PLAYING WITH BALANCE
While observing the children playing in the school garden, we noticed that they were having fun walking on a bench using it as a balance board. So we decided to propose other experiences about balance.

During and after the various experiences we asked them to describe their body, trying to make them aware of what they knew about it and how there were perceiving the feeling of balance.
We gave this tool to children without giving them any explanation, and we observed how they were using it.

*Alice*: it turns around  
*Irene*: it is for turning around  
*Teacher*: is it an easy game?  
*Alice*: it’s easy

Then we tried to step on it:

*Francesco*: you can turn on it, you do with your feet up and down  
*Alice*: you have to turn, first you step on it but it doesn’t stay still so I slip  
*Teacher*: why do you open your arms?  
*Alice*: so that I don’t fall  
*Teacher*: so what do you do on this toy?  
*Alice*: you swing
Edoardo F.: it is for doing gymnastics and you go on it with your belly... I can’t! You should turn this way (he shows how, using his hands)
Leonardo: I go on it with my knees, I have to push myself using my knees and with my hands I turn around.

Emanuele: I’m not afraid.

Edoardo P.: I’m turning around this way, this is something to turn.
Ethan: If you stand up it’s easier, this way (on his knees) it’s harder
Alessandro: you go on it lying down and you turn around with your belly
Teacher: do you want to try standing up?
Alessandro: but then I would fall... I think it is to do gymnastics, to make some tries, you should use it as a skateboard
One morning we asked to the children to take their picture as they do every day during the "Appello" (circle time) but in a different way: instead of walking, they had to jump on one foot.

Teacher: is it easy to jump on one foot?
Alessandro: I was jumping on one foot but I was about to put the other one down so it’s not so easy
Leonardo: I jumped on just one leg and I arrived to my picture without putting the other foot down
Francesco: I put one foot down
Alessandro: because when I jump on one foot sometimes I fall
Matilde: it’s hard on one leg because I jump strong and I need to put the other leg down otherwise I fall

Micole: it’s not easy because you can fall and I’m afraid to fall
Matilde: it’s hard for her because she has boots

Micole: yes, it’s because I have boots

Teacher: take them off

Micole: without the boots it’s easier, but it’s not very easy anyway
BICI SENZA PEDALI

Abbiamo proposto ai bambini di provare la balance bike per mettere alla prova il loro equilibrio.

"E' facile, si cade ma si tiene bene non cade. E' per questo che non ha pedale, la muovono con le mani che pedalam a non cadere."

"Perché serve pedale e solo l'equilibrio e le ruote che ci fa tenere."

"Con le mani ricreano il pedale e con le mani si va avanti."

"E' il pedale e non c'è il pedale non si può andare per questo non serve pedale e non cade."

"Perché non ci sono i pedali non va a cadere e non scivola."

"Non lo ci sono i pedali non va a cadere e non scivola."

"Non ci sono i pedali non ci è da cadere e non scivola."

"Certo per cadere cadono sempre quando non ha i pedali e non ci sono i pedali e non cade mai."

"Non ci sono i pedali e non ci è da cadere e non scivola."

"E' facile di più dalla muova le mani."

"E' facile che non ci sono i pedali e non cade mai."
THE BALANCE BIKE (with no pedals)

We proposed to children to try the “balance bikes”, in order to test their balance.

*Teacher*: is it easy to go with these bikes?

*Emanuele*: it’s hard because I was falling from the bike.

*Irene*: I fell because it was too high.

*Melisa*: it was easy, I went fast.

*Irene*: **with the pedals it’s less tiring, with the feet it’s harder**

*Melisa*: I have it with the pedals at home.

*Emanuele*: I have it with orange pedals.

*Teacher*: try to go as fast as you can.

*Emanuele*: my bike was faster.

*Melisa*: mine was faster.
Teacher: what do you move when you go by bike?
Melisa: I was moving the pedals with the wheels
Teacher: so there are pedals?
Melisa: there are wheels
Irene: I was moving my legs
Emanuele: the legs
Irene: my legs are fast, if there aren't the pedals, I need to move the legs but I fall
Emanuele: I was fast but I was falling down
Teacher: is it easy?
Matilde: it’s easy, if you fall but you keep your hands still it doesn’t fall. It’s easier to go with my bike because this one doesn’t have those things that pedal, mine has those that pedal and it doesn’t fall
Sofia J.: the bike I have at home is easier because it has four wheels, this one has just two wheels and it happens that it falls down
Teacher: try to make a ride as fast as you can
Matilde: I’m very fast
Micole: with my legs I was going not very fast because Matilde and I were close to each other and we started together
Matilde: yes we were going fast, fast with the legs and with the steering wheel
Teacher: with your bike at home do you go faster?
Sofia J.: I go faster at home because I have the training wheels
Micole: with my bike because it has training wheels
Alessandro: I was about to fall down, these bikes always fall down, mine at home doesn’t fall because it has pedals. This is why I can’t go fast
Teacher: why do you fall?
Alessandro: maybe because it hasn’t the pedals
Michelle: because yes, I fall!
Ethan: Alle this makes the brake
Alessandro: there is only one brake… look I can go fast, but I fall
Teacher: but is this easy to go with these bikes?
Alessandro: no, see it falls, it hasn’t the pedals
Michelle: no because you fall
Ethan: it’s easier than my bike at home it has the locker
Alessandro: my bike too has the locker
Michelle: mine too
Alessandro: I can go also without holding to anything only with the wheels
Teacher: oh but you fell?!

