously conclude the kindergarten year and then welcome the new year in a jointly prepared environment.**



Goals & Competencies

The **goals** we set for the toy-free period were:

- Promoting creativity,
- Recognising that joy in the activity does not require purchased toys,
- Developing own ideas without constant adult guidance,
- Improving communication, as non-prefabricated play and open-ended materials require more
- engagement with others than games with predefined purpose and rules,
- Enduring boredom and experiencing that something new can emerge from boredom,
- Consciously concluding the kindergarten year and beginning the new one.

The **competencies of children** to be developed and strengthened include:

- Learning to create and implement their own ideas.
- Learning to invent games with other children.
- Having diverse experiences with creative materials (paint, cardboard, sticks, clay, etc.).
- Experiencing that it takes time and patience for things to develop (process-oriented work).
- Being creatively active without adult guidance (and realising that this is possible).

Preparation

After deciding to implement the “Toy-Free Kindergarten” project, we informed the parents about the idea and the plan at the September 2023 parent evening.

In June 2024, we sent an email to parents requesting assistance to bring open-ended materials such as cardboard, sticks, lids, cardboard tubes, etc.

One week before the start, we asked the children about their ideas regarding the toy-free kindergarten during the daily morning circle.

In early July 2024, we began cleaning and repairing the toys with the children, then moved them to our auxiliary building. Different approaches were taken, for example, one group packed all toys into boxes and “shipped” them to different regions (the moon, Mount Everest, etc.), while another group democratically selected materials from a play area daily.



Implementation

In the following weeks, children played with open-ended materials such as blankets, creative supplies, cloths, strings, natural materials, cardboard, yoghurt containers, water, plastic bottles, etc. Additionally, the groups went on more outings into nature and the nearby environment.

Perhaps most noticeably, **many children began to realise**, often for the first time, that there were far more materials and art supplies available than they initially thought. As one boy put it: *I didn't know we had beads.*

They created colourful potions and figures from clay, built marble runs from cardboard, made pirate islands, hiding houses, crawling tunnels, etc. Cardboard was used to try out different painting techniques, with some children sitting inside the boxes to decorate from within. Towers were built from caps and stones using ladders.

In preparation for the upcoming kindergarten year, we **assembled furniture together**, where children learned that it requires a certain sequence and patience. They also learned how to handle tools like Allen keys and screwdrivers.

It was important to us that children could create and implement as many ideas as possible, which was challenging for some staff and children at first.

Some parents were also initially sceptical. Therefore, **we documented the process in the entrance area and posted notices in the respective group rooms.**

Conclusion

At the end of August, the toys that were removed at the beginning of the toy-free practice were collectively returned to the groups. The children discussed where they will place and store these toys in their playroom for future use. The children were then asked how they wanted to celebrate the conclusion. It was decided to have a farewell ice cream party with homemade ice cream.

Finally, parents were surveyed via email about their impressions of the project.

Reflection

Our goals were achieved. We observed that the **children were more creative** during the toy-free kindergarten period and that **social interactions improved** due to the many negotiation processes.

The educators found it easier to observe when the focus was entirely on the children rather than on the activities offered. There were more discussions among the educators, and the reflection on the processes during this time was viewed positively by everyone. We were satisfied that everything went well, as we planned.

What have we learned?

- Settling-in processes during this period are somewhat more challenging.
- Children who are used to being guided and encouraged at home need more time to develop into independent, self-initiated play.
- As educators, it becomes easier to observe what occupies the children. At the same time, it is unfamiliar to step back from an active role and adopt a supportive, observing role.
- Young children need a bit more input from adults (which surprised us somewhat).



Children's feedback

"We crafted with wood, which we don't do very often. I built something cool – a flip phone!"

"I made pizza out of foil and cardboard."

"I built a house out of cardboard, and now I live in it."



Feedback from the parents

"My son usually doesn't find painting and drawing very exciting at home. But in summer, he often had a drawer full of new drawings. He also did much more crafting. His favourite activity was role-playing, and there was plenty of space for that now. Although a long kindergarten day is often difficult for him and he's usually happy when he's picked up, he didn't want to leave early or stop playing."

"We are absolutely thrilled. Our child is naturally very creative, but thanks to this initiative, he has been nonstop crafting, recycling, and tinkering all summer. In the afternoons, he just wants to set up a Tonie and cut and glue. Now, no paper scraps are allowed in the trash because there's always a use for them. So, a big success – we'd love to do it again!"

"Incredible how much pride our son takes in bringing home handmade crafts, boundless imagination, and the right use of materials. We also continue this idea at home by making things from improvised materials. At first, we were worried that our son would refuse to go to kindergarten without toys, but in the end, he was simply delighted. And although there's naturally a problem with where to store the crafts, since you can't throw away anything – not even small notes (because they're crystals or money) – the child is now always busy with useful things when he's bored. So, thank you very much for this experience!"

Conclusion and outlook

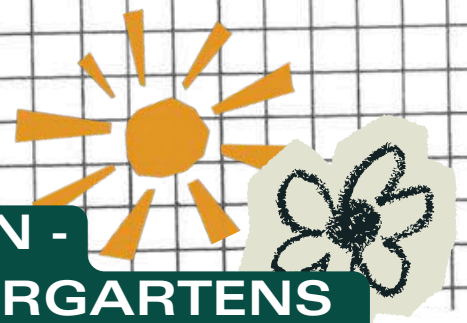
During the toy-free kindergarten period, a lot of development occurred among children. They worked a lot and showed great **perseverance and creativity in expressing themselves** in different ways. We adults also experienced some learning processes. On one hand, we **sharpened our observation skills** due to the removal of the animator role. Our meetings became more valuable through exchange and discussions about the challenges and impressions that arose. On the other hand, we also **got to know ourselves better** by reflecting on how we personally felt in our roles as supporters and observers.

Overall, we can say that **we all grew through this project** – both socially and emotionally, and in our creativity. It became clear how much children can focus and engage when stimuli are reduced and when they have time to pursue their own ideas at their own pace.

Therefore, in summer 2025, we have built on the experiences from the first toy-free period and integrated the toy-free kindergarten into our pedagogical concept. In exchange with teachers and experts who participated in the international training in Slovenia in April 2025, in the scope of the Erasmus+ project *Toy-Free Month: Cultivating Creativity and Sustainability in Young Learners*, many great sustainable ideas were presented. As a result, there will be a permanent building block construction area in the multi-purpose room in the summer of 2025. Additionally, parents are encouraged to create and bring games from open-ended materials from home, alongside collecting and bringing used materials to the kindergarten.

We look forward to the upcoming toy-free period and can only recommend the TFM practice (and project)!





8. TOY-FREE MONTH IN ACTION - PRESENTATIONS FROM KINDERGARTENS

Every kindergarten shaped the Toy-Free Month in its own way.

The following practices show how educators and children explored open-ended materials, encouraged free play and developed new forms of play, involved families, and transformed everyday objects into **meaningful learning experiences**.

The Toy-Free Month practice encourages creativity, cooperation, communication, problem-solving, independence, and more sustainable attitudes and mindsets.

These stories are intended to inspire and encourage other educators and kindergartens to begin. **There is no single way to implement a Toy-Free Month** – only many possibilities to explore, adapt, develop and co-create open, inclusive, and engaging learning environments.



READ ABOUT IT!

TOY-FREE MONTH IMPLEMENTATION

Feedback and Reflection Template for Kindergarten Teachers

Name of kindergarten, city, country:

Kindergarten dr. France Prešeren – Prešernova unit, Ljubljana, Slovenija

Teacher/Teachers who prepared this presentation:

Urška Vinder



1. Time and duration of the TFM practice (start and end date):

1–24 April 2026



2. Number of teachers involved in the implementation of TFM practice:

10 teachers (in 5 groups).



3. Number and age of children involved in the implementation of TFM practice

9 children, aged 2–3.

14 + 15 children (2 groups), aged 3–4.

20 + 20 children (2 groups), aged 2–6.



4. Number of parents informed about the TFM practice:

Parents of all children were informed by email, in which we explained the content and purpose of the project. We also displayed posters outside the playrooms indicating which materials we were collecting. In addition, parents were asked to complete a two-part questionnaire: the first part before the project began and the second part at the end.



5. Number of teachers (at your own and other kindergartens) informed (not actively involved) about the TFM practice:

All teachers and staff members (approx. 40) were informed about the Toy-Free Month, as children and parents from other groups also brought in materials. These materials were later shared among the groups according to their needs.



6. Feedback from the teachers who implemented the practice.

The **main objectives** were for the children to develop their imagination, create and direct their own play without instructions from an adult, and strengthen their language skills by describing or explaining their play, the process, and what they were making.

We prepared the children through a story, discussion, and their active involvement, including agreeing on which toys would be removed and helping to put them away. The children responded very positively and genuinely explored and developed their play using a variety of materials.

It proved particularly effective to involve both children and parents through parent meetings, material collection, and questionnaires. A shared event, such as the toy swap organised at our kindergarten unit, was also very successful.

At first, our main concern was whether we would collect enough materials and whether they would be varied enough for exploration and play. However, this did not become a problem. The greatest challenge for the children was playing in the grassy outdoor area, where, apart from collected natural materials and a few fixed play structures, such as climbing equipment, we did not provide any additional toys or materials.

Based on our first implementation, I believe we carried out the project in a way that was appropriate and meaningful. At present, I would not add or change anything.

One possible improvement would be to encourage parents and children to remove or put away toys at home for at least a few days and organise their own Toy-Free Week alongside the kindergarten activities.



7. Feedback from children

What the children liked most was having “new toys” – materials they could use in different ways than usual. They particularly enjoyed the large boxes, and comments such as “I like it when we can hide or have a house” were often heard. They also enjoyed playing with wool because it “never ends,” allowing them to keep winding and unwinding it for as long as they wanted.

Most children explored all the new materials with great interest. At first, they simply handled and manipulated them, but gradually their play developed a clearer idea, direction, and purpose. For example, cardboard tubes were initially used by all the children as drumsticks or objects for making noise. Later, they became “waves,” “binoculars,” and many other things. Some children mainly followed the play of others or repeated the same play sequence they had previously observed their friends using.

There were no noticeable changes in the children’s behaviour, but there was **a clear change in the way they played and in their creativity.** They first explored the

materials in different ways, and once they had fully experimented with them, the boxes began to take on new meanings, becoming a shop, a house, picnic equipment, and more.

While playing with wool, some children showed noticeable **progress in finger dexterity and in their ability to use scissors**. Children who had previously shown little motivation to practise cutting began choosing to do so independently—for example, cutting wool to make “spaghetti.”

The children made the following comments during and at the end of the activity:

“We do not need the toys back, but I like the small wooden blocks.”

“I like the boxes because we can hide in them.”

“I like that we changed the toys. Now I can sand the wooden blocks.”

“I like that the box became a car.”

“I like playing with the colourful stones. I am making glasses.”

“I like playing with the boxes and repairing them.”

One boy, who usually finds independent play and play without instructions or guidance from his friends particularly challenging, also said: “It is not good that we put the toys away—I miss them.”



8. Feedback from parents.

Parents were involved at several levels throughout the year:

- They received an email explaining the purpose of the Toy-Free Month project and inviting them to participate.
- The purpose, objectives, implementation process, and parents’ role were presented at parent meetings in each group.
- Posters were displayed outside the playrooms with lists of the materials being collected for the project.
- An exhibition was prepared featuring photographs and children’s comments about the project.
- A toy swap event was organised at the level of the kindergarten unit.

Parents reported that the **children talked more at home about what they had done in kindergarten**, including how they explored and played with different materials. They also began assigning new roles to ordinary everyday objects and using them in their play at home.

Parents often said that they supported the concept and were genuinely interested in seeing how it would work in practice. During the implementation, they regularly shared what the children had said about the project at home and whether its effects could also be noticed there. Most parents said they had not yet introduced toy-free play at home, but they supported the approach by spending more time in nature and encouraging outdoor play.



9. Personal reflection and “little sparkles”.

Personally, I learned that both educators and children need to be given the opportunity to try activities that may not initially seem like the “safest choice.”

What pleased me most was seeing how my little children independently found ways to explore and how a single box or a piece of wool took on more and more roles – or completely different ones – in their eyes and imagination.

My advice to others would be simply to begin and plan how you will inform everyone, organise the process, and collect the materials, and then allow the activities to develop naturally. Without trying to control everything, the process may unfold even better than when we have a fixed final goal or “product” in mind.

The best feeling, not just a single moment, came from observing the children as they explored. It reminded me that educators do not always need to lead activities. More often, and not only as a theoretical idea but in actual practice, **we should allow children to guide the course of their play, exploration, or whatever the experience becomes in their eyes.**



10. Short presentation of the main activities for each week.

Week	Activities	Materials or tools used	Notes (important aspects, reminders, tips ...)
Week 1	Discussion about the process using the story What Would Happen If All the Toys Disappeared Overnight?	Story "What Would Happen If All the Toys Disappeared Overnight?"	Children contribute to the discussion by sharing their own experiences. Supporting their intrinsic motivation is important.
	Preparing the room by removing the "traditional toys" and agreeing on which items would remain	Our kindergarten toys	Children express their wishes and accept the agreement.
	Sorting the materials and deciding where each type of material would be stored in the playroom	Materials brought from home	Children enjoy bringing in materials and actively helping to prepare the playroom. They particularly appreciate being involved in the process.
	Becoming familiar with and manipulating the materials	Cardboard tubes, ceramic tiles, wooden blocks	Children explore how each material can be handled and used in play. We agreed on rules for using each material safely and in a way that would not pose a health risk.
Week 2	Exploring and playing with boxes	Boxes of different sizes and with different types of openings and closures	Mainly role play, such as playing kitchen, shop or picnic. A single box often changes its purpose or role during the same play activity.
	Exploring and playing with cardboard tubes	Tubes of different lengths, widths and levels of firmness	The play is initially very physical, including hockey and hitting or bouncing objects. Later, children also connect softer tubes to create longer pipes. Clear rules are needed to ensure that the play remains safe for everyone.
	Exploring and playing with ceramic tiles	Ceramic tiles of different colours and sizes	It was interesting to observe whether children used the tiles to create shapes, such as

			cuboids, arranged them into patterns, such as large–small sequences, or assigned them roles as family members, such as mother and father.
	Exercise sessions and short movement breaks using waste materials	Pieces of fabric, cardboard tubes, newspaper	Children enjoy the activities and laugh while exercising. They also adapt familiar exercises independently by incorporating the materials.
Week 3	Playing in the playground and sandpit	Discarded plastic packaging	The theme of the play changed according to the containers the children selected. For example, they pretended to celebrate a birthday or go on a picnic.
	Exploring and playing with wool	Wool of different colours and thicknesses, scissors	Children cut much more than usual and enjoy the wool because it seems “endless.” Rules are needed regarding safe use and activities that may be harmful, such as wrapping wool around hands, fingers or the neck.
	Exploring waste paper and newspaper using standard materials from the creative area	Newspaper, waste paper such as old receipts, glue and scissors	Children cut more than usual, and their creative ideas continue to develop and expand throughout the activity.
	Exploring and developing activities using a wide range of additional materials brought by parents	Paper cupcake cases, polystyrene packaging pieces, paper cups, painted wooden sticks	Exploring and developing activities using a wide range of additional materials brought by parents
	Visiting an umbrella repair workshop	Old umbrellas at the repair workshop	We wanted to show the children that broken items do not necessarily need to be thrown away immediately. The children also shared their own experiences with broken

			umbrellas, supporting verbal expression.
Week 4	Visiting a forest area with exposed tree roots	Natural environment: roots and slopes	Children test their physical abilities and develop confidence. All children create obstacle courses on the roots for themselves and their friends, without fear but with different levels of caution and speed.
Week 4	Playing with large boxes	Large boxes, such as refrigerator and television boxes	Playing with large boxes
	Sanding wooden blocks and preparing them for play	Untreated wooden blocks and sandpaper	Sanding wooden blocks and preparing them for play
	Toy swap	Children's toys	Children proudly present the toys they have brought and happily choose new ones. Next time, children from the younger groups in the other kindergarten unit could also be included, as toys suitable for this age group were most likely to remain unclaimed.
	Playing with pieces of fabric of different sizes	Fabric pieces of different sizes	The children engage in family role play, using the fabric for babies, beds or tablecloths. They also spontaneously begin doing movement exercises, as they had done in previous days. Particular attention is needed to prevent slipping on loose pieces of fabric.



11. Photos



Playing with wool, which took on different meanings during exploration: a vase, a circle, and a storm



Playing with cups by filling them and practising one-to-one correspondence: one cup—one ball



Sanding pieces of wood and preparing them for play

TOY-FREE MONTH IMPLEMENTATION

Feedback and Reflection Template for Kindergarten Teachers

Name of kindergarten, city, country:

Kindergarten dr. France Prešeren – Puharjeva unit, Ljubljana, Slovenija

Teacher/Teachers who prepared this presentation:

Urška Bolta Salihović.



1. Time and duration of the TFM practice (start and end date):

30 March–1 May 2026



2. Number of teachers involved in the implementation of TFM practice:

4 teachers (in 2 groups).



3. Number and age of children involved in the implementation of TFM practice

10 + 13 children, aged 2–3.



4. Number of parents informed about the TFM practice:

Before the beginning of the project, all parents from both groups were informed about the Toy-Free Month through meetings, conversations and questionnaires.



5. Number of teachers (at your own and other kindergartens) informed (not actively involved) about the TFM practice:

All teachers and staff members (approx. 40) were informed about the implementation process and the outcomes of the project, although they were not directly involved in the activities.



6. Feedback from the teachers who implemented the practice.

The main goal of the Toy-Free Month project was to encourage children's creativity, imagination, independence and social interaction through open-ended play and the use of natural and everyday materials. Before the beginning of the project, we removed toys together with the children and talked with them about the changes that would take place. During the implementation we observed that children gradually became more engaged in symbolic play, communication and cooperation. They used boxes, sticks, fabric, stones, cardboard tubes and other simple materials in creative ways. We also noticed that children spent more time in focused play and solved conflicts more independently.

One of the greatest benefits of the project was the opportunity for teachers to step back, observe children more carefully and recognize abilities, interests and social dynamics that are not always visible during structured play with toys.

During the implementation of the project, we visited Tivoli Park at least once a week, where children developed gross motor skills, balance, perseverance and cooperation through movement and exploration of the natural environment. Children climbed trees, ran up and down the hills, explored natural materials and engaged in spontaneous symbolic play. They often used packaging materials, sand and sticks to prepare imaginary meals, mix 'soups' and play cooking games. The natural environment offered rich sensory experiences and encouraged independent exploration and creativity. One especially meaningful activity was mud painting. Children collected soil by themselves, while teachers added water. The children mixed the soil and water into mud and then used paintbrushes to paint on fabric and tree bark. During the activity they showed high levels of concentration, cooperation and curiosity while exploring textures, materials and different ways of applying mud to the surface.



7. Feedback from children

Children especially enjoyed activities that allowed **freedom of movement, imagination and exploration**. They were highly engaged in symbolic play; construction play and outdoor exploration. Many children repeatedly choose natural and unstructured materials instead of traditional toys. For example, children collected sticks and pretended they were cooking, building houses or making campfires. Some children transported sand and leaves in containers and created pretend meals together. Others used cardboard boxes as cars or hiding places and invited friends into their play. Children also enjoyed climbing trees, running up and down hills and balancing on natural surfaces in Tivoli Park. Several children proudly showed teachers their creations and explained what they had built or imagined. During the project, children became more independent in organizing their play and were able to stay focused on activities for a longer time. Many

children communicated more with peers, invited others into play and developed richer imaginative stories.

Children especially enjoyed **playing with natural and unstructured materials** such as sticks, stones, cardboard boxes, fabric, water and paper. They created houses, roads, kitchens, shops and obstacle courses through imaginative play. During the month children became more creative, communicative and independent. Some children initially searched for their usual toys but later adapted and started using available materials in new and inventive ways.

Children often expressed **excitement and surprise** during the project and many of their reactions showed how strongly they became involved in open-ended play.

At the beginning, some children asked: “Where are the toys?”, “What can we play with now?” or “When will the toys come back?”.

After a few days, their conversations changed significantly. Children started inviting each other into play by saying: “Come, let’s cook soup!”, “This box is my house!”, “We need more sticks for the fire!” or “Look, I made mud paint!”.

During outdoor activities in Tivoli Park, children excitedly called friends to climb trees together and proudly showed teachers how high they could climb. Some children ran down the hills laughing and repeated the activity many times. While playing with sand, leaves and sticks, children negotiated roles and developed imaginative stories together. For example, some children pretended to prepare meals and offered ‘food’ to others, while others created camps and houses from branches and packaging materials. During mud painting, children talked about the texture and colour of the mud and experimented with painting lines, circles and handprints on fabric and tree bark. Several children proudly explained their creations to teachers and peers and often invited others to join in their activities. Over time, children became increasingly confident in expressing their own ideas and initiating play independently.



8. Feedback from parents.

Parents played a very important role in the implementation of the Toy-Free Month project. The project was presented to parents approximately two months before the beginning of the implementation through meetings, conversations and written information. Parents responded with great interest, motivation and support. They became highly involved in preparing materials for children’s play and exploration. More than a month before the project started, parents regularly brought different open-ended and natural materials to the kindergarten. They donated a large quantity and variety of materials such as cardboard boxes, sticks, cut wooden logs, stones, paper, cardboard tubes, fabric,

containers and other recycled materials. The collected materials became an important part of children's symbolic play, construction activities, movement games and sensory exploration. Parents also actively participated by completing questionnaire surveys that we sent during the project. Their responses provided valuable insight into children's play at home, their creativity, independence and the influence of the project on family interactions.

Parents were actively involved through questionnaires and conversations. Many parents reported positive changes at home, including more imaginative play, more interest in books and natural materials, and less dependence on screens or plastic toys. Several parents noticed that children spent more time playing independently and interacted more with family members. Most parents evaluated the project as meaningful and expressed willingness to participate again.



9. Personal reflection and “little sparkles”.

This experience showed us how important free and open-ended play is for children's overall development. By stepping back and observing more, we gained a deeper understanding of the children's interests, creativity and social relationships. One memorable moment was when the children used simple cardboard boxes and fabric to create an entire imaginary home and played together cooperatively for a long period of time.

Throughout the project we observed **many important developmental changes in children's play and behaviour.** Children gradually became more independent in organizing their play and no longer relied on teachers for constant guidance. We noticed significantly more cooperation between children, especially during outdoor activities and symbolic play. Children negotiated roles, shared materials and solved small conflicts more independently than before. Many children showed **longer periods of concentration and persistence** during activities such as building with boxes, mixing mud, painting on fabric and tree bark, climbing trees and creating symbolic games with natural materials. **Outdoor play in Tivoli Park had a particularly positive effect on children's emotional wellbeing, movement and social interactions.** Children were calmer, more relaxed and more engaged while exploring nature, running up and down hills, collecting sand, sticks and stones or preparing imaginary meals together. We also observed rich symbolic play when children used simple materials such as cardboard boxes, fabric, sticks and containers in many creative ways. For example, boxes became houses, tunnels and vehicles, while sticks were used as cooking tools, fishing rods and magical objects in play. The mud painting activity encouraged sensory exploration, creativity and cooperation, as children independently collected soil, mixed mud with

water and experimented with painting on different natural surfaces. Another important observation was that children needed less structured entertainment over time and became increasingly capable of creating their own games and ideas. By stepping back and observing more carefully, teachers gained valuable insight into children's interests, strengths, communication skills and natural ways of learning through play.

I would inspire others by sharing real examples from our everyday experiences during the Toy-Free Month. **Throughout the project, we observed how creative, independent and connected the children became when they were given simple, open-ended materials instead of ready-made toys.** We would show photos of the activities, examples of children's creations and share authentic conversations and observations from the project. Parents noticed positive changes at home as well, such as longer independent play, more imagination and reduced interest in screens and plastic toys. By presenting these meaningful outcomes and showing that children truly do not need expensive toys to play deeply and happily, we believe more teachers and parents would feel motivated and confident to participate in future projects.

One very special "sparkle moment" happened during our visit to Tivoli Park. The children collected soil by themselves, and we added water so they could mix mud together. They carefully stirred the mud with sticks and then used brushes to paint on fabric and tree bark. The children were completely focused and excited. One child proudly said: "Look, I made chocolate soup for the tree!" while another added: "The tree likes our painting." The children cooperated naturally, shared materials without conflict and spent a very long time deeply engaged in the activity. What made the moment especially meaningful was seeing how little was needed for such rich, joyful and imaginative play. The children were calm, connected and fully present in the experience.



10. Short presentation of the main activities for each week.

Week	Activities	Materials or Tools Used	Notes / Observations
Week 1	Introduction to the Toy-Free Month. Children explored the new environment without plastic toys and became familiar with open-ended materials. They built tunnels, houses and hiding places from cardboard boxes and fabrics. In Tivoli Park the children climbed trees, rolled down grassy hills, ran uphill and downhill and played simple chasing games together. They also collected sticks and leaves for pretend cooking games.	Cardboard boxes, paper tubes, fabrics, recycled packaging, sticks, leaves, sand, baskets, ropes. 	Children adapted very quickly to the new environment. They communicated more with each other and explored materials creatively. Outdoor play encouraged cooperation, movement and imagination.
Week 2	Children created roads, obstacle courses and small shelters from boxes and natural materials. They played family games, kitchen games and transportation games using recycled objects. During visits to Tivoli Park they collected sand, mixed it with sticks, leaves and water and prepared 'soups,'	Large cardboard boxes, ropes, wooden planks, sticks, leaves, stones, sand, recycled containers, fabrics. 	Symbolic play became richer and more imaginative. Children stayed engaged for longer periods and solved small disagreements more independently. They especially enjoyed cooperative building activities.

	‘cakes’ and ‘coffee.’ Children balanced on logs, climbed tree trunks and carried branches together.		
Week 3	Mud painting activity in Tivoli Park. Children independently collected soil and earth, educators added water and the children mixed mud together. They painted with brushes on fabric and tree bark. Indoors they created collages from natural materials and built large constructions together. Children also continued outdoor exploration, climbing trees and collecting natural treasures.	Soil, water, brushes, fabric, tree bark, cardboard, stones, leaves, sticks, natural loose parts. 	Children were deeply focused and calm during the mud painting activity. Many spontaneous conversations emerged during the activity. They proudly showed each other their paintings and experimented with different textures and colours made from nature.
Week 4	Outdoor exploration became even more active. Children rolled on the grass, climbed trees, jumped from logs and carried large branches together. They built ‘restaurants,’ ‘houses’ and ‘shops’ from sticks, boxes and fabrics. Indoors they used paper tubes, fabrics and recycled	Branches, fabrics, paper tubes, boxes, leaves, stones, logs, recycled materials, baskets, ropes.	Children showed increased independence and confidence. Their cooperation became more natural and they often shared materials without adult support. Physical outdoor play helped develop balance, coordination and teamwork.

	materials for dramatic play and storytelling. Some children created long roads and obstacle tracks through the classroom.		
Week 5	Reflection week and repetition of favourite activities. Children independently chose materials and games without adult guidance. In Tivoli Park they returned to mud kitchens, climbing games, running games and rolling on grassy hills. They collected pinecones, leaves, stones and sticks to create group art projects and pretend play scenarios. Indoors they combined all previously used materials into large collaborative constructions.	Mud, sand, sticks, stones, pinecones, leaves, cardboard, fabrics, recycled materials, wooden logs, containers.	By the end of the project children became highly independent in play. Their concentration, creativity and social interaction noticeably developed. They used materials in increasingly imaginative ways and remained engaged in play for long periods of time.



11. Photos



TOY-FREE MONTH IMPLEMENTATION

Feedback and Reflection Template for Kindergarten Teachers

Name of kindergarten, city, country:

Kindergarten Radlje ob Dravi, Radlje ob Dravi, Slovenija

Teacher/Teachers who prepared this presentation:

Alja Puhner



1. Time and duration of the TFM practice (start and end date):

1–30 April 2026



2. Number of teachers involved in the implementation of TFM practice:

3 teachers (playroom 5)



3. Number and age of children involved in the implementation of TFM practice:

20 children, aged 3–6.



4. Number of parents informed about the TFM practice:

Obveščeni so bili vsi starši otrok (40 staršev). Parents of all 20 children.



5. Number of teachers (at your own and other kindergartens) informed (not actively involved) about the TFM practice:

17 other teachers were informed about the TFM practice.



6. Feedback from the teachers who implemented the practice.

The main purpose was to give children the opportunity to develop their imagination as fully as possible, explore different materials, and strengthen their connection with nature and the environment.

We first prepared the playroom by removing all the toys and educational materials that had previously been available. We then redesigned the activity areas. The children were actively involved in the preparation and arranged the “new” materials according to their own ideas.

At first, we were unsure whether we would be able to find enough space to store all the traditional toys from the group. We solved this by placing a new cupboard in our office, which was used specifically for the Toy-Free Month project.

The Toy-Free Month was a very positive experience. We would carry it out in the same way again.



7. Feedback from children

The children played most often with CDs, bamboo sticks, and buttons.

What was new was that we removed all the toys, but the children had no difficulties with this. They found the Toy-Free Month very interesting because it encouraged creativity, and no idea or suggestion was considered wrong.

There was a great deal of cooperation and communication, as the children had to agree on how to play, listen to one another's opinions, and search for suitable materials.

They enjoyed the experience very much and said they would like to have more activities based on similar ideas.



8. Feedback from parents.

We involved parents in the project by sending them a letter explaining the project's purpose, objectives, and other key information. We also invited them to help us collect the materials.

We did not discuss any major changes at home, and parents did not report any changes or comments.

Parents responded positively to the activity. They supported the project by bringing materials to the kindergarten, helping us offer the children a new experience.



9. Personal reflection and “little sparkles”.

This project further confirmed for me that children do not need much to feel happy and content.



10. Short presentation of the main activities for each week.

On the first day, we prepared new activity areas and filled the storage drawers with new materials.

During the first week, the children had the opportunity to explore all the new materials.

In the second week, they began developing ideas for different games and thinking about how the materials could be transformed into toys.

The third week focused on art, as the children created a mosaic using a variety of materials.

During the final week, we reviewed the materials that were still available and added new or different ones where needed for further exploration.



11. Photos



Arranging the storage drawers with new materials



Babies made from fabric and cardboard tubes



Putting away the toys



Arranging CDs in the storage drawers



New activity areas



A manicure set made from cardboard tubes



Tractor



Spinners



A rainbow made from buttons and metal lids

TOY-FREE MONTH IMPLEMENTATION

Feedback and Reflection Template for Kindergarten Teachers

Name of kindergarten, city, country:

Kindergarten Radlje ob Dravi, Radlje ob Dravi, Slovenija

Teacher/Teachers who prepared this presentation:

Lea Vodušek



1. Time and duration of the TFM practice (start and end date):

1–30 April 2026



2. Number of teachers involved in the implementation of TFM practice:

3 teachers (playroom 1).



3. Number and age of children involved in the implementation of TFM practice

20 children, aged 3–6.



4. Number of parents informed about the TFM practice:

Parents of all 20 children.



5. Number of teachers (at your own and other kindergartens) informed (not actively involved) about the TFM practice:

17 other teachers were informed about the TFM practice.



6. Feedback from the teachers who implemented the practice.

The main objective was to raise children's awareness of the sustainable use of resources, reduce the number of toys purchased, and create new useful items from waste materials.

Together with the children, we removed the existing toys. We asked parents to bring as many different materials as possible to the kindergarten, such as cardboard tubes, buttons, fabric, wood, and similar items.

One of the main challenges was finding enough space to store the existing toys and all the materials the children brought from home. At first, the children also found it difficult to imagine how they could play with waste materials.

If I carried out the project again, I would start collecting the materials much earlier.

I found April to be a very suitable time for organising the Toy-Free Month, and I would choose the same period again. The weather is already pleasantly warm, which allows many activities to take place outdoors.



7. Feedback from children

During play, the children cooperated more and there were fewer conflicts. They used their imagination and felt proud and satisfied when they created something new.

At first, they needed an adult to guide them into this new world of play. Gradually, however, the play developed more independently among the children themselves. They used more imagination and came up with new ideas.

"We are happy that we made our own new toy."

"Playing with cardboard tubes and boxes is fun."



8. Feedback from parents.

Parents were mainly involved by providing a wide range of materials. They also motivated and encouraged the children and explained the purpose of the Toy-Free Month to them.

Parents reported that the children also began looking for new materials at home. Instead of immediately throwing things away, they saved them and used them to create something new.

Many parents said they liked the idea and would now try to do more creative activities with their children while buying and accumulating fewer new toys.



9. Personal reflection and “little sparkles”.

At first, I could not imagine how I would implement the project. After giving it considerable thought, however, I realised that we already carry out many toy-free activities in our kindergarten. Once I put my ideas into words, the implementation became much easier.

I enjoyed seeing the happy and satisfied expressions on the children’s faces most of all, as well as observing their cooperation and creativity.

I believe that we have already inspired them and that our kindergarten is already well on its way to fully embracing the project.

One particularly memorable moment was when a girl asked me in the forest play area: “But where are the inflatable play structures?”



10. Short presentation of the main activities for each week.

We have played a lot in the forest play area (we have our own forest playroom that we have created together with children) or we have play in the kindergarten’s playroom with different materials (natural materials from the forest, buttons, textiles, wool etc.).

Visit to the forest playroom:

- The Gnome’s Book: Our Forest Adventures

Activities:

- Building a gnome house
- Painting with mud on tree trunks
- Creating a forest picture or mandala
- Baking forest muffins
- Completing an obstacle course in the forest
- Searching for insects and plants
- Playing forest detective



11. Photos



Forest playroom: Gnome's house



Puppet from waste material



Car from waste material



House from waste material

TOY-FREE MONTH IMPLEMENTATION

Feedback and Reflection Template for Kindergarten Teachers

Name of kindergarten, city, country:

Dječji vrtić Cvrčak Čakovec, Croatia

Teacher/Teachers who prepared this presentation:

1. Valentina Bel, univ. mag. praesc. educ.
2. Helena Fajić, univ. mag. praesc. educ.

1. Time and duration of the TFM practice (start and end date):



The Toy-Free Month practice was officially implemented from **19 January 2026 to 20 February 2026**. However, some elements of the practice have continued to be present in our everyday work, especially the use of natural, recycled and open-ended materials in children's play.

2. Number of teachers involved in the implementation of TFM practice:



2

3. Number and age of children involved in the implementation of TFM practice (e.g. 1 group of 21 children 5-6 years old, 2 groups: 1 = 15 children 4-6 years old, 1 = 20 children 5-6 years old):



1 group of 19 children, 5 – 7 years old

4. Number of parents informed about the TFM practice:



Parents of all children from the “Trešnjice” group were informed about the Toy-Free Month practice through the eVrtić application and the kindergarten notice board. They were introduced to the aims of the initiative and invited to support the implementation by collecting natural, recycled and open-ended materials.

Number of families informed: 17

5. Number of teachers (at your own and other kindergartens) **informed** (not actively involved) about the TFM practice:



67 teachers from Dječji vrtić Cvrčak were informed about the Toy-Free Month practice. The information was shared through posters displayed on a clearly visible notice board in the main kindergarten building Cvrčak, where teachers from different groups and kindergarten locations regularly come for meetings and professional activities. They were informed about the initiative, but were not actively involved in its implementation.

For questions 6–9 try to keep each answer short, focusing on the main points or examples.



6. Feedback from the teachers who implemented the practice.

The main educational goals of our Toy-Free Month practice were to encourage children's creativity, imagination, cooperation, problem-solving skills and environmental awareness through sustainable play. We wanted children to experience that play does not depend on commercial toys, but can be created with natural, recycled, reused and self-made materials. The preparation and implementation went well because children were actively involved from the very beginning. Together with the teachers, they discussed toys, materials, waste, recycling and different ways of obtaining or creating toys without buying new ones. Children helped create a list of needed materials, participated in planning the activities and took part in preparing the playroom. One important part of the preparation was introducing children to the concept of commercial toys. Some commercial toys were removed from the playroom, while the remaining boxes were marked with coloured dots. A red dot marked purchased/commercial toys that were not to be used during the initiative, while a green dot marked open-ended, natural, recycled or unstructured materials that could be used for play and activities. The practice worked well because children quickly accepted the change and started using open-ended materials creatively. They used cardboard boxes, fabric, wooden objects, natural materials, packaging, wooden spoons and other collected materials for construction, symbolic play, storytelling and making their own toys. The main challenge was the initial adjustment to the absence of familiar commercial toys. Some children needed more time, encouragement and adult support to start using open-ended materials independently. Another challenge was organizing and storing a large number of collected materials in a clear and safe way.

If we implemented the practice again, we would prepare even more clearly defined material areas from the beginning and include more short reflection moments with children each week. We would also involve parents even more through small home challenges, such as making one toy from reused materials together with their child.



7. Feedback from children

Children were most engaged in activities where they could create something by themselves and then use it in play. They especially enjoyed collecting materials, sorting them, making toys, creating fairy-tale characters from wooden spoons, using natural materials in free play and participating in the workshop on traditional toys and rag dolls.

At the beginning, some children found it unusual that certain commercial toys were not available. However, over time they became more independent and creative in using open-

ended materials. They began to see cardboard boxes, fabric, sticks, stones, wooden pieces and packaging as possible toys or parts of a new game.

From week to week, children showed more initiative, cooperation and imagination. They negotiated more during play, combined different materials, changed the purpose of objects and developed longer and richer symbolic play. They also became more aware of waste, recycling and the idea that materials can be reused instead of thrown away.



8. Feedback from parents.

Parents were informed about the Toy-Free Month practice through the eVrtić application and the kindergarten notice board. They received information about the purpose of the initiative, the temporary removal of commercial toys and the importance of sustainable play. They were invited to participate by collecting materials that children could use for play, exploration and making their own toys. Parents supported the implementation by bringing different materials from home, such as wooden spoons, cardboard tubes, boxes, fabric, packaging and other reusable materials. Their involvement was important because children could see that sustainable play connects kindergarten and family life. Parents were encouraged to talk with children at home about toys, waste, reuse, recycling and alternative ways of playing without buying new toys. Some parents noticed that children became more interested in collecting everyday materials and thinking about how they could be reused in play.



9. Personal reflection and “little sparkles”.

For us as teachers, Toy-Free Month was a valuable professional experience because it reminded us how powerful open-ended play can be. When commercial toys were removed or limited, children had more space to create, negotiate, imagine, explore and cooperate. We could observe their ideas more clearly and see how ordinary materials became meaningful tools for play and learning. The most rewarding part was seeing children gradually change their perspective. Materials that they might previously have considered waste became resources for construction, storytelling, symbolic play and creative expression. Children started to ask what else they could make, how they could reuse something and what materials they needed for their ideas. One “sparkle moment” was when children began to treat the collected materials as treasures. They carefully sorted them, selected them for play and proudly explained what they could become. Another meaningful moment was the workshop on traditional toys and rag dolls, where children discovered that toys can be simple, handmade and still very valuable. The initiative inspired us to continue using more natural, recycled and open-ended materials even after the official end of Toy-Free Month. It also encouraged us to keep developing children’s environmental awareness through everyday play and practical activities.



10. Short presentation of the main activities for each week.

Week	Activities	Materials or tools used	Notes
Week 1 – Introduction, awareness and planning	We introduced the Toy-Free Month initiative to children and parents. Parents were informed through the eVrtić application and the kindergarten notice board. With children, we discussed toys, how often they get or buy them, what materials toys are made of, what happens to toys when they break or are no longer needed, and how we can get toys without buying them. Children were introduced to the concept of commercial toys. Some toys were removed from the playroom, while materials were marked with red and green dots. Children and teachers created a plan for the month and made a list of materials needed for making toys.	eVrtić application, notice board, posters, commercial toys, coloured dots, paper for the material list, discussion prompts	The first week focused on understanding the purpose of the initiative, creating clear rules and involving children in planning from the beginning.