Alessandro: it wasn’t me, it was the bike who fell. Mine at home doesn’t fall because it has pedals

Teacher: try to go as fast as you can

Ethan: with my feet I was going fast

Alessandro: I was staying still but then I was going fast too... the wheels were going fast

Michelle: I was doing fast with the bike...

**I was going with these wheels but there are no pedals. You have to go only with your feet.**

Alessandro: yes, there are these things with the top, and the wire, but I don’t know what it is for, maybe to keep the wheels

Michelle: but there are no pedals, that is the brake
Cristian: oh oh oh you fall!
Leonardo: because you didn’t take the training wheels (misspelled), because with training wheels you don’t fall
Cristian: shall we make a race?
Teacher: but is it easy?
Leonardo: no because at home I don’t fall, here I do
Enea: this is hard because it hasn’t the training wheels
Teacher: only the training wheels are missing?
Leonardo: yes I need the training wheels
Cristian: me too
Teacher: try to go as fast as you can
Leonardo: I was going faster, I was going fast with the wheels
Enea: I was moving the wheels
Cristian: it was going slow to me
Leonardo: but I want the training wheels for the bikes
Teacher: do you go faster with the bike with the training wheels?
Leonardo: yes yes
Enea: yes
Cristian: yes
Edoardo P.: you need the pedals, because without them we fall down
Francesco: this way you fall, with the pedals you don’t

Teacher: you fall with these bikes?
Francesco: yes I was falling
Edoardo P.: the bike was falling, I could avoid falling down

Teacher: but is it easy?
Edoardo P.: it’s hard
Francesco: because without the pedals there is only the seat and the wheels that make us keep up
Sofia F.: it’s a bit hard because without the pedals
Francesco: with my bike it’s easy because there are pedals

Teacher: try to go very fast. How can you do that?
Francesco: I need to turn the wheels
Sofia F.: make the feet fast, then big push with your feet, then take your feet up, and then you brake
Edoardo P.: I was running with the bike
We presented a new tool to the children and we asked them what it is.

Alessandro: it’s a skateboard
Sofia J.: a skateboard for playing

We tried it...

Alessandro: to me it wasn’t so easy, I was about to fall like with the bikes
Edoardo F.: to me it was easy, I was doing little steps with the skateboard, I fell only once
Sofia J.: I was falling because the “skatebad” was too slippery

Teacher: how could you push yourselves forward?
Alessandro: to go fast you need to go on cement. To go forward I was using my feet I was doing this way (he moves the feet back and forward) it means going fast
Sofia J.: I was going with just one foot
Edoardo F.: I was going forward when I was pushing with one foot

Teacher: were you afraid to fall?
Alessandro: I wasn’t
Sofia J.: I was, it was slippery
Ethan: yes
Vincenzo: it’s a “skerbit”
Sofia F.: with the skateboard you slip
Irene: I have it also at home but I was going slow
Teacher: why?
Irene: because then you slip
Francesco: if I were going fast I would fall

Teacher: was it easy?
Irene: Sami tried but for him it wasn’t easy
Melisa: no but I was going faster
Vincenzo: it wasn’t easy, you could hear a noise

Teacher: how do you use it?
Melisa: with a foot up and one down and then one foot has to go forward
Irene: the foot that is down pushes and walks... look I can balance but then it moves and I fall (she tries to stay with both feet on it). Then I totter because I’m pushing myself with two feet

Teacher: what does it mean to balance?
Irene: that you never fall
Vincenzo: but you have to do to push with a foot
Francesco: you don’t fall you balance staying still like this with your arms
Melisa: open arms
Sofia F.: it is something you keep
Melisa: balance means open arms
In the school garden we mounted a slackline and proposed it to children, without explaining it again. Every child used his creativity to explore different ways to use it.

*Matilde:* it’s a long rope

*Alessandro:* that one is attached to trees. There is a glass thing in the middle of the line

*Micole:* it’s dangerous, you fall

*Irene:* that one is for going on it standing up

*Matilde:* you can’t stand up because you fall, you can’t stand up

*Leonardo:* to go standing up you put one foot on it, another one on it and then you become taller like the trees

*Micole:* it is for going this (she climbs over with a foot)

*Edoardo F.:* it is for walking on it with two feet and then you jump
Leonardo: I lifted a leg after the other one, but I was about to fall, but I didn’t fall
Francesco: I attached myself to the branch and if I teared away I would fall
Alessandro