Week 2 – Materials, waste, recycling and reuse	We formed a material collection and reuse centre in the playroom. Children collected, sorted, named and explored different materials brought from home, found in kindergarten or collected from nature. They made additional waste-sorting containers for plastic, metal and glass, as only paper had previously been sorted in the group. We watched short documentary videos about waste in nature and used the Kamishibai story <i>The Journey of a Little Duckling</i> to discuss pollution and care for nature.	Recycled materials, natural materials, cardboard boxes, containers for paper, plastic, metal and glass, Kamishibai story, short documentary videos	This week connected sustainable play with environmental responsibility. Children began to understand that waste can become a useful resource.
Week 3 – Making our own toys and developing symbolic play	Children used collected natural, recycled and open-ended materials to make their own toys, characters, constructions and props for play. A special activity was making fairy-tale characters from wooden spoons brought from home. Children decorated them with fabric,	Wooden spoons, fabric, paper, cardboard, glue, scissors, natural materials, recycled materials, open-ended play materials	This week focused on children's creativity and ownership. Children discovered that an object becomes a toy through imagination and use.

	paper and other available materials and later used them for storytelling, dramatization and symbolic play. During free play, they used cardboard boxes, fabric, stones, sticks, wooden pieces and packaging in many different ways.		
Week 4 – Traditional toys, reflection and presentation	A guest visited the group and presented traditional games and toys from the time of grandparents. Children learned how toys used to be made from simple, natural and available materials. The guest led a workshop on making rag dolls. At the end of the initiative, we reflected with children on what they enjoyed, what was challenging, what they made and what they learned. At the end of the initiative, children reflected on what they enjoyed, what was challenging, what they made and what they learned.	Fabric, natural materials, traditional toys, materials for rag dolls, photos of activities, children's handmade toys	This week connected sustainable play with tradition, intergenerational learning and reflection. Children became aware that play can be rich even without commercial toys.



11. Photos and Videos



Informing parents



Preparing the playroom for Toy-Free Month



Nature becomes a toy



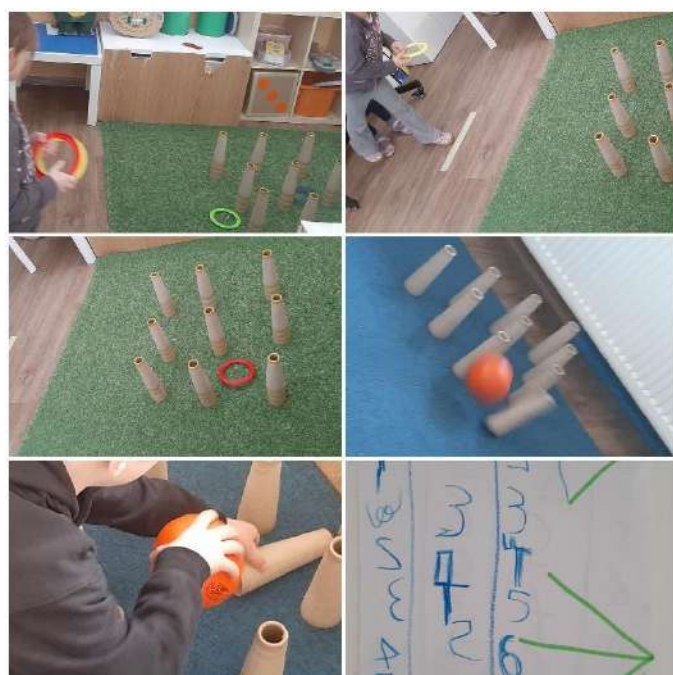
Open-ended play with natural materials



Measuring and playing with cardboard tubes



Traditional Toys and Rag Doll Workshop



Target games with reused cardboard tubes



Creating musical instruments

TOY-FREE MONTH IMPLEMENTATION

Feedback and Reflection Template for Kindergarten Teachers

Name of kindergarten, city, country:

Kindergarten Zvončić Ozalj, Ozalj, Croatia

Teacher/Teachers who prepared this presentation:

1. Bojana Cvijak
2. Đurđica Rožić



1. Time and duration of the TFM practice (start and end date):

12.01.2026 – 13.02.2026.



2. Number of teachers involved in the implementation of TFM practice:

Two kindergarten teachers and one assistant



3. Number and age of children involved in the implementation of TFM practice

(e.g. 1 group of 21 children 5-6 years old, 2 groups: 1 = 15 children 4-6 years old, 1 = 20 children 5-6 years old):

1 group of 20 children, 3-4 years old



4. Number of parents informed about the TFM practice:

About 10 (families)



5. Number of teachers (at your own and other kindergartens) **informed** (not actively involved) about the TFM practice:

20 kindergarten teachers

**For questions 6–9 try to keep each answer short,
focusing on the main points or examples.**



6. Feedback from the teachers who implemented the practice.

The main goal was to encourage children's creativity, imagination and active exploration of unstructured materials, instead of ready-made structured toys. By using natural and everyday materials collected with the help of parents, children were given the opportunity to invent their own ways of playing, develop problem-solving skills, and engage in more collaborative and meaningful play.

Preparation and implementation went gradually. Every day the children "cleaned up" part of the permanent toys and filled the boxes with unshaped material until the toys were completely replaced. Although it was fun at first, after a while some of the children asked for some of the toys to be returned.

The biggest challenges were in the beginning as the children explored new possibilities in the living room. Most children accepted and after an initial aimless wandering, found creative ways to use new and different materials. However, some children (for example a boy who had only played with toy cars until then) did not find satisfaction in the change despite the encouragement.

Tidying up was also a challenge. As children at an early age are just beginning to master the skills of tidying up and keeping the living room tidy, large amounts of unsorted material were often left everywhere.

If we would do the same project again, we would have to prepare better in terms of: marking the boxes with pictures for a certain type of material; introducing new materials occasionally and introducing the children to them; and initially combining toys with pedagogically unstructured material.

For the next toy-free month, we would choose a month when more time is spent outside the room, when the opportunities for outdoor exploration are much greater than in the living room such as games with water and sand, dirt and stones, etc.



7. Feedback from children

Most children used cardboard rings, plastic tubes and fruits such as chestnuts, walnuts, etc. Styrofoam leftovers retained the interest of children for the longest time because they were used in the kitchen as food, as objects for playing on slopes and as art material. Natural materials were used as mathematical games, inserts, and for symbolic play.

New for all the children was the amount of materials constantly available (some of these materials had been used occasionally until then).

The challenge for children who until then only played with one or two toys was to find interest in the materials that were offered.

Children's behavior, skills, and creativity changed noticeably from the first to the fourth week. In the first week, many children showed curiosity but also some uncertainty because they were used to ready-made toys. At first, some of the children wandered aimlessly because we let them see who would be interested in what.

During the second and third week, they gradually became more confident, started exploring materials more independently, and began creating their own games and ideas. Most of the children already knew when they arrived at the room which center they wanted to go to and which materials were most interesting to them.

By the fourth week, children demonstrated greater creativity, longer concentration in play, better cooperation with peers, and more imaginative use of the available materials. Since unshaped material has a shorter shelf life, and we did not replace it with new ones after the 3rd week, the lack of material led to hostility in the group and arguments over the use of the material.

Some of the children were unhappy from the beginning because of the toys that were removed (mostly because a lot of new ones arrived at the school after Christmas)

What turned out to be a delight was the unstructured game where a new idea was born from the same material every day. For example, styrofoam could be both a "lunch" and a decoration for a picture and trash that a truck should pick up and part of a necklace when strung together. The children came to show off each piece of work and were excited about new discoveries.



8. Feedback from parents.

Parents (some of them) were actively involved by purchasing materials that we asked them to bring to us if they had any. At the parents' meeting, the idea of the project was presented, where some of the parents wondered how we were going to do it and were not particularly supportive of the idea. The other part of the parents enthusiastically accepted the idea and immediately got involved in bringing the materials. At the end of the project and after the presentation, we received praise and support from all the parents because they saw how much benefit was achieved in that month without toys.



9. Personal reflection and "little sparkles".

Through this experience, I personally received confirmation of how stimulating unstructured materials and games are for the overall development of children, especially in encouraging creativity, divergent thinking, and cooperation among children.

I realized how important, desirable and necessary good preparation is. Also, how such initiatives encourage parents to actively participate, especially when they are announced and

presented in advance and when the children themselves encourage parents to cooperate. When the first parent brought the materials, the others encouraged their parents that they "had to" bring them too.

I enjoyed watching the development of play and the manipulation of materials the most. From initial exploration, throwing, setting aside, to using and devising new ways of using certain materials.

I was also pleased to receive feedback from parents. Some of them said that they should no longer throw anything in the trash at home because it can be used for play in kindergarten.

We can try to inspire our colleagues by presenting the project as we implemented it in the group with all the benefits that arise from the project. And instruct them on how to avoid the mistakes we made.

As for parents, in the same way as now, with open communication, presentation and a request for involvement

And in the future, I intend to encourage children to use more natural materials as well as recycled ones every day. To teach them how the same thing can be used in many ways and to use commercial toys as little as possible in my work.

I don't know which one "sparkle moment" would it be, I will remember the images of children wrapping themselves in ribbons and saying they were making dresses, the boy who stacked paper tubes on his hands because he was playing a robot, and the statement of a mother who said she was no longer allowed to throw paper towel tubes in the trash because the boy said his teacher needed them.



10. **Short presentation of the main activities for each week.**

It's difficult to arrange activities exactly by week now because the photos weren't put into folders on time, but into one shared album from which they were later taken out for presentation purposes.

Also, in our work we used very few guided activities, but the activities were conducted in a way that offered the children the material and awaited their initiative. For example, by bringing a large box, the children immediately started the game "wolf and 3 little pigs", after which we made masks of the piglet and the wolf so that the children could continue the dramatic game. At the same time, the other part of the children tended to more calm and exploratory games, where our role was to react in that direction as quickly as possible: to create incentives, to expand the initiated activity.

Some activities were often returned to the children (playing with sand, Styrofoam, breaking ice, building slopes and paths), while some of the children (girls) turned to the art center and explored art techniques.

What is certain is that in the first week, the toys were gradually removed from the store and an alternative was sought in unstructured materials. Later, materials were added and changed as they wore out and were torn.

After the 3rd week, we didn't replenish the materials (we didn't have any more, and we didn't ask the parents for any more), but we slowly returned the toys. First the dolls and toy cars (which some children kept asking to be returned) and then didactics, magnetic blocks, lego blocks, play toys in the center of the kitchen.

With the return of the toys, the children combined the unshaped material with the purchased toys, which turned out to be the implementation of both segments in the game.



11. Photos and Videos

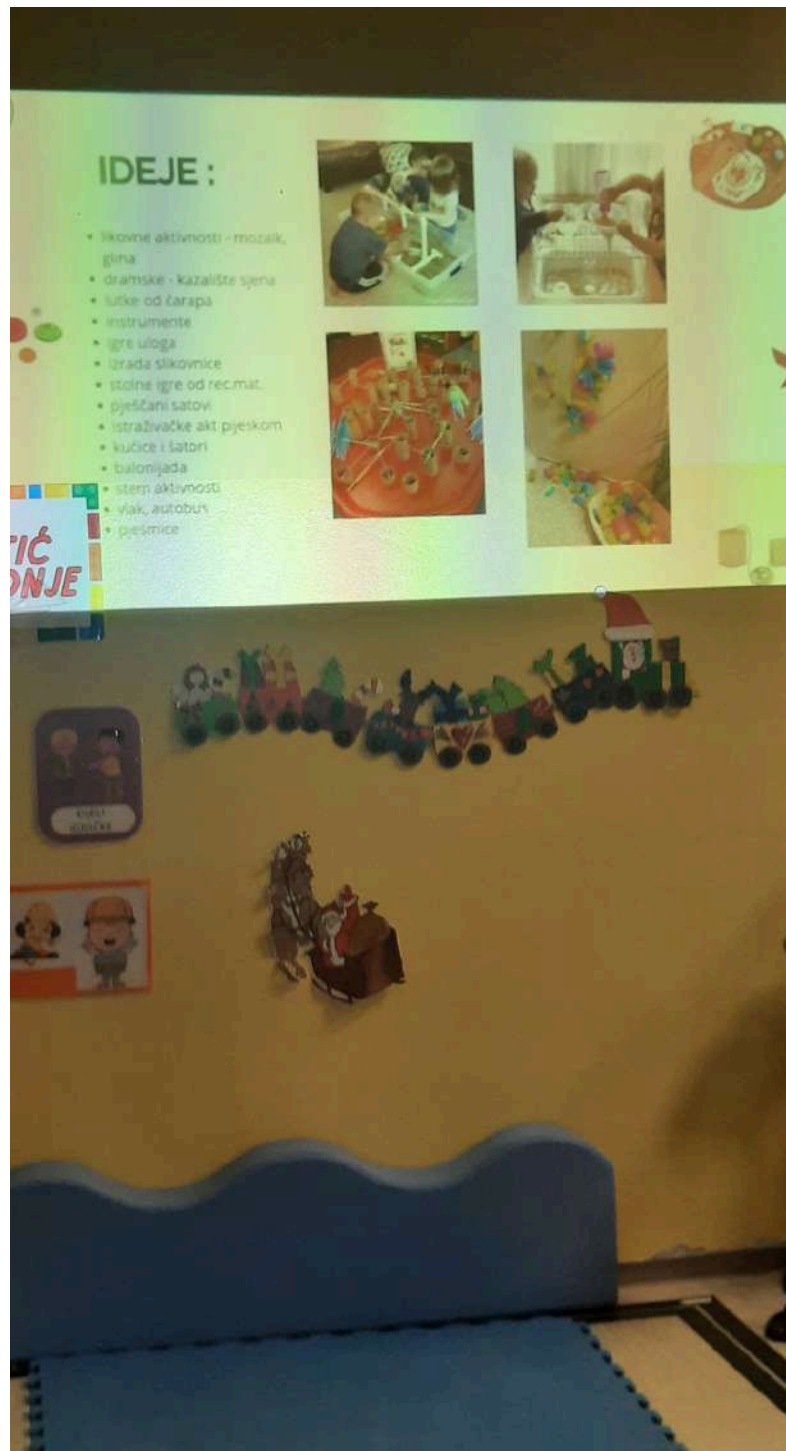


More photos can be found on the web page of the TFM project.

Bojana Cvijak, Kindergarten teacher, mentor
Kindergarten Zvončić Ozalj, Croatia



Bojana Cvijak
Kindergarten Zvončić Ozalj
Croatia
group Pužići



Parent meeting

presentation of the project and an invitation for cooperation in the form of bringing pedagogically unstructured material



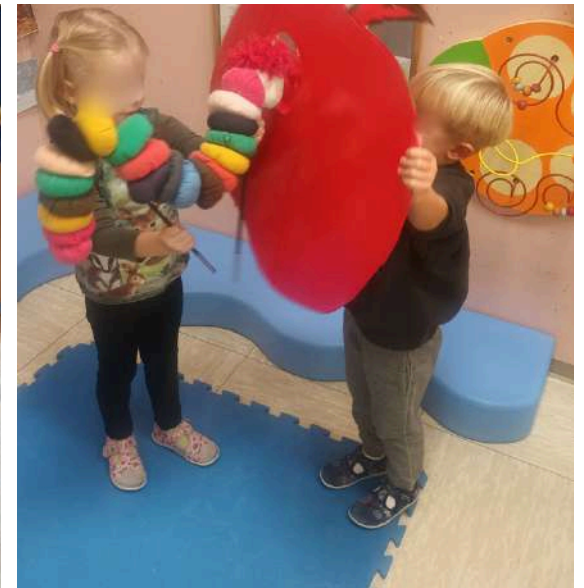


Art activities





Visual stimuli, dramatic games, guided games - guess what's hidden in the bag





Kitchen corner





Pre-mathematics and digital skills



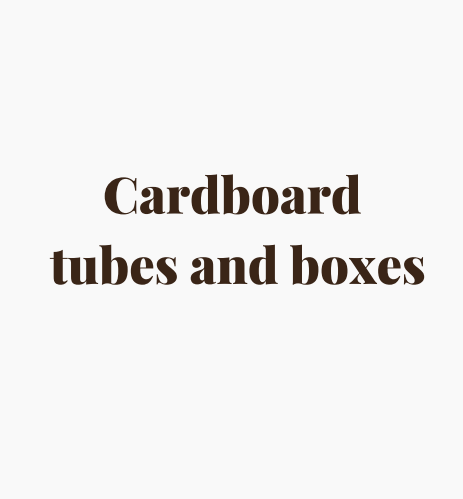


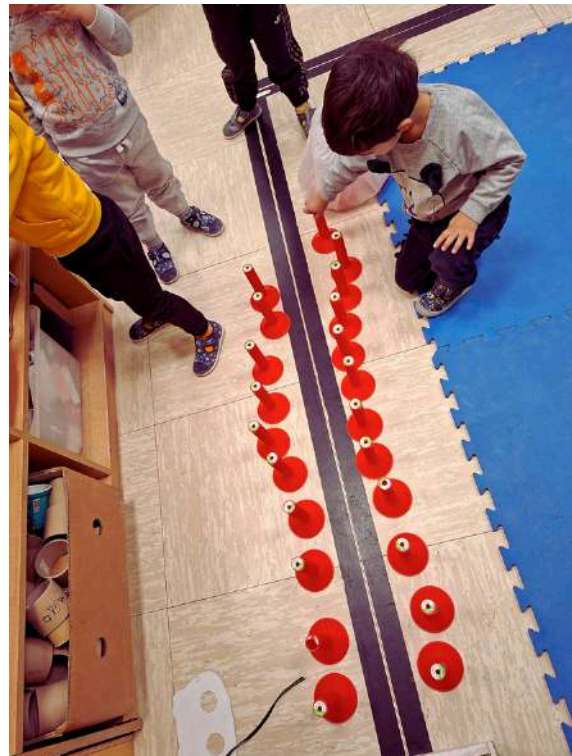
**Playing with natural materials:
musical bottles, mandalas,
various symbolic games**



Life practical activities







**Sorting and
classifying**



An unstructured paper tape game that grew into dress making and a fashion show





STEM
activities



**Making toys from
pedagogically unshaped
materials and playing with
them**



TOY-FREE MONTH IMPLEMENTATION

Feedback and Reflection Template for Kindergarten Teachers

Name of kindergarten, city, country:

KLUB DLA DZIECI „Stokrotka” Biały Kościół,
ul. Cedrowa 1, 57-100 Strzelin (POLSKA)

Teacher/Teachers who prepared this presentation:

Mariola Kwarcińska



1. Time and duration of the TFM practice (start and end date):

From 16th March 2026 to 20th March 2026



2. Number of teachers involved in the implementation of TFM practice:

One teacher



3. Number and age of children involved in the implementation of TFM practice
(e.g. 1 group of 21 children 5-6 years old, 2 groups: 1 = 15 children 4-6 years old, 1 = 20 children 5-6 years old):

A group of 20 kids, aged 3-6 years



4. Number of parents informed about the TFM practice:

All of the teachers in the group (so around 40)



5. Number of teachers (at your own and other kindergartens) **informed** (not actively involved) about the TFM practice:

Two teachers

**For questions 6–9 try to keep each answer short,
focusing on the main points or examples.**



6. Feedback from the teachers who implemented the practice.

What were the main educational or teaching objectives of your TFM activity?

- Stimulating creativity and imagination – children invent games using available materials (e.g. cardboard boxes, sticks, fabrics).
- Developing problem-solving skills – how to play without toys; children find solutions themselves.
- Supporting language development – more conversation, storytelling, word games.
- Developing motor skills and physical fitness – more movement, outdoor play.
- Learning through experience – experimenting with the environment instead of the pre-determined functions of toys.

How did the preparations and implementation generally go? What worked well?

- Preparations began with planning the activities and informing the children and (often) their parents about the idea of a ‘toy-free week’. It was important to:
- discuss with the children what the event would involve and why we were doing away with traditional toys,
- preparing alternative play materials (e.g. cardboard boxes, art supplies, natural materials),
- planning activities that foster creativity, cooperation and physical activity,
- organising the classroom space to encourage free exploration.

During the week, the children took part in a variety of activities, such as:

- building games using recycled materials,
- physical and team-building games,
- art and craft sessions,
- themed games and role-play,
- outdoor activities, a trip to the woods, and creating a moat out of sticks as a place to rest.

The teacher acted as a guide and observer, supporting the children in coming up with their own ideas for play, rather than imposing ready-made solutions.

What worked well?

- High level of children’s engagement – the children eagerly took part in the proposed activities and initiated games themselves.
 - Development of creativity – the children used simple materials in very imaginative ways.
 - Better group integration – more cooperation and joint activities.
 - Greater independence – the children organised their own time and play.
- A positive atmosphere – the lack of toys did not have a negative impact on the mood; on the contrary, there was more spontaneous joy.

What were the main challenges or difficulties?

- Difficulties in organising play

Some children were unable to come up with games on their own and needed more support from the teacher.

- Conflicts between children

Sharing limited materials (e.g. cardboard boxes or art supplies) sometimes led to disputes.

- The need for greater teacher involvement

The teacher had to support the children more actively, suggest ideas and moderate the play, especially at the beginning.

- Individual differences among the children

Some children adapted more quickly to the new conditions, whilst others needed more time and support.

Despite the challenges that arose, most of them were temporary. Over time, the children:

- became increasingly better at organising their play,
- showed greater creativity,
- were more willing to cooperate with their peers.

If you were to implement this again, what would you adjust or improve?

Encouraging parents to continue similar activities at home.

Gradually reducing the number of toys before the start of the week so that the change is not too sudden.

Any ideas or suggestions for the next implementation?

- Some children were unable to come up with games on their own and needed more support from the teacher.
- Continuation in a cyclical format
- Introducing, for example, a 'toy-free day' once a week or once a month.
- Gradually establishing the habit of creative play without ready-made objects.
- Involving parents
- Suggesting simple activities to do at home without toys.
- Sharing the results (e.g. photos, short descriptions of the games).

7. Feedback from children



The children particularly enjoyed free play using materials such as cardboard, fabric and natural objects, as well as themed and physical activities. The greatest engagement was evident during joint building activities, role-play and coming up with their own ideas for play. Initially, the lack of ready-made toys and the difficulty in organising their own time posed a challenge. For many children, this was a new situation requiring greater initiative and creativity. Over the course of the week, a

change in the children's behaviour was noticeable – they became more independent, were more willing to cooperate with their peers and showed greater ingenuity. Their social, communication and creative skills developed. The children expressed positive views about the experience – they emphasised that they enjoyed playing together, building things and having the chance to come up with their own activities. Some noted that although it was difficult at first, over time the play became interesting and rewarding

8. Feedback from parents.



Parental involvement can be described as good. Most parents showed an interest in the initiative, talked to their children about how the week had gone and – in some cases – supported the activities by providing materials (e.g. cardboard boxes, rolls of paper, fabrics). Parents noticed positive changes in their children's behaviour at home – greater independence in organising play, more frequent use of everyday objects, and the development of creativity. Children were more willing to involve family members in joint activities and were less likely to reach for ready-made toys. In their feedback, parents most often emphasised that this was a valuable and inspiring initiative. They appreciated the development of their children's imagination and social skills. There were also a few suggestions to provide more detailed information about planned activities in advance or to give examples of games to use at home.

9. Personal reflection and “little sparkles”.

‘Toy-Free Week’ taught me just how much creative potential children have, provided they are given the right conditions to explore. I realised that they don't need ready-made objects to develop – all they need is space, time and a little support. This experience also showed me how important the role of the teacher is as a guide who inspires rather than imposes.

What gave me the greatest pleasure was watching the children become more and more independent and creative day by day. I was particularly delighted that they began to initiate play themselves and work together, coming up with ideas as a group.

To inspire others to take part in a similar initiative, it is worth sharing the positive outcomes – showing just how much children can gain from such experiences. It can also be helpful to present specific examples of games and the results of the children's work, such as photos or short descriptions.

I particularly remember the moment when a group of children built a ‘house’ out of cardboard boxes and then spontaneously began to act out family roles inside it. One of the children said at the time: ‘This is better than real toys, because we can do everything our own way’. That moment was very moving for me and reinforced my belief in how important and valuable this initiative was.

10. Short presentation of the main activities for each week.



Monday: Introduction to the 'toy-free week' and first construction activities – the children built houses out of cardboard and available materials.

Materials: cardboard, boxes, blankets, fabric, adhesive tape, cushions.

Tuesday: Making vehicles from recycled materials – the children made aeroplanes and cars.

Materials: toilet roll tubes, plastic bottles, bottle caps, cardboard, coloured paper, glue, tape.

Wednesday: A trip to the forest – observing nature, listening to the sounds of nature and discovering what lies beneath the leaves. The children also built a communal 'ditch' to sit in and had their lunch.

Materials: natural elements (leaves, sticks, branches, moss), no artificial materials.

Thursday: Creating our own games and activities using eco-friendly and recycled materials.

Materials: cardboard boxes, bottle caps, stones, sticks, string, paper, recycled materials.

Friday: Free play and a summary of the week – returning to favourite activities and discussing experiences.

Materials: all previously used materials (cardboard boxes, fabrics, natural elements, recycled materials).



11. Photos



TOY-FREE MONTH IMPLEMENTATION

Feedback and Reflection Template for Kindergarten Teachers

Name of kindergarten, city, country:

Seedlings Nature Kindergarten, Wrocław, Poland

Teacher/Teachers who prepared this presentation:

Justyna Godlewska



1. Time and duration of the TFM practice (start and end date):

From 01.07.2025 to 29.08.2025



2. Number of teachers involved in the implementation of TFM practice:

Five teachers



3. Number and age of children involved in the implementation of TFM practice (e.g. 1 group of 21 children 5-6 years old, 2 groups: 1 = 15 children 4-6 years old, 1 = 20 children 5-6 years old):

2 groups: 1 = 14 children 5-6 years old, 1 = 11 children 3-4 years old.



4. Number of parents informed about the TFM practice:

About 50 parents



5. Number of teachers (at your own and other kindergartens) **informed** (not actively involved) about the TFM practice:

All the teachers from the preschool took part (5 teachers)

For questions 6–9 try to keep each answer short, focusing on the main points or examples.



6. Feedback from the teachers who implemented the practice. (Keep answers short — a few sentences or bullet points are enough.)

The main goal was to show children that there are many objects in their environment, as well as in nature, that can be used as toys. **This helped foster children’s imagination and creativity.** It was a good idea to talk with the children about this project and to put the toys away in the basement together. The kids knew why they were doing this and where the toys were—it wasn’t a surprise. It worked well to show them various natural materials they could play with.



7. Feedback from children
(Summarize briefly — use examples or quotes if possible.)

The children were very eager to come up with different games and looked for natural substitutes for familiar toys; for example, they used tape rolls as building blocks. They really enjoyed using ropes as swings or tying them between trees so they could climb. **We noticed, day by day, that their attention became increasingly focused on their surroundings and that they had started to find various natural elements to use as toys.**



8. Feedback from parents.
(Write key points or short notes.)

To wrap up the project, we organized an event where parents and children were invited to make their own toys using natural materials or recycled items. The families brought these toys to the event, and we put together a small exhibition.



9. Personal reflection and “little sparkles”.
(A few sentences are enough.)

As teachers at a forest preschool, we often use natural and recycled materials to create teaching aids and toys. This project gave us an opportunity to expand our skills. What brought us the greatest joy was watching the children, who were very engaged in the project activities and came up with wonderful ideas for toys. Such an experience greatly fosters creativity in both children and teachers. I highly recommend it.



10. Short presentation of the main activities for each week.
(Summarize the weekly activities briefly, using either the short, structured notes OR the table on the next page to show how you implemented the TFM practice.
You can also add photos to present the activities. Important: Include photos without children’s faces.)

Week 1 - Talking with the children about the Toy-Free Month project; moving the toys to the basement. Showing the children, during circle time, various natural materials and recycled items that can be used to make toys.

Week 2 - Creating games and toys for outdoor play.

Week 3 - Making toys out of cardboard—cardboard houses, cardboard furniture, and paper towel rolls, as well as figures made from paper towel rolls.

Week 4 - Making toys out of sticks and string.

Weeks 5, 6, and 7 – Using the made elements for play and creating new toys.

Week 8 – Preparing an exhibition for parents as a summary of the project.



11. Photos and Videos





Creating a “Toy-Free Summer” poster using recycled materials and scraps as a way to engage children in conversation and introduce the project to the preschool.



Games we created together with the children.



Playing with blocks made from tape rolls.



Using ropes for outdoor play.



Making toys from recycled materials.

TOY-FREE MONTH IMPLEMENTATION

Feedback and Reflection Template for Kindergarten Teachers

Name of kindergarten, city, country:

9th kindergarten of Karditsa

Teacher/Teachers who prepared this presentation:

- Rena Theochari,
- Ioanna Stournara,
- Vicky Papadopoulou,
- Martha Grigiriadou,
- Evaggelia Mpakalakou



1. Time and duration of the TFM practice (start and end date):

From February 23rd to March 20th



2. Number of teachers involved in the implementation of TFM practice:

Five teachers



3. Number and age of children involved in the implementation of TFM practice

(e.g. 1 group of 21 children 5-6 years old, 2 groups: 1 = 15 children 4-6 years old, 1 = 20 children 5-6 years old):

3 groups of children 5-6 years old. Two with 16, one with 19 children



4. Number of parents informed about the TFM practice:

All of them, about 90



5. Number of teachers (at your own and other kindergartens) **informed** (not actively involved) about the TFM practice:

Ten teachers

For questions 6–9 try to keep each answer short,
focusing on the main points or examples.



6. Feedback from the teachers who implemented the practice.

Main goals: we wanted the kids to be able to entertain themselves without being supported by actual toys, thus empowering their imagination, communication skills and sense of belonging in a team.

Preparation / implementation: easier than we expected! Especially at the group who have already been working in a similar way, it came very naturally. The other groups seemed intrigued by the new choices of games they had!

Challenges: with children with difficulties it was difficult to disrupt their routine, or take away their favourite toys.

For next year we are already thinking of encouraging children to play with makeshift toys, rather than conventional ones, especially now they have the experience of how to do so. And the toys they have created will still be in their classrooms, for them to play with.



7. Feedback from children

Children especially enjoyed the procedure of creating new toys, by themselves, with materials that weren't used as toys. They also liked the fact that we went to the playground without toys, but could play older, traditional games that their grandparents used to play with, or that they created on their own. We noticed their imagination grew and they were not struggling to entertain themselves, it came easier to them to find things to play with. They connected more with each other, once they needed more kids to play with them, rather than being alone with a toy. Many of them said "my grandma used to play these games", or "we have some empty plastic bottles at home that I told my mum to bring to you", showing that they want to participate more in this activity.



8. Feedback from parents.

We informed the parents of the project via e-mail and in person, asked them to think of old, traditional games and tell their children about them. Asked them to bring recyclable materials we can use. Their children played the new / old games at home, brought home toys they made, presented them proudly to the family, and played with them. They liked our idea, thought of it as something different that could take the boredom away from their kids (now they won't always say "I'm bored, give me the tablet"). It also connected their kids to the grandparents more, with conversations like "you used to play with that, too?" or "how did you use to play when you were little?". They also asked parents / grandparents to give them their old toys to play with!

9. Personal reflection and “little sparkles”.



The teacher who was already using similar ways to entertain her group felt validated and was so much more experienced in this (we used so much of her advice!). We realized it was not as difficult as we thought in the beginning. Our fears that the children would keep asking for their toys subsided from the very first days, when we saw how invested they became in the project. Creating our own toys or playing without toys was refreshing for us, too. It was particularly enjoyable for us when children loved playing with games / toys we used to play when we were younger, connecting us more. It made teaching / learning easier, too, once we played and taught them things, making our time in class more enjoyable. When we asked the children if they wanted their old toys back, most of them (especially in the group already using hand-made toys) said no! The weather was sunny for most of this month, so we played a lot outside. The children stopped asking to bring toys out, they felt nice to play with themselves, or think of how they would play. I would say, this was our success!



10. Short presentation of the main activities for each week.

Week	Activities	Materials or tools used	Notes (important aspects, reminders, tips ...)
Week 1	Played traditional, old game “Little Helen sits and cries” (kids in a circle, one kid in the middle. All singing a song to entice Helen come and play with them)	Nothing	Introduced the game to the children, how it’s played and the rules. Great for rainy days to play indoors.
	Played traditional game “Koutso” (the kids skip between lines, or to reach a rock they have thrown)	Nothing or a small rock	Showed them how it’s played both inside and out of the classroom.
	Invented our own “domino” with pieces of leftover paper from previous crafts.	Leftover pieces of paper, colours	They created their own game they could play with anytime. Loved this fact!
Week 2	Played traditional game “skamnakia” (little stools) (children bent in a line as they others go over them)	nothing	We made sure it was safe for them because kids in the past were more resilient!
	Played with “domino”	Leftover pieces of paper, colours	They invented the rules as we played, then followed them. They could play without the supervision of a teacher!
	Made musical instruments (maracas)	Plastic bottles, egg cartons, rice, glue, duct tape	You need patience to create them, they wanted to have their own

	Made tower of numbers and played with it (asked them to put numbers in order)	Toilet paper, colours	Easy, educational and fun
Week 3	Free activity outside at break time: they played "survivor" trying to light a fire with sticks. Played with the sand trying to make sandcastles.	Sticks, leaves, earth dirt	Was not provoked, they improvised to have fun, they touched dirt and loved it!
	Made number game (match the correct amount of flowers with the respective number of dots)	Toilet paper, leftover pieces of paper, colours	Helped learn the numbers and fine motor skills of the hands
	Made and played with "memory game" / "matching game" (showed them 5 pictures, asked them to put them again in the right order. Had all caps from the back side, opened them one by one to make pairs)	Old caps from jars, colours	Tried to copy the same picture twice. One game, two ways to play.
	Played traditional game "tiflomiga" (blind fly) (one kid covers their eyes with the cloth, tries to catch the others)	A small piece of cloth	Connected to the games their parents / grandparents played
Week 4	Created small drums for each one	Sticks, paper napkins, string, an old necklace	They wanted their own instrument, we provided it to them. Felt they could make whatever they wanted to play with, not buy it.
	Butterfly puzzle	Tongue depressor, paper tape, colours	Give specific instructions, maybe create the outline
	Created means of transport and animals	Toilet paper, colours, glue	Loved the fact they made their own cars, animals to play with



11. Photos



Koutso



Little Helen sits and cries



Domino



Skamnakia



Musical instruments



Tower of numbers



Survivor





Number game



Memory game / matching game



Tiflomiga



Drums



Butterfly puzzle



Means of transport / animals

TOY-FREE MONTH IMPLEMENTATION

Feedback and Reflection Template for Kindergarten Teachers

Name of kindergarten, city, country:

16th Kindergarten of Drama, Greece

Teacher/Teachers who prepared this presentation:

Athanasiadou Eleftheria



1. Time and duration of the TFM practice (start and end date): **3/11/2025 - 28/11/2025**



2. Number of teachers involved in the implementation of TFM practice: **One (1)**



3. Number and age of children involved in the implementation of TFM practice (e.g. 1 group of 21 children 5-6 years old, 2 groups: 1 = 15 children 4-6 years old, 1 = 20 children 5-6 years old):

1 group of 14 children 4-6 years old



4. Number of parents informed about the TFM practice: **10 parents**



5. Number of teachers (at your own and other kindergartens) **informed** (not actively involved) about the TFM practice: **2 teachers**

**For questions 6–9 try to keep each answer short,
focusing on the main points or examples.**



6. Feedback from the teachers who implemented the practice.

(Keep answers short — a few sentences or bullet points are enough.)

You can use the following questions to reflect on your experience:

- What were the main educational or learning goals of your TFM practice?
- How did the preparation and implementation go overall? What worked well?
- What were the main challenges or difficulties?
- If you implemented it again, what would you adjust or improve?
- Any ideas or suggestions for the next implementation?

Learning goals: Strengthen student engagement, support active learning, and improve understanding of key concepts through hands-on and collaborative activities.

Implementation overview: Preparation was generally smooth; the structure of the activities and clear instructions helped lessons flow well. Students responded positively to interactive components.

Challenges: Time management was difficult, and some students needed extra support to follow the tasks. Adapting materials to different levels required additional effort.

Improvements for next time: Provide more differentiated materials, allow more time for complex activities, and include clearer guidance for transitions.

Suggestions: Incorporate optional extension tasks, gather quick student feedback after each session, and refine resources to make them easier to reuse across classes.



7. Feedback from children

(Summarize briefly — use examples or quotes if possible.)

You can use the following questions to think about how children experienced the Toy-Free Month:

- What did they enjoy or engage with the most?
- What was challenging or new for them?
- How did their behavior, skills, or creativity change from week 1 to week 4?
- What did they say or express about the experience? (Optional short quotes: “I liked when we...”)

During the Toy-Free Month, children showed high engagement with **open-ended play**. Many gravitated toward building with chairs, blankets, and cardboard boxes, turning them into “houses,” “boats,” and “shops.” Outdoor play also became more imaginative as children created games with natural materials like sticks, sand, and leaves.

Some children initially found it **challenging** not to have their usual toys, especially during the first week. A few expressed that they “didn’t know what to play.” However, this shifted as they discovered new possibilities and began collaborating more with peers.

Over the four weeks, educators observed noticeable growth in **creativity, problem-solving, and social interaction**. Children became more confident in inventing their own games, negotiating roles, and sustaining longer periods of cooperative play. Conflicts decreased as children developed better communication and turn-taking.

Children commented positively on the experience. Some examples include:

- *“I liked when we made breakfast with mud.”*
- *“I didn’t miss the toys anymore because we made everything ourselves.”*

Overall, the children’s feedback reflected **enjoyment, pride, and a sense of ownership** over their play.



8. Feedback from parents.

(Write key points or short notes.)

You can use the following questions to reflect parent’s involvement:

- How were parents involved?
- What changes did they observe at home (thoughts, behaviours of children)?

What feedback did they give about the activity? (their thoughts, impressions)

Feedback from Parents – Key Points

- **Parent Involvement**
 - Parents actively supported the activity at home.
 - Helped children complete assigned tasks or follow routines.
 - Engaged in discussions with children about the activity.
 - Provided encouragement and reinforced learning at home.
- **Changes Observed at Home**
 - Children showed increased interest in the topic/activity.
 - Improved communication about what they learned in class.
 - Positive behaviour changes (e.g., responsibility, confidence, cooperation).
 - More independence in completing tasks.
 - Better emotional regulation or problem-solving.
 - Demonstrated new skills or vocabulary related to the activity.
- **Parents’ Feedback on the Activity**
 - Appreciated the activity’s relevance and impact on their child.

- o Felt the activity strengthened home–school connection.
- o Reported that the activity was enjoyable and meaningful for their child.
- o Suggested continuing similar activities in the future.
- o Provided constructive suggestions for improvement (if any).
- o Expressed satisfaction with communication and involvement opportunities.



9. Personal reflection and “little sparkles”.

(A few sentences are enough.)

You can use the following questions to reflect your own Toy-Free Month experience:

- What did you personally learn or gain from this experience?
- What did you enjoy or find most rewarding?
- How could you inspire others (teachers, parents, children) to join next time?
- Describe one “sparkle moment” — something meaningful, funny, or heart-warming that you’ll remember.
- During Toy-Free Month, I learned how much creativity blossoms when the focus shifts from things to imagination. I really enjoyed seeing how simple materials and open time invited deeper cooperation and calmer, more meaningful play. It felt rewarding to notice moments when children took the lead, discovering their own ideas without relying on prepared toys.
- To inspire others, I’d highlight how freeing it is to watch children invent their own fun — it reminds teachers and parents that *less* can truly be *more*. Sharing small stories, photos, or quick examples of children’s imaginative breakthroughs can spark curiosity in others.
- My favorite “sparkle moment” was when a group of children proudly announced they did a television show and they were talking about the news. Their joy, teamwork, and creativity lit up the whole room.



10. Short presentation of the main activities for each week.

(Summarize the weekly activities briefly, using either the short, structured notes OR the table on the next page to show how you implemented the TFM practice.

You can also add photos to present the activities. Important: Include photos without children’s faces.)

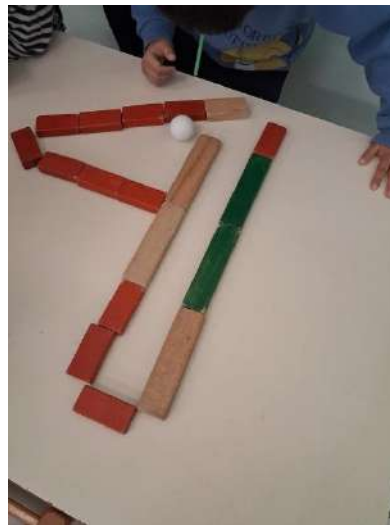
Week	Activities	Materials or tools used	Notes (important aspects, reminders, tips ...)
Week 1	They made a healthy breakfast in nature's kitchen with ingredients they found in the yard.	Soil, water, twigs	
	They simulated Arcimboldo's painting with autumn fruits and vegetables that they brought from home.	Fruits and vegetables	
	They created the food pyramid with fruits, legumes, and vegetables that they brought from home	Fruits and vegetables	
	They play the game: guess what I am? A child pretends to describe a food and the group tries to guess it.		
	Which foods resemble the organs of our body. Walnut – brain, strawberry – heart, eggs – eyes, etc.		
Week 2	They represent shapes (circle, triangle, square) with their body.	Their body	
	They draw concentric circles on salt.	Salt	
	Which object in space is a square, a triangle, a circle?	Materials from the class	
	With natural materials (stones, twigs, pine cones) or even balls, they create a circle.	Natural materials and balls	
	They create shapes with clay and then paint them.	Clay	
Week 3	Building a train with matchboxes and lids	Matchboxes and lids	
	Painting with soil, leaves and water	Natural materials	
	Creating prints with sponges	Sponges and colors	
	We make dolls with recyclable materials.	Fabrics, buttons, woods	

	We make a ball with fabrics, like they did in the old days.	Fabrics	
Week 4	We build a TV with cardboard boxes	Paper box	
	We learn about solubility with natural materials	Twigs, stones, sand, cork and glass of water	
	We create scales with recyclable materials and weigh pine nuts	Hanger, rope and pine cones	
	We learn numbers in a playful way	Wooden blocks, a straw and a ping pong ball	
	We do experiments with water	Oil, salt, water, alcohol	



11. Photos and Videos

1st week





2nd week



3rd week



4th week



TOY-FREE MONTH IMPLEMENTATION

Feedback and Reflection Template for Kindergarten Teachers

Name of kindergarten, city, country: 55 kindergarten of Larisa, in Greece.

Teacher/Teachers who prepared this presentation:

- Boura Styliani,
- Maimari Eirini,
- Palaska Dimitra,
- Tsitsinanou Fotini,
- Mixalopoulou Ermioni,
- Valiakou Vasiliki.



1. Time and duration of the TFM practice (start and end date):

December 2025 - January 2026



2. Number of teachers involved in the implementation of TFM practice:

Three



3. Number and age of children involved in the implementation of TFM practice (e.g. 1 group of 21 children 5-6 years old, 2 groups: 1 = 15 children 4-6 years old, 1 = 20 children 5-6 years old):

3 groups: 14 to 25 children 4-6 years old.



4. Number of parents informed about the TFM practice: **129 families, 258 parents**



5. Number of teachers (at your own and other kindergartens) **informed** (not actively involved) about the TFM practice: **27 teachers**

For questions 6–9 try to keep each answer short,
focusing on the main points or examples.



6. Feedback from the teachers who implemented the practice.

(Keep answers short — a few sentences or bullet points are enough.)

You can use the following questions to reflect on your experience:

- What were the main educational or learning goals of your TFM practice?
 - How did the preparation and implementation go overall? What worked well?
 - What were the main challenges or difficulties?
 - If you implemented it again, what would you adjust or improve?
 - Any ideas or suggestions for the next implementation?
-
- **Main educational goals:**
To enhance children's creativity, imagination, emotional expression, cooperation, and autonomy through play without ready-made toys, using natural and open-ended materials.
 - **Preparation & implementation:**
The preparation focused on organising safe, accessible spaces and collecting natural and recycled materials. The implementation progressed smoothly, with high levels of children's engagement, initiative, and active participation.
 - **Challenges:**
Initial hesitation from some children due to the absence of toys and the need for time to adapt. Managing open-ended activities required flexibility and continuous observation.
 - **Adjustments for future implementation:**
More time could be allocated to reflection and discussion with children, and stronger involvement of families could be planned from the beginning.
 - **Suggestions for next implementation:**
Extend the duration of the practice, enrich outdoor learning opportunities, and strengthen collaboration with parents and the wider school community.



7. Feedback from children

(Summarize briefly — use examples or quotes if possible.)

You can use the following questions to think about how children experienced the Toy-Free Month:

- What did they enjoy or engage with the most?
- What was challenging or new for them?
- How did their behavior, skills, or creativity change from week 1 to week 4?
- What did they say or express about the experience? (Optional short quotes: *"I liked when we..."*)

The children showed high levels of engagement and motivation during the activities implemented in natural and outdoor learning environments, including outdoor play, exploration of light and shadows, and the use of magnifying glasses to observe natural materials such as leaves, sand, and small objects. They particularly enjoyed expressing emotions through creative activities, such as illustrating feelings on fig leaves, and participating in simple experiments that encouraged inquiry, observation,

and curiosity. Although some activities were initially unfamiliar and challenging, over time the children demonstrated increased confidence, autonomy, and collaboration, actively proposing ideas and solutions. From week 1 to week 4, noticeable progress was observed in creativity, symbolic play, fine motor skills, and communication, through activities such as cardboard constructions, portraits created with natural materials (sand, branches, and leaves), the construction of a school model using natural resources, and the representation of a typical kindergarten day. Music, movement, songs, and “frozen statues” activities further supported emotional expression, cooperation, and self-regulation. Overall, the children described the experience positively, highlighting enjoyment, active participation, and learning through play and exploration.



8. Feedback from parents.

(Write key points or short notes.)

You can use the following questions to reflect parent’s involvement:

- How were parents involved?
- What changes did they observe at home (thoughts, behaviours of children)?
- What feedback did they give about the activity? (their thoughts, impressions)

Parents were informed about the activities and objectives of the project and were actively involved by discussing the experiences with their children at home, encouraging the use of natural and recycled materials, and supporting related activities outside school. Many parents reported positive changes in their children’s behaviour, including increased creativity, imagination, and initiative, as well as greater interest in nature and outdoor play. They also observed that children talked more enthusiastically about their school day, shared ideas from the activities, and showed improved emotional expression and collaboration. Overall, parents expressed very positive feedback, highlighting their appreciation for the experiential, play-based approach and the reduced reliance on ready-made toys, noting that the activities strengthened their children’s autonomy, confidence, and enjoyment of learning.



9. Personal reflection and “little sparkles”.

(A few sentences are enough.)

You can use the following questions to reflect your own Toy-Free Month experience:

- What did you personally learn or gain from this experience?
- What did you enjoy or find most rewarding?
- How could you inspire others (teachers, parents, children) to join next time?
- Describe one “sparkle moment” — something meaningful, funny, or heart-warming that you’ll remember.

Through the Toy-Free Month experience, I gained a deeper understanding of how children’s creativity, imagination, and emotional expression flourish when they are given time, space, and simple materials. I found it especially rewarding to observe the children’s growing confidence,

collaboration, and ability to initiate their own ideas without reliance on ready-made toys. This experience inspired me to encourage other teachers and parents to trust children’s natural curiosity and to explore play-based, nature-focused learning approaches. One memorable “sparkle moment” was when a child proudly said, “We don’t need toys — we can make everything ourselves,” while showing a self-created play scene using natural materials, capturing the essence of joy, autonomy, and meaningful learning.



10. **Short presentation of the main activities for each week.**

(Summarize the weekly activities briefly, using either the short, structured notes OR the table on the next page to show how you implemented the TFM practice.

You can also add photos to present the activities. Important: Include photos without children’s faces.)

Week 1 – Exploring Feelings & Natural Materials

The children engaged in activities focused on emotional expression and sensory exploration, such as expressing emotions on fig leaves, free play with natural materials, and observing elements of nature using magnifying glasses. Emphasis was placed on collaboration and parental involvement through the implementation of creative constructions, as well as on familiarization with the “Toy-Free Month” approach by fostering curiosity and observation.

Week 2 – Outdoor Play, Light & Discovery

Activities included outdoor games in the schoolyard, exploring shadows created by sunlight, simple experiments, and inquiry-based exploration. Children were encouraged to ask questions, test ideas, and collaborate through play and discovery.

Week 3 – Creative Expression & Symbolic Play

Children engaged in creative constructions using cardboard and natural materials, created portraits with sand, branches, and leaves, and participated in music, songs, movement activities, and “frozen statues.” The focus was on imagination, cooperation, and expressive play.

Week 4 – Representation & Reflection

The final week focused on higher-level symbolic thinking through the creation of a school model using natural materials and the representation of a typical day in the kindergarten setting. The children reflected on their experiences, created constructions using unused school materials, revisited favorite activities, and shared ideas and stories inspired by the “Toy-Free Month” initiative.

(Optional – you can choose this table to present the TFM practice in your kindergarten.)

Week	Activities	Materials or tools used	Notes (important aspects, reminders, tips ...)
Week 1	Activity 1: Through play with natural materials, children depict themselves and express how they feel at school.	Leaves, branches, sand, stones, paper, and glue	
	Activity 2: Just as emotions can be mixed, colors are combined in order to create new ones. Children	Colors, cardboard, cardboard boxes, bottles	

	experiment with color mixing by placing colored circles on a base (e.g., combining red and yellow to create orange).		
	Activity 3: With the arrival of Christmas, parents are invited to the school to participate in the creation of Christmas crafts using unused and recycled materials.	Cardboard boxes, threads, cardboard, buttons, unused decorations, glue	
	Activity 4: Children collect materials from the schoolyard and use them to represent how they feel in the school environment.	Fig leaves, tree fruits/seeds, glue, cardboard	
Week 2	Activity 1: We leave the classroom and explore the outdoor environment using magnifying glasses.	Magnifying glasses	
	Activity 2: We experiment and play with the shadows created by sunlight.	Our body (materials for body-related activities)	
	Activity 3: We return to the classroom and look for unused materials in order to create a snake-shaped toy to play with.	Buttons, threads, markers, cardboard, glue	
	Activity 4: Children explore and create rain using cotton and water, engaging in playful learning experiences.	Water, cotton, bowl	
Week 3	Activity 1: <i>"The Magic Fabric"</i> Children are divided into four groups. By being covered individually and then collectively with the "magic fabric," they transform into anything they wish,	Fabrics	

	using imagination and creative movement.		
	Activity 2: <i>"The Rain Dance"</i> Children form a circle and play the rain game. This is a simple group movement activity that helps the team focus on what follows and has a motivating and energizing effect. One child initiates a movement, which is then passed from one child to the next in the same direction.	Markers, small papers, music, our body (for body-related activities)	
	Activity 3: <i>"Frozen Statues"</i> Music is played, and when it stops, the children "freeze" and remain still.	Music, our body (for movement activities)	
	Activity 4: <i>Matching Numbers and Quantities</i> We draw circles on cardboard using a plastic cup and write the numbers from 1 to 10. On ten plastic cups, we draw black dots from one to ten. The activity is ready to play. Two children work together to match each number with the cup that has the same number of dots. One child chooses and places the cup, and the other child checks if the choice is correct. When the activity is finished, the children change roles.	Cardboard box, plastic cups, black marker	
	Activity 5: <i>Matching Quantities and Numbers</i> We draw circles on cardboard using a plastic cup and draw from one to ten dots inside each circle. On ten plastic cups, we write the numbers from 1 to 10. The activity is ready to play. Two children work together to match each quantity with the cup that has the correct number. One child chooses and places the cup, and the other child checks if the choice is correct. When the activity is finished, the children change roles.	Cardboard box, plastic cups, black marker	

Week 4	Activity 1: <i>"Pyxidoulis and Pyxidoula Lead the Way!"</i> Children create Pyxidoulis and Pyxidoula using unused materials, with the aim of exploring the different areas of the school.	Fabrics, buttons, cardboard	
	Activity 2: Learning Through Play and Creativity Children create a model of the school including their own figures. Through symbolic play and drama-based activities, they represent a typical day at school	Sticks, markers, cardboard, cardboard boxes, leaves, branches, sand, stones	
	Activity 3: <i>Creating and Playing with Landmarks</i> Using natural materials, children create landmarks from their homeland and develop communication skills through dialogue and information exchange.	Sticks, leaves, tree fruits/seeds, glue, cardboard	



11. Photos

If you haven't already added the photos at question 10, please add at least 3 photos of the toys, materials, activities - without children's faces. Each photo must be named so it's clear what it shows (e.g., "Building the castle with boxes").

Week 1 – Exploring Feelings & Natural Materials

Activity 1:

Through play with natural materials, children depict themselves and express how they feel at school.

Activity 2:

Just as emotions can be mixed, colors are combined in order to create new ones. Children experiment with color mixing by placing colored circles on a base (e.g., combining red and yellow to create orange).

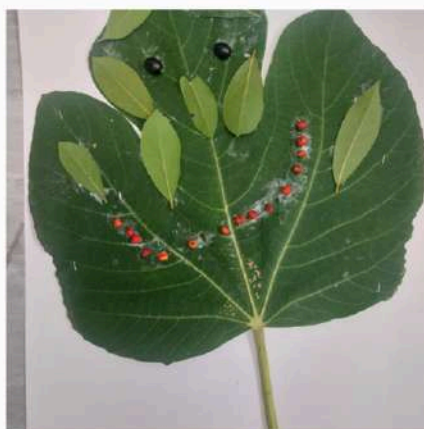
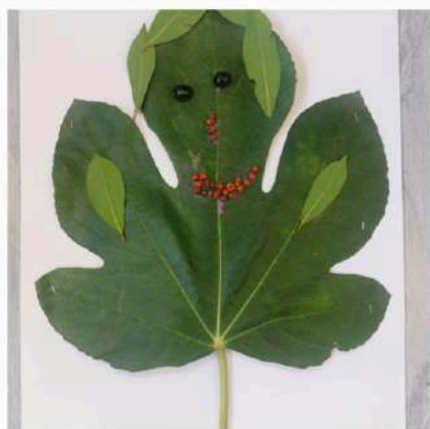
Activity 3:

With the arrival of Christmas, parents are invited to the school to participate in the creation of Christmas crafts using unused and recycled materials. We also built the winter puppet theater.

Activity 4:

Children collect materials from the schoolyard and use them to represent how they feel in the school environment.









Week 2 – Outdoor Play, Light & Discovery

Activity 1:

We leave the classroom and explore the outdoor environment using magnifying glasses.

Activity 2:

We experiment and play with the shadows created by sunlight.

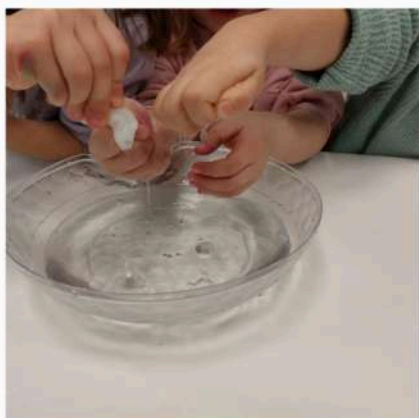
Activity 3:

We return to the classroom and look for unused materials in order to create a snake-shaped toy to play with.

Activity 4:

Children explore and create rain using cotton and water, engaging in playful learning experiences.







Week 3 – Creative Expression & Symbolic Play

Activity 1:

“The Magic Fabric”

Children are divided into four groups. By being covered individually and then collectively with the “magic fabric,” they transform into anything they wish, using imagination and creative movement.

Activity 2:

“The Rain Dance”

Children form a circle and play the rain game. This is a simple group movement activity that helps the team focus on what follows and has a motivating and energizing effect. One child initiates a movement, which is then passed from one child to the next in the same direction.

Activity 3:

“Frozen Statues”

Music is played, and when it stops, the children “freeze” and remain still.

Activity 4:

“Matching Numbers and Quantities”

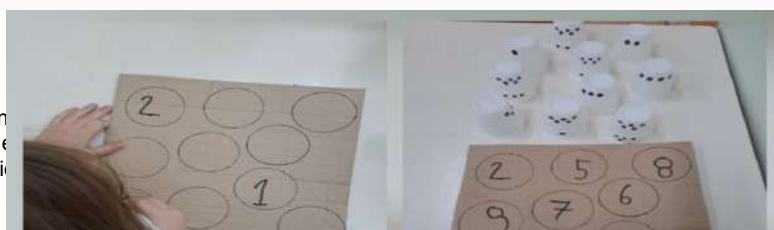
We draw circles on cardboard using a plastic cup and write the numbers from 1 to 10. On ten plastic cups, we draw black dots from one to ten. The activity is ready to play. Two children work together to match each number with the cup that has the same number of dots. One child chooses and places

the cup, and the other child checks if the choice is correct. When the activity is finished, the children change roles.

Activity 5:*Matching Quantities and Numbers*

We draw circles on cardboard using a plastic cup and draw from one to ten dots inside each circle. On ten plastic cups, we write the numbers from 1 to 10. The activity is ready to play. Two children work together to match each quantity with the cup that has the correct number. One child chooses and places the cup, and the other child checks if the choice is correct. When the activity is finished, the children change roles.







Week 4 – Representation & Reflection

Activity 1:

“Pyxidoulis and Pyxidoula Lead the Way!”

Children create Pyxidoulis and Pyxidoula using unused materials, with the aim of exploring the different areas of the school.

Activity 2:

Learning Through Play and Creativity

Children create a model of the school including their own figures. Through symbolic play and drama-based activities, they represent a typical day at school.

Activity 3:

Creating and Playing with Landmarks

Using natural materials, children create landmarks from their homeland and develop communication skills through dialogue and information exchange.





TOY-FREE MONTH IMPLEMENTATION

Feedback and Reflection Template for Kindergarten Teachers

Name of kindergarten, city, country:

Kindergarten "Gumbek", Beletinec, Sveti Ilija, Croatia

Teacher/Teachers who prepared this presentation:

Helena Đurin, pedagogue



1. Time and duration of the TFM practice (start and end date):

2.2.2026 - 28.2.2026



2. Number of teachers involved in the implementation of TFM practice:

Ten (10)



3. Number and age of children involved in the implementation of TFM practice

(e.g. 1 group of 21 children 5-6 years old, 2 groups: 1 = 15 children 4-6 years old, 1 = 20 children 5-6 years old):

1 group of children in the age of 1 year old- 14 children

1 group of children in the age of 2 years old- 20 children

1 group of children in the age of 3 years old- 25 children

1 group of children in the age of 4-5 years old- 27 children

1 group of children in the age of 6-7 years old- 30 children



4. Number of parents informed about the TFM practice:

232 parents



5. Number of teachers (at your own and other kindergartens) informed (not actively involved) about the TFM practice:

3 students of Faculty of early childhood and preschool education.

**For questions 6–9 try to keep each answer short,
focusing on the main points or examples.**



6. Feedback from the teachers who implemented the practice.

(Keep answers short — a few sentences or bullet points are enough.)

You can use the following questions to reflect on your experience:

- **What were the main educational or learning goals of your TFM practice?**

To encourage open-ended play, creativity and innovation, to stimulate sensorimotor development, social interactions and cooperation, to raise environmental awareness and to encourage pretend play and problem-based learning.

- **How did the preparation and implementation go overall? What worked well?**

Preparation went well. Planning and furnishing the centers was easy because of parents' engagement. Implementation went well because children were highly motivated, and they showed interest for different materials.

- **What were the main challenges or difficulties?**

Development differences between children in group, safety while using some materials, photo-documentation of the process during four weeks.

- **If you implemented it again, what would you adjust or improve?**

We would ensure more systematic photo documentation of the process, we would include children in preparation process more, we would ensure more gradual introduction of material so that children can explore the material themselves better

- **Any ideas or suggestions for the next implementation?**

We would expand initiative on kindergarten yard, extend initiative to a full year with a focus on one type of material per month (e.g. Textile month, Cardboard month ..), we would encourage intergenerational cooperation through traditional games with grandparents, organize an exhibition of constructions and art works that children created.



7. Feedback from children

(Summarize briefly — use examples or quotes if possible.)

You can use the following questions to think about how children experienced the Toy-Free Month:

- **What did they enjoy or engage with the most?**

Mostly children enjoyed various possibilities that materials provided. They were able to combine **natural materials** (wooden pebbles, twigs, etc.), **recycled materials** (cardboard boxes, tubes, cans), **textile** (various fabrics), etc. in so many different ways. They enjoyed the process itself because they started with one idea, and ended in a whole new place, revealing new possibilities.

- **What was challenging or new for them?**

Some of materials were new for children so it was challenging to reuse the same material multiple times, and it was hard to understand some of material properties (soft, huskily, sharp, heavy, etc.)

- **How did their behavior, skills, or creativity change from week 1 to week 4?**

Children's fine motor skills development is noticeable (hand-eye coordination, pincer grip), graphomotor skills, sensory integration, progress is also visible in cognitive development (semiotic function, understanding of cause and effect relationships, understanding simple mathematical concepts), language development and socio-emotional development.

Also, we noticed that children spontaneously formed teams, supported and complemented each other in the activities, and there was no dominance in terms of incentives. If one of the children dominated, the others spontaneously followed.

- **What did they say or express about the experience? (Optional short quotes: “I liked when we...”)**

“We agreed to work something out together, and in the end we managed to work something else out, which was even better.”

"We have a lot of work to do and it's interesting and you can make a lot of different things (bridges, houses, buildings). I love building."

"We had a lot of material to clean up, but we came to an agreement and cleaned it all up quickly."

"I'm thinking about becoming a construction worker one day, just like we do here, and my dad tells me to become a doctor, but I'd rather be a construction worker because he can do a lot of things."



8. Feedback from parents.

(Write key points or short notes.)

You can use the following questions to reflect parent's involvement:

- **How were parents involved?**

Parents got involved by helping to equip the activity centers.

- **What changes did they observe at home (thoughts, behaviours of children)?**

Parents have noticed that children stay involved in activities longer, that they use everyday objects more for play, that they invent games and stories. They have also noticed that they find solutions to problem situations more easily, that they find several different solutions and that they no longer bother so much whether they did something right or wrong. They also noticed that the children talked more during play, explaining what and how are they doing something, and cooperated more. Furthermore, the children became more independent.

- **What feedback did they give about the activity? (their thoughts, impressions)**

Parents are satisfied with the positive changes in their children's behavior. They emphasize that interest in technology has decreased a little. They point out that the interest in buying toys has decreased, and that the interest in ordinary objects has increased, which gives them satisfaction.



9. Personal reflection and “little sparkles”.

(A few sentences are enough.)

You can use the following questions to reflect your own Toy-Free Month experience:

- **What did you personally learn or gain from this experience?**

The initiative prompted an in-depth analysis of one's own practice, considering the role of educators as facilitators in relation to the traditional role of knowledge transmitters.

The most interesting aspect was the evolution of symbolic play over the four weeks. It started with simple manipulation of materials (stacking, combining), then role play appeared. Furthermore, a more complex symbolic transformation took place. Finally, integration of multiple materials into complex narratives occurred. It was also fascinating to observe how the children themselves became "designers" of the toys - instead of passive consumption of finished products, they became active creators of their own toys and game scenarios.

- **What did you enjoy or find most rewarding?**

Witnessing children's spontaneous learning and creativity provides deep professional fulfillment. Observing how children construct their own knowledge through play confirms the value of a constructivist approach in early childhood education. Also, working with a colleague on a same project enriched professional dialogue and the exchange of ideas.

- **How could you inspire others (teachers, parents, children) to join next time?**

"I highly recommend implementing such an initiative to all colleagues in early childhood education, with a special emphasis on:

- **Cost-effectiveness** – minimal costs with maximum developmental outcomes
- **Adaptability** – can be implemented in any spatial and material context
- **Inclusivity** – open materials enable the participation of children of different developmental levels
- **Sustainability** – develops ecological awareness from an early age

I would recommend colleagues to prepare for the initial "resistance" of children accustomed to commercial toys, but also to be patient – children quickly find joy in creative play when given enough time and freedom."

- **Describe one "sparkle moment" — something meaningful, funny, or heart-warming that you'll remember.**

Working with open materials reminded us of the universality of play and creativity that transcends generations and cultural contexts.

"What I liked most was the spontaneity and authenticity of the children's discoveries. The moments when the children themselves found unexpected ways to use the materials were especially valuable because they demonstrated the constructivist principle that children are not "empty vessels" to be filled with knowledge, but active constructors of their own understanding of the world."



10. **Short presentation of the main activities for each week.**

Week	Activities	Materials or tools used	Notes (important aspects, reminders, tips ...)
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Week 1	Educational group “Loptice” (1yo) Construction activity	Cardboard boxes of various colors and sizes 	A couple boys use cardboard boxes and stack them on top of each other. When they have them all stacked, they knock them over with their hands, which makes them laugh. Then they stack them again. After a while, a girl joins in and says she wants to rate the tall tower.
	Educational group “Zvezdice” (2 yo) Construction activity	Reels, stand with three upright sleeves 	The boy takes the offered rings and places them on the upright tubes. He takes other, smaller tubes and tries which one he can place on the large ones. After placing the plastic tube, he places the rings on top. Later, the other two boys do the same and place another tube on top, which falls, then hold it up and place more rings on top of it.

	Educational group “Kockice” (3 yo) Construction activity	Metal pots, laminate, boards of various sizes, thicknesses and lengths  	The boy starts the game, which other children observe and join in by bringing additional materials (boards) - They name the structure – “We are building a dam over a stream”. The activity encourages communication, and the children share experiences they have had reading picture books or watching a cartoon about a beaver.
	Educational group “Pužići” (4-5 yo) Construction activity	cardboard boxes, various wooden shapes, springs, sleeves, plastic triangular shapes, plastic crate	The boys construct a skyscraper from various materials. One boy takes on the role of the builder while

			the other children add materials. The boys use a plastic crate to transport the building materials. They frequently change the structure of the constructed building and gradually build on it. The boys build a fence from triangular wooden shapes to form a square, creating a new solid structure.
	Educational group "Pčelice" (6-7 yo) Activities in Family center	Various wooden shapes, boards, tubes, cardboard boxes  	Several girls start building a dollhouse. They use various materials from the center and combine them in various ways. Two girls take wooden triangular shapes and stack them up, noticing that they have built a pyramid. They also take cubes and try to stack them with other shapes.

Week 2	Educational group "Loptice" (1yo) Activities in Family center	Wooden blocks, plastic crate, blankets, fabrics 	A girl brings two long wooden cubes and puts them in a piece of cloth and wraps them. She says that they are babies and brings them to the teacher to "hold" them for a while. After that, she puts a blanket and a pillow in a plastic box and puts the "babies" to sleep. The other children join in the symbolic game and each of them brings something for the "babies".
	Educational group "Zvezdice" (2 yo) Activities in Kindergarten hall (gym)	Cardboard boxes	A boy takes a large cardboard box and sits in it and starts making noises like a train. Two children come up to him and start pushing him around the room, but they fail. Later, they stand next to each other and succeed. Another boy takes boxes and builds towers out of

			them and then knocks them down. The boy places different boxes around the mat and explains how to build a house.
Educational group "Kockice" (3 yo)	Didactic game	Clips, mat with different shapes 	A didactic game that children take on on their own initiative and gain experience through visual perception. Children talk to each other and name shapes, colors, sizes and compare them.
Educational group "Pužići" (4-5 yo)	Activities in Family center Fine motor skill activity	Cardboard packaging for eggs, scoops, spatulas, tongs, sturdy cardboard, small sleeves, screws, plastic dowels...	The children put the boxes of Kinder eggs into the cardboard egg packaging, then take the offered grabbers, spoons, spatulas, tongs and take the "eggs" out of the packaging and back into the packaging, spill the eggs from the cardboard packaging back into the metal container and repeat the action several times. The boy takes the smaller tubes which he arranges



and then inserts the Kinder eggs into the top of the tubes, then tries to arrange these same tubes on the tops of the cardboard egg packaging.

The girl arranges the Kinder eggs one next to the other in a row in the middle of the sturdy cardboard boxes and two more girls join her. For this, two boys are drilling nuts, screws, bolts and dowels in the winter and pressing them into the holes in the cardboard packaging. One of the boys takes the tongs and manages to take the screw and move it to another cardboard box, repeating this several times.

Educational group "Pčelice" (6-7 yo)

Construction Center - Weaving

Loom, bicycle rims, wool, fabric

Children imitate the process of fabric creation and weaving on a loom. They thread the wool between

		 	the strings on the loom, and the cloth between the wires on the bicycle rim. Several children try their hand at imitating the weaving process using all the materials provided.
Week 3	Educational group "Loptice" (1yo) Sensorimotor activity	Snow, plastic containers, bottles, spoons, cans 	Considering the weather conditions, snow has been brought into the room. The children observe the container of snow, then take it in their hands, squeeze it, and mash it. A girl takes a plastic bottle, picks up small snowballs with her hand, and fills the bottle with them. Then two boys take spoons to scoop up the snow and fill a smaller bowl. Then a boy holds a snowball in his hand and watches how the snow turns into water, then puts the snowball on the table and makes circular movements with it on the table. The children filled bottles and cans with snow, and when it started to melt, they tried to scoop up the remaining liquid with their hands.
	Educational group "Zvezdice" (2yo)	Cotton swabs, straws, plasticine	

Sensorimotor and fine motor skill activity



The boy takes plasticine and kneads it with his hands and presses his fingers into it. The girl takes a piece of plasticine and shapes it into a ball, into which she presses straws vertically. Another girl puts plasticine around the ear sticks, then takes it out of the plasticine and puts it aside to dry. The girl flattens the plasticine with a rolling pin and presses straws into it horizontally, side by side. Two little girls fill a container with plasticine, put straws and ear sticks on top and sing "Happy birthday to you".

Educational group "Kockice" (3 yo)
Activity with water

Plastic packaging, plastic pipes, water

Children are choosing different materials to play with in the kindergarten's backyard. They are exploring their immediate environment. It is noticeable that they have an interest in water and playing with it. They love to pour, mix and monitor the amount of water entering the pipes (is the water level

			the same in the puddle as in the pipe).
Educational group “Pužići” (4-5 yo) Construction activity		Boards, sleeves, packaging with tool slots 	The boy arranges the blocks in a row and then puts boards of the same width on that row, on that construction he puts two more blocks and a board on top, building a window (boy's comment). He leans out of the window, and lets the other boy into the house below between the two knockers. On top of the entire construction, he puts a television, which is actually a tool packaging. Next to this structure, they build a series of blocks that touch each other, and they insert small cubes into the blocks to make the wall stronger. After building the house, the boys make balancing structures out of a combination of a larger solid hammer and a board, which they place in the middle, and individually test

			how long they can keep the balance.
		Plastic tubes, sponges, cardboard and plastic tubes, cardboard boxes   	
	Educational group "Pčelice" (6-7 yo) Construction activity		Two boys are talking about how they can make a water pipe across the room. They use various tubes that they connect to each other and run them across the room until they run out of materials, at which point the teacher offers them additional materials. In one part, they place vertical tubes that they say are a bridge and that water travels over the bridge.

			
Week 4	Educational group "Loptice" (1yo) Gorss motor center	Food cans, plastic containers, vine branches 	The children bring bowls and cans from the "Kitchen center" and line them up on the mats. A girl brings vine branches and starts hitting the bowls with them and making sounds. Soon the other children join her in playing.
	Educational group "Zvezdice" (2 yo) Activity in art center	cardboard tubes, tempera paints, branches, brushes	On the table, the children are offered tempera paints and cardboard tubes. The girl takes a brush and paints a branch with it, the other girl takes a branch and puts it in the tempera paint and uses it to draw patterns on the table cover. The boy takes the tube and puts it in the tempera paint, the paint drips onto the table. The other girl spreads the tempera paint on the tube with her fingers, and following her example, the girl takes the tube and rolls it around the table and observes how the

			tube is painted, but also shows her hands to the teacher - how dirty they are. Then she wipes her hands in a clean tube.
	Educational group "Kockice" (3 yo) Gorss motor activity, Construction activity	wooden beams, water 	Children always show interest in water, whether inside or outside. The boy, talking about his experiences, brings various materials and forms a bridge. After he crosses the bridge, the other children join in. At first, they carefully walk on a 25cm wide beam, and later it turns into a competitive game of who will cross first without falling into the "water". The same game, only presented in a different way, takes place in the fresh air. This develops balance, self-confidence and togetherness, and expresses positive emotions and success.



tubes of various sizes, cardboard,
wooden cubes and boards, corks,
cardboard boxes

Educational group "Pužići" (4-5
yo)

Construction activity



The boys build a structure
inside which they insert
wooden cut-outs that they
use to light a fire. They
place a wooden board over
the structure, and on it,
corks that represent meat,
and they grill. After the
entire structure has
collapsed, the boy places
the collapsed parts in the
middle so that all the parts
burn, then sorts them into
boxes and stores them.
They continue the game
with the same materials,

			but in a different way. They build a structure from the shells inside which they concrete the surface. Pouring in small parts, and leveling them with their hands and a wooden board so that the concrete surface is flat.
	Educational group "Pčelice" (6-7 yo) Center of table games	Cardboard box, small wooden rollers, wooden spatulas, corks, glue, paper roll, pompoms, tacks, markers, straws, small wooden pebbles, marbles 	Children think about all the ways we can make a maze using different unshaped materials. They combine and place objects on the cardboard box, agreeing and cooperating with each other. The teacher helps with gluing the objects. While solving the maze, the children follow the path that leads to the goal. They successfully overcome the obstacles that are set before them.



11. Photos



Building the city with wooden bricks



Building the water supply system



Building the Kindergartens fence

TOY-FREE MONTH IMPLEMENTATION

Feedback and Reflection Template for Kindergarten Teachers

Name of kindergarten, city, country:

JDG Veseli Cvetovi - Kisela Voda, city / Skopje, country / N.Macedonia

Teacher/Teachers who prepared this presentation:

- **Klementina Petrushevska, Teacher/Educator**
- **Gabriela Stojanovska, Teacher/Educator**
- **Zorica Gunov, Teacher/Educator**



1. Time and duration of the TFM practice (start and end date):

Start date 10 November / end date 5 December 2025 for two groups

Start date 17 November / end date 12 December 2025 for one group



2. Number of teachers involved in the implementation of TFM practice:

Tree teachers/educators implement TFM practice.

Klementina Petrushevska, Gabriela Stojanovska and Zorica Gunov.



3. Number and age of children involved in the implementation of TFM practice

1 group of 27 children 4-5 years old, 2 groups: 1 = 27 children 5-6 years old, 1 = 30 children 5-6 years old):



4. Number of parents informed about the TFM practice:

All parents were informed about the TFM practice.



4. Number of teachers (at your own and other kindergartens) **informed** (not actively involved) about the TFM practice:

In our unit we have 8 teachers and all of them were informed. Three of the teachers implement the practice.

**For questions 6–9 try to keep each answer short,
focusing on the main points or examples.**



6. Feedback from the teachers who implemented the practice.

- What were the main educational or learning goals of your TFM practice?
- How did the preparation and implementation go overall? What worked well?
- What were the main challenges or difficulties?
- If you implemented it again, what would you adjust or improve?
- Any ideas or suggestions for the next implementation?

We learned that the child enjoys a toy they can play with. We liked that many things we have at home, which we thought were not useful, have now gained value and become toys.

By sharing the toys and even making toys as small gifts for others, the entire process of making toys was fun.

However, we had to make two of each one for home and one for kindergarten because they wanted to have it to play with all the time.

They mostly enjoyed cutting and coloring. They enjoyed playing because this was a kind of new toy they created themselves. They played together with others and explained how they made the toy. The challenges we noticed include an increased interest in creating, discovering something new, wanting to make things, and inventing new toys.



7. Feedback from children

- What did they enjoy or engage with the most?
- What was challenging or new for them?
- How did their behavior, skills, or creativity change from week 1 to week 4?
- What did they say or express about the experience? (Optional short quotes: *"I liked when we..."*)

The children were most happy and enjoyed playing the games they had made with their parents and with their friends and teachers in the kindergarten. They were most involved in playing the friendly games in cooperation with their friends.

These types of games were new to them, and it was challenging to see how much and how they would succeed in playing toy-free games.

During the first week they brought the games and toys they had made with their parents, but they were not very interested in the games until I, as a teacher, started to cooperate in the game and encourage them to play together.

From week to week , we had greater cooperation, there was an increase in the children's creativity, and the children became more active and more confident in these types of games.

They expressed their experience with lots of smiles, happiness, fun and playing together which was visible on their faces and in their behavior.



8. Feedback from parents.

- How were parents involved?
- What changes did they observe at home (thoughts, behaviors of children)?
- What feedback did they give about the activity? (their thoughts, impressions)

The parents were involved through home workshops together with kids making toys and games, as well as purchasing various materials for making toys. They saw that the children are happy, that they have made toys and want to play with them, as well as show them to their friends in the kindergarten and play together. The parents are delighted with how much the home made games and toys can be interesting for the children even more than the conventional toys. They were happy that these types of toys have a positive effect on children, that it distracts them from playing games on the mobile phone, tablet or computer.

Cooperation with Parents

Information Corner

Method of implementation: Display board with photos and topic description

Goal of cooperation: Informing and involving parents

Material Donations

Method of implementation: Collecting natural and recycled materials

Goal of cooperation: Involving parents in the process

Workshop: “We Play Together”

Method of implementation: Joint toy-making activities for parent and child

Goal of cooperation: Strengthening the parent–child bond

Tips for Home

Method of implementation: Short suggestions for games using everyday objects

Goal of cooperation: Continuing learning at home.



9. Personal reflection and “little sparkles”.

- What did you personally learn or gain from this experience?
- What did you enjoy or find most rewarding?
- How could you inspire others (teachers, parents, children) to join next time?

- Describe one “sparkle moment” — something meaningful, funny, or heart-warming that you’ll remember.

During the month without toys, I realized that children do not need toys to be creative and fully involved in the game. I really liked that every day with simple materials and with their own ideas and imagination they created their own roles through the games, came up with stories, etc. I realized how important free play and cooperation between children is for child development. At the same time I would like to share how happy and focused the children were in the game.

For me, the most rewarding feeling was the fact that the children were most successful in the ideas for making toys by themselves and in the joint cooperation in the game.

I would inspire others with my observations and impressions of how this type of playing toy-free games has a positive effect on children.

One significant, sparkly moment,, was when, together with the children, we made a rocket out of a bottle, collage and foam. The children were overjoyed, and one of them commended that we had found a way for us to be astronauts and fly with our own rocket ship.



10. Short presentation of the main activities for each week.

WEEK I – Toys from Nature

Monday

Activity: Exploring natural materials

Materials: Leaves, pine cones, twigs, pebbles

Tuesday

Activity: Creating animals from pine cones and playdough

Materials: Pine cones, playdough, glue

Wednesday

Activity: Nature orchestra – sounds from nature

Materials: Pebbles, twigs, walnuts

Thursday

Activity: Leaf picture book

Materials: Leaves, crayons, tempera paint, cardboard

Friday

Activity: Social game: “Who will find the strangest shape?”

Materials: Natural materials

WEEK II – A Second Life for Old Materials

Monday

Activity: “From waste to toy” – creating objects from old materials

Materials: Boxes, paper rolls, bottles, glue

Tuesday

Activity: Musical instruments from recycled materials

Materials: Cans, rice, bottles

Wednesday

Activity: Game: "Find a use"

Materials: Old household items

Thursday

Activity: Mini exhibition: "Our new toys"

Materials: Handmade toys

Friday

Activity: Song and movement: "Everything can be a toy"

Materials: Music, everyday objects

WEEK III – Playing with Shadows, Water, and Sand

Monday

Activity: Shadow theatre

Materials: Flashlights, sheet, cardboard figures

Tuesday

Activity: Water experiments – what sinks, what floats

Materials: Water, cups, plastic objects

Wednesday

Activity: Mixing colors in water

Materials: Paints, containers, brushes

Thursday

Activity: Playing with sand – shapes and traces

Materials: Sand, molds, spoons

Friday

Activity: Game: "Follow the shadow"

Materials: Light source, figures, space for movement

WEEK IV – Art and Mathematics with Unconventional Materials

Monday

Activity: Mathematical collection of objects

Materials: Buttons, bottle caps, sticks

Tuesday

Activity: Mandalas from natural and recycled materials

Materials: Cardboard, leaves, bottle caps, glue

Wednesday

Activity: Rhythmic games with objects

Materials: Tapping objects, music

Thursday

Activity: Creating an “art station”

Materials: Fabric, thread, beads, wooden sticks

Friday

Activity: Gallery: “Our Unusual Creations”

Materials: Children’s creations, display board



11. Photos and Videos

If you haven’t already added the photos at question 10, please add at least 3 photos of the toys, materials, activities - without children’s faces. Each photo must be named so it’s clear what it shows (e.g., “*Building the castle with boxes*”).

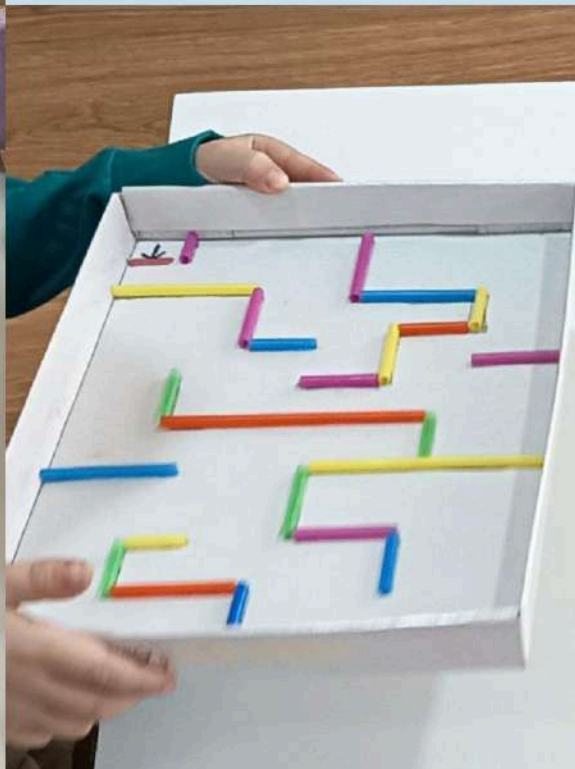
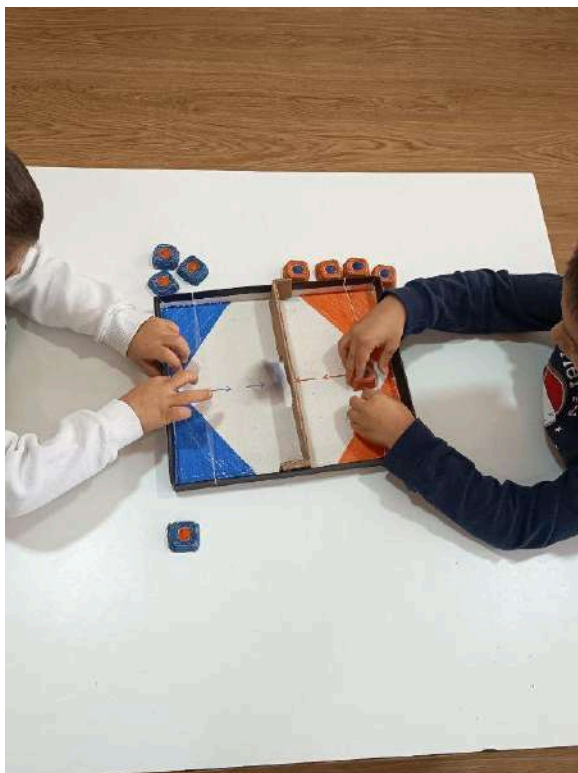
Didactic math toys, means of transportation (cars, trains, boats, rockets)



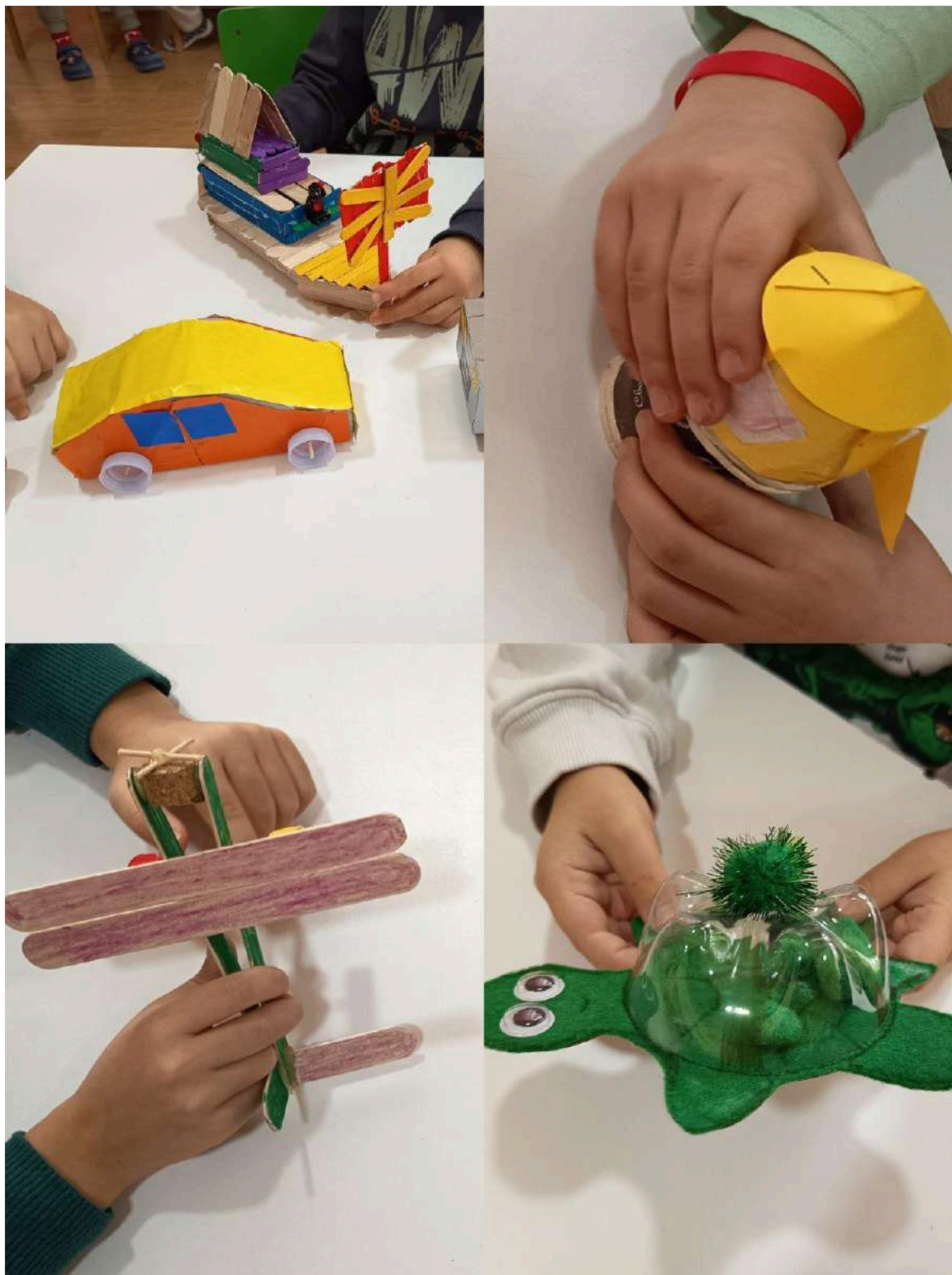
Didactic math toys (counting, measurement, perception)



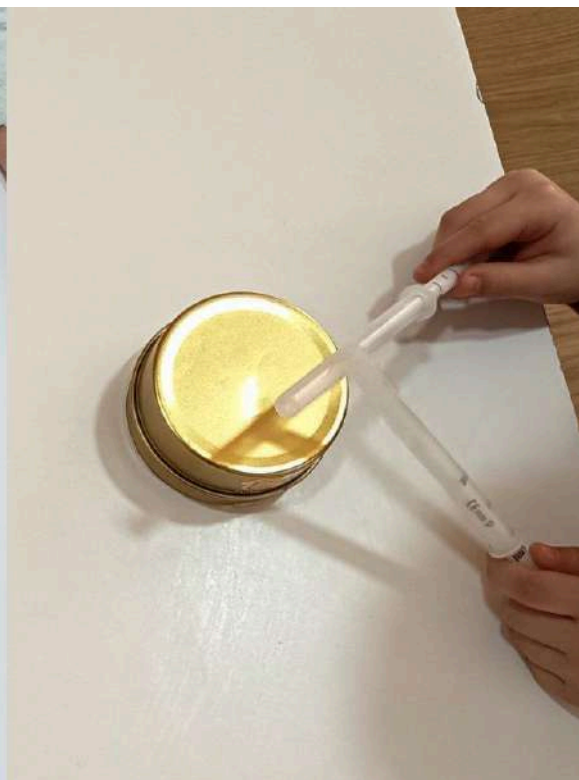
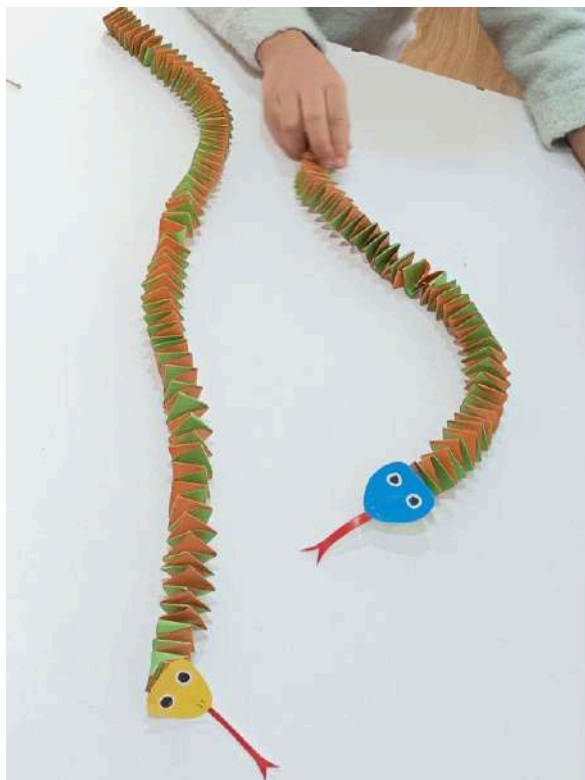
Games for coordination, focus, logic development



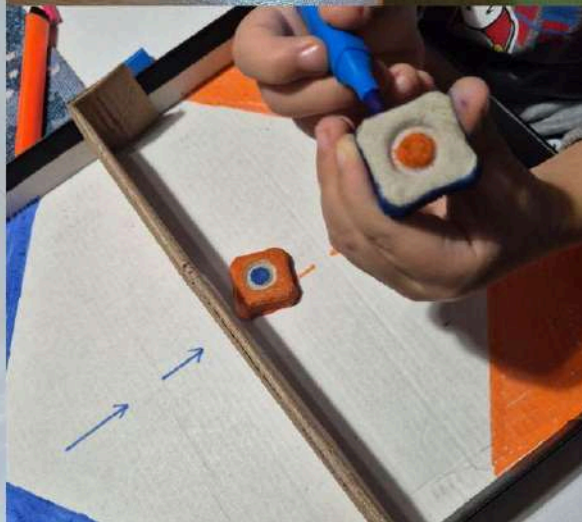
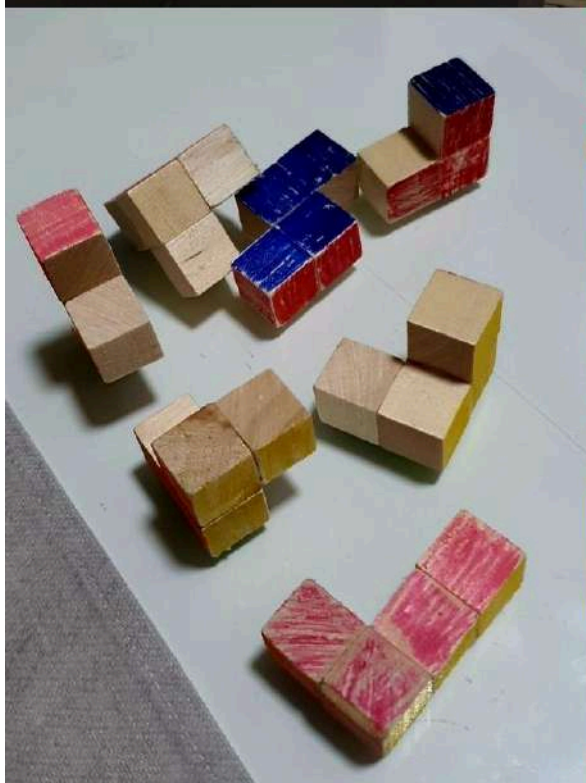
Games/toys for developing creativity and imagination



Games/toys for developing creativity and imagination



Toy creation process....



TOY-FREE MONTH IMPLEMENTATION

Feedback and Reflection Template for Kindergarten Teachers

Name of kindergarten, city, country:

“Școala Gimnazială Gheoghe Șincai” kindergarten, Florești, România

Teacher/Teachers who prepared this presentation:

Hebe Alexandra Anda



1. Time and duration of the TFM practice (start and end date):

03.11.2025- 28.11.2025



2. Number of teachers involved in the implementation of TFM practice:

11 teachers



3. Number and age of children involved in the implementation of TFM practice

(e.g. 1 group of 21 children 5-6 years old, 2 groups: 1 = 15 children 4-6 years old, 1 = 20 children 5-6 years old):

8 groups: 1= 3 children 3-4 years old, 1= 19 children 4-5 years old, 1= 5 children 4-5 years old, 1= 25 children 4-5 years old, 1= 28 children 5-6 years old, 1= 24 children 5-6 years old, 1= 20 children 5-6 years old, 1= 20 children 5-6 years old.



4. Number of parents informed about the TFM practice:

150 parents



5. Number of teachers (at your own and other kindergartens) **informed** (not actively involved) about the TFM practice:

21 teachers

**For questions 6–9 try to keep each answer short,
focusing on the main points or examples.**



6. Feedback from the teachers who implemented the practice.

(Keep answers short — a few sentences or bullet points are enough.)

You can use the following questions to reflect on your experience:

- What were the main educational or learning goals of your TFM practice?
- How did the preparation and implementation go overall? What worked well?
- What were the main challenges or difficulties?
- If you implemented it again, what would you adjust or improve?
- Any ideas or suggestions for the next implementation?

The first step was to talk to each other, to see who was interested, after that we informed the parents and implemented the project. The main educational learning was to teach children to be creative with materials from nature, to use objects to create, learn and build different things. The first week we saw difficulty in children using objects and some materials to play.



7. Feedback from children

(Summarize briefly — use examples or quotes if possible.)

You can use the following questions to think about how children experienced the Toy-Free Month:

- What did they enjoy or engage with the most?
- What was challenging or new for them?
- How did their behavior, skills, or creativity change from week 1 to week 4?
- What did they say or express about the experience? (Optional short quotes: “I liked when we...”)

At first, in the first week they asked a lot “How can I play with this?” The most we heard from children after the first week was “Can you see what I just created/ built to compose with these materials?”. They were surprised to see what they did with some of the materials.



8. Feedback from parents.

(Write key points or short notes.)

You can use the following questions to reflect parent’s involvement:

- How were parents involved?
- What changes did they observe at home (thoughts, behaviours of children)?
- What feedback did they give about the activity? (their thoughts, impressions)

The parents saw how children's patience increased with house chores. They said children always peek at something on their way home, to use that to create something or to do a project at home. In the end the parents agreed that children have more toys than they need, and they quickly lose interest in them.



9. Personal reflection and “little sparkles”.

(A few sentences are enough.)

You can use the following questions to reflect your own Toy-Free Month experience:

- What did you personally learn or gain from this experience?
- What did you enjoy or find most rewarding?
- How could you inspire others (teachers, parents, children) to join next time?
- Describe one “sparkle moment” — something meaningful, funny, or heart-warming that you’ll remember.

We learned to stop over-stimulating children with toys, to leave space for tranquil play and let them discover how to use some materials from nature in their own way.



10. Short presentation of the main activities for each week.

(Summarize the weekly activities briefly, using either the short, structured notes OR the table on the next page to show how you implemented the TFM practice.

You can also add photos to present the activities. Important: Include photos without children’s faces.)

(Optional – you can choose this table to present the TFM practice in your kindergarten.)

Week	Activities	Materials or tools used	Notes (important aspects, reminders, tips ...)
Week 1	Blossom tree	Flowers, cardboard	
	The Elephant in the room	Sook, paper plate, paper	
	”x-o ” game	Paper, chestnuts	
	Maze	chestnuts	
Week 2	Map of Romania	Cardboard, watercolors	
	Mark the route	Chestnuts, nuts, paper, rope, plasticine	
	Snail	Plasticine, chestnuts, toothpicks	
Week 3	Create with materials from nature	Chestnuts, leafs, corn, sticks, pine cones	
	Place according to the model	Sticks , paper	

	Hedgehog	Paper, glue, leafs	
	Faces on leafs	Leafs, markes	
Week 4	We are cooks	Bols, chefs hat, food	
	Caterpillar	Water colors, egg carton	
	Painted stones	Stones, water colors	
	The boat	Sponge, sticks, paper, plastic dishes, water	



11. Photos and Videos

If you haven't already added the photos at question 10, please add at least 3 photos of the toys, materials, activities - without children's faces. Each photo must be named so it's clear what it shows (e.g., "Building the castle with boxes").



Making a boat



Painting stones.



Cooking.



Caterpillars in the garden.



Making faces on the leaf.



Painting stones



Walnut shell boats



Caterpillar from egg cograg



Place according to model



Playing with materials from nature



cesstWe create with materials from nature



Chestnut snail



Add chestnut according to model

making



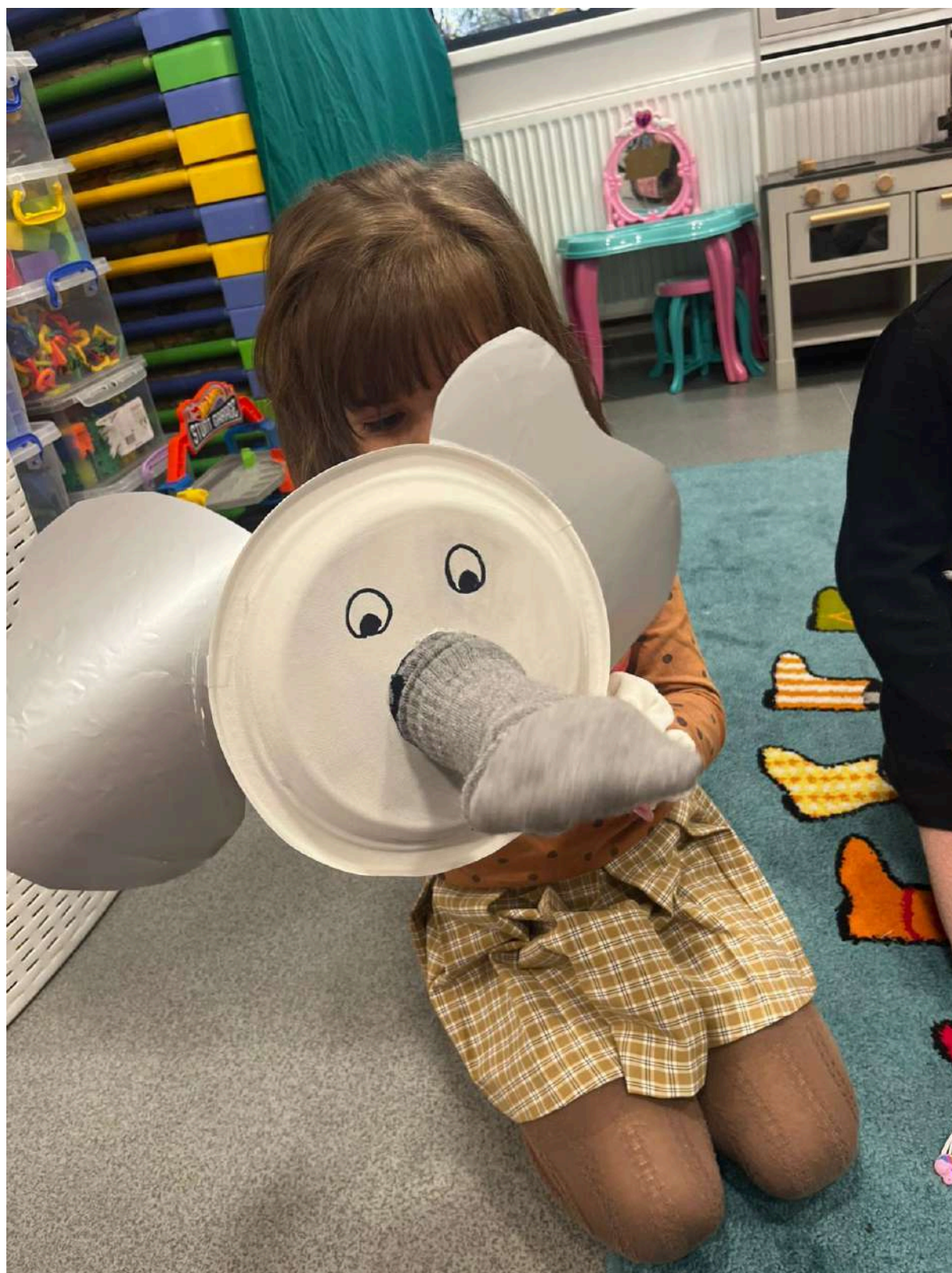
Painting the Romanian map with our palms



Labirint



Playing X-O Game



Elefant in the room



Blossom tree

TOY-FREE MONTH IMPLEMENTATION

Feedback and Reflection Template for Kindergarten Teachers

Name of kindergarten, city, country:

Kindergarten Dobrna, Dobrna, Slovenija

Teacher/Teachers who prepared this presentation:

Irena Cesar



1. Time and duration of the TFM practice (start and end date):

1–30 April 2026



2. Number of teachers involved in the implementation of TFM practice:

2 teachers



3. Number and age of children involved in the implementation of TFM practice

19 children, aged 3–5.



4. Number of parents informed about the TFM practice:

38 parents



5. Number of teachers (at your own and other kindergartens) informed (not actively involved) about the TFM practice:

All teachers from Kindergarten Dobrna.



6. Feedback from the teachers who implemented the practice.

It is difficult for me to comment on the opinions of the other educators. In every project, some staff members feel that certain activities are unnecessary, while others are happy to take on new challenges. Since this project has become a regular part of our kindergarten practice, everyone is expected to make an effort and, for the benefit of the children, find the most suitable solutions and adaptations in line with the project guidelines.



7. Feedback from children

The children are used to toys being removed for cleaning and are also motivated to bring waste packaging from home for play. We used everything they brought and followed the interests of individual children when they wanted to create something.

They particularly enjoyed the educational materials that we had prepared ourselves during the year. They also took relatively good care of these materials.

Over the three weeks during which the project was implemented, as the final week coincided with the holidays, the children's play developed considerably. Symbolic play became especially prominent in the kitchen area, where they actively incorporated natural materials.

The playroom appeared rather chaotic throughout the month, but there were fewer conflicts among the children because enough materials and resources were available. Since they did not have toy cars, boxes became cars. Since they did not have dolls, the drama and puppet area became more prominent, naturally encouraging them to communicate with one another through the puppets.



8. Feedback from parents.

Parents are also familiar with this practice. Only one child in the group had transferred from another kindergarten. Parents brought in materials, although a few commented that they could hardly wait for the month to end so that the children could once again bring their own toys to kindergarten.

However, an agreement had already been established at the beginning of the school year that the only toys children could bring from home were soft toys used during rest time.

Other parents expressed satisfaction and reported that their children were also trying to take care of the planet at home by reusing objects for play that they might not previously have considered using.



9. Personal reflection and “little sparkles”.

I enjoy creating educational toys, as this allows me to fully express my creativity. I always have more ideas than I am able to put into practice, but never enough time to implement them all.



10. Short presentation of the main activities for each week.

Throughout each week, emphasis was also placed on spending time outdoors.

Week 1

- Removing purchased toys and storing them in cupboards and boxes together with the children
- Introductory motivation and explanation of the purpose of the activities
- Listening to stories with environmental themes during morning circle time, rest time or outdoor activities
- Preparing activity areas together using waste and natural materials that were already available, as educators often collect and save materials in advance

Week 2

- Playing in different activity areas
- Encouraging cooperation among children
- Exploring materials and the different ways in which they could be used
- Art activities, with enough time provided for the creative process
- Bringing additional waste materials from home and incorporating them into the activity areas

Week 3

- Creating educational materials to support the development of fine motor skills and mathematical abilities
- Using the newly created educational materials in play and learning activities

Week 4

- Holiday activities with combined groups
- Trying out play materials prepared by other groups
- Peer learning between children, with children from each playroom showing visiting children how to use the materials

- Separating the waste generated during the activities into the appropriate recycling bins
- Discussing which materials and toys should be kept for the following month because of the children's continued interest



11. Photos



Kitchen corner – serving pizzas



The most enjoyable part is putting everything into one box, emptying it into a pile on the floor, and then developing construction play.



Independent use of the drama area based on the theme *News from the Forest*



Completing a Tetris puzzle by following a template



A ball maze



Inserting buttons into cut-off plastic bottles or arranging them into patterns



Counting and matching: counting how many pinecones are inside the turtle and finding the corresponding number of dots on the turtle's leg

TOY-FREE MONTH IMPLEMENTATION

Feedback and Reflection Template for Kindergarten Teachers

Name of kindergarten, city, country:

Kindergarten Dobrna, Dobrna, Slovenija

Teacher/Teachers who prepared this presentation:

Mateja Kos



1. Time and duration of the TFM practice (start and end date):

1–30 April 2026



2. Number of teachers involved in the implementation of TFM practice:

2 teachers



3. Number and age of children involved in the implementation of TFM practice

16 children, aged 3–4



4. Number of parents informed about the TFM practice:

16 parents



5. Number of teachers (at your own and other kindergartens) informed (not actively involved) about the TFM practice:

All teachers from Kindergarten Dobrna and 2 additional teachers from kindergarten in Velenje.



6. Feedback from the teachers who implemented the practice.

Implementation requires materials that educators need to plan in advance and collect, organise, and prepare systematically, with the support of parents, the wider community, and external contributors.



7. Feedback from children

Projects of this kind help children develop creativity and imagination and learn how to play with unstructured materials. This requires considerable thinking, experience, and persistence as they gradually work towards a solution or final product. In other cases, the play is not focused on producing an end result but on the process itself.



8. Feedback from parents.

Parents are generally happy to participate, although some feel that the implementation period is too long.



9. Personal reflection and “little sparkles”.

These projects are primarily based on cooperation, encouragement, and mutual learning. There is certainly still room to develop and improve the implementation. Advice, experiences, comments, encouragement, and guidance based on good practice are therefore very welcome.



10. Short presentation of the main activities for each week.

Throughout each week, emphasis was also placed on spending time outdoors.

Week 1

- Becoming familiar with different materials and waste packaging
- Collecting, observing, handling, playing with, and comparing materials

Week 2

- Grouping, sorting, and creating sequences
- Creating pictures with waste materials
- Painting cardboard tubes and making musical instruments

Week 3

- Making friendship bracelets
- Creating cars from cardboard boxes
- Painting leaves with soil
- Collecting pebbles by a stream and using them in collage activities

Week 4

- Creating pictures from waste materials
- Gluing discarded plastic forks onto cardboard packaging
- Making flowers from plastic forks
- Creating a display board using waste materials
- Making necklaces from waste materials, such as straws and beads
- Grouping waste materials according to their material: paper, cardboard, plastic, and wood
- Arranging pebbles into sequences to create a frame

TOY-FREE MONTH IMPLEMENTATION

Feedback and Reflection Template for Kindergarten Teachers

Name of kindergarten, city, country:

Kindergarten Dobrna, Dobrna, Slovenija

Teacher/Teachers who prepared this presentation:

Milena Korenak



1. Time and duration of the TFM practice (start and end date):

1–30 April 2026



2. Number of teachers involved in the implementation of TFM practice:

2 teachers (Green group)



3. Number and age of children involved in the implementation of TFM practice

21 children, aged 5–6.



4. Number of parents informed about the TFM practice:

42 parents



5. Number of teachers (at your own and other kindergartens) informed (not actively involved) about the TFM practice:

All teachers from Kindergarten Dobrna.



6. Feedback from the teachers who implemented the practice.

The children took part in preparing for the Toy-Free Month by:

- putting away and cleaning the purchased toys,
- preparing activity areas with unstructured materials,
- bringing unstructured materials to the kindergarten.

They also followed the agreement not to bring any toys from home.

A variety of waste materials was made available to the children. At first, they used these materials freely, following their own ideas and preferences. Later, we guided them in creating educational toys and other items from waste materials. The children worked out the production process themselves, while only the final objective was defined.

The objectives set for the group were partly achieved. During the Toy-Free Month, the children were noticeably more active and louder. It was therefore necessary to introduce activities thoughtfully and in a structured way while still allowing the children freedom to use their imagination.



7. Feedback from children

The Toy-Free Month presented a special challenge for the children. Their creativity became even more visible during this period. They needed additional support when playing with waste materials, while they had no difficulties using them in the creative activity areas.

During the first two weeks, the children explored the possibilities of the waste materials but then began to miss the purchased toys. With additional motivation and greater involvement from the educators in the play process and activities, we encouraged them to continue creating and playing with the materials.

The children were happy when they successfully built or assembled something from waste materials, and they were very proud of their creations.



8. Feedback from parents.

Parents did not provide any specific feedback, but they were happy to help us collect waste materials. Some pointed out that their children no longer wanted to bring their own toys to the kindergarten.



9. Personal reflection and “little sparkles”.

I learned that every group of children and every individual child is different. Some need more encouragement, while others need less. Some are more creative in expressing themselves, while others require more support.

Next time, we could provide the children with an even wider variety of unstructured materials and perhaps show them more examples of objects made from waste materials. However, too many examples might also limit their own creativity.

The Toy-Free Month is a valuable opportunity for both children and educators to express their creativity and imagination. Children greatly enjoy these activities, especially when they are given the freedom to create in their own way.



10. Short presentation of the main activities for each week.

Week 1: Becoming familiar with and sorting waste materials.

Week 2: Free creative activities and play with waste materials.

Week 3: More structured involvement of educators in creative activities and play with waste materials; thematic creative activities.

Week 4: Completing the creations and preparing an exhibition.

TOY-FREE MONTH IMPLEMENTATION

Feedback and Reflection Template for Kindergarten Teachers

Name of kindergarten, city, country: Privatkindergarten Schmetterling, Vienna, Austria

Teacher/Teachers who prepared this presentation: Eva Fichtinger



1. Time and duration of the TFM practice (start and end date):
28.07-29.08 2025 and 3.8-4.9.2026



2. Number of teachers involved in the implementation of TFM practice: 3



3. Number and age of children involved in the implementation of TFM practice (e.g. 1 group of 21 children 5-6 years old, 2 groups: 1 = 15 children 4-6 years old, 1 = 20 children 5-6 years old):

1 Group of 20 children age 2,5-6 years old



4. Number of parents informed about the TFM practice:

All parents from the group



5. Number of teachers (at your own and other kindergartens) **informed** (not actively involved) about the TFM practice:

The whole team was informed



6. Feedback from the teachers who implemented the practice.

(Keep answers short — a few sentences or bullet points are enough.)

You can use the following questions to reflect on your experience:

1. What were the main educational or learning goals of your TFM practice?

The main goal was to help students learn actively, work together, and better understand the topic. They also learned that they do not need many toys to have fun and use their imagination.

2. How did the preparation and implementation go overall? What worked well?

The lesson was well prepared and implemented successfully. Students were actively involved, enjoyed the activities, and worked well together.

3. What were the main challenges or difficulties?

Some children needed more support than others especially in the beginning. Keeping all students equally engaged also required attention. Also to motivate the whole team to do this practice as many were critical about it.

4. If you implemented it again, what would you adjust or improve?

If I implemented that again, I would organize an additional parents' evening to involve parents more in the topic. I would also suggest simple activities that families could do at home to reinforce the learning.

5. Any ideas or suggestions for the next implementation?

I would also give them more time to explore and share their ideas during the activities. I would encourage families to continue the activities at home by providing simple ideas they can do together. This would help strengthen the connection between home and kindergarten.



7. Feedback from children

(Summarize briefly — use examples or quotes if possible.)

The children gave very positive feedback and were highly engaged throughout the activities. They enjoyed exploring and creating with different materials they collected from nature, as well as recycled materials and everyday objects that would normally be thrown away. They were excited to discover that they could create their own play experiences without using traditional toys.

Some children said, "Look what I made with this old box!", "I found this stick and made something new," and "We can make toys from things we find." Other comments included, "Can we collect more things outside?" and "I want to make another one."

The children showed creativity, curiosity, and imagination while transforming simple materials into new creations. They also began to understand the value of reusing

objects and that fun and meaningful play can come from materials found in nature or items that might otherwise be thrown away.

You can use the following questions to think about how children experienced the Toy-Free Month:

What did they enjoy or engage with the most?

The children enjoyed exploring, collecting, and creating with natural and recycled materials. They especially liked using their imagination to turn simple objects into something new.

What was challenging or new for them?

Using materials without clear instructions was new for some children. They had to think creatively and find their own ways to use the materials. It was hard for them in the beginning and some didn't know what to do.

How did their behavior, skills, or creativity change from week 1 to week 4?

From week 1 to week 4, the children became more confident, independent, and creative. They started sharing more ideas and trying different ways to create.

What did they say or express about the experience?

The children shared positive comments such as, *"Look what I made!"*, *"I found this outside and made something new,"* and *"Can we do this again?"* They showed excitement and pride in their creations.



8. Feedback from parents.

How were parents involved?

Parents were informed about the project and encouraged to discuss the experience with their children and support creative play with simple, natural, and recycled materials at home.

What changes did they observe at home?

Some parents noticed that their children became more imaginative and interested in creating their own games and activities. They also started reflecting on the amount of toys available at home and the importance of offering opportunities for open-ended play.

What feedback did they give about the activity?

Parents found the activity meaningful and eye-opening, although it was also challenging

for some. Many shared that they were used to buying toys for their children and had not previously considered how everyday objects and natural materials could encourage creativity and learning. The activity helped them rethink the role of toys and appreciate the value of imagination and exploration.



9. Personal reflection and “little sparkles”.

(A few sentences are enough.)

You can use the following questions to reflect your own Toy-Free Month experience:

- What did you personally learn or gain from this experience?
- What did you enjoy or find most rewarding?
- How could you inspire others (teachers, parents, children) to join next time?
- Describe one “sparkle moment” — something meaningful, funny, or heart-warming that you’ll remember.

This experience taught me that children do not need many toys to learn, explore, and enjoy themselves. I learned the importance of giving children time and space to use their imagination and creativity with simple materials.

The most rewarding part was seeing the children become excited about creating with natural and recycled materials and feeling proud of their own ideas.

I would inspire others by sharing the positive results and showing that simple activities can create meaningful learning experiences.

One sparkle moment was seeing a child proudly say, “*I made this myself,*” while showing a creation made from materials that would normally be thrown away.



10. **Short presentation of the main activities for each week.**

(Summarize the weekly activities briefly, using either the short, structured notes OR the table on the next page to show how you implemented the TFM practice.

You can also add photos to present the activities. Important: Include photos without children’s faces.)

(Optional – you can choose this table to present the TFM practice in your kindergarten.)

Week	Activities	Materials or tools used	Notes (important aspects, reminders, tips ...)
Week 1	Discussing our project		Also tell the parents
	Putting away all the toys we could find together in the group		Kids loved doing it and collecting all the toys and putting them into a box themselves and put them to the storage room
	Finding recyclable materials from everyday objects		
	Collecting natural materials outdoors	sticks, stones, leaves, etc	
Week 2	Getting more used to not having toys :)		Giving kids space and time
	Making creations with collected materials	Collected materials	Giving small inputs when needed in the beginning
	Exploring creativity without traditional toys		
	Going outside a lot!		
Week 3			
	Sharing ideas and working together		
	Still going outside and to parks around the area		
Week 4			
	Reflection and sharing		
	Sharing favourite activities and experiences		
	Making a poster together		
	Presenting and discussing creations		



11. Photos and Videos

If you haven't already added the photos at question 10, please add at least 3 photos of the toys, materials, activities - without children's faces. Each photo must be named so it's clear what it shows (e.g., "*Building the castle with boxes*").

Putting away the toys together:



Making crafts out of recycled materials





Making a market:



Finding snails in the garden and making them a house:

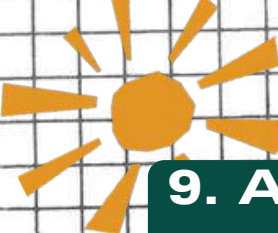


exploring with newspaper:



Time outside building a house:





9. ADDITIONAL IDEAS FOR TFM GAMES AND TOYS



“
I've noticed that my son now starts playing on his own more often. He'll grab a box, a stick, or a blanket, and just start playing something he's made up. Before, he always wanted a toy for everything. Now he often says: "I'll just make something myself."
(Parent – Kindergarten Dobrna)



Superhero Lab project: <https://superherolab.eu/results/>



Ideas for outdoor games: <https://1millionideas.com/25-creative-and-fun-backyard-game-ideas>



Fun Lab: <https://www.facebook.com/funlabapp>



DIY Cardboard Toy: Simple and Fun Tutorial:
<https://www.facebook.com/share/v/19QaZa6Jxj/>



Fishing for Waste (Ekopotencjal, Poland) – Rules and Instructions

Instructions for the Fishing for waste” game:

Make simple fishing rods from sticks and string. Use simple sticks, wooden dowels, or bamboo canes as fishing poles.

Attach a string with a small hook or clip at the end (for safety, you can use bent paper clips or similar blunt hooks).

Wash real waste items, add loops (cable ties), and place them in a blue bag/box = the “ocean.” large blue container, IKEA bag, or blue cloth to represent the ocean.

Prepare 6 bins in the right colors with labels (paper, glass, plastic & metal, bio, mixed, e-waste).

Rules:

- Catch waste from the ocean with your rod.
- Sort it into the correct bin.
- Play solo or in 2 teams – the fastest team to clean the ocean wins, if sorting is correct!

Goal: Clean the ocean, learn recycling, and have fun!





10. LITERATURE

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Toy-Free Month: Cultivating Creativity and Sustainability in Young Learners

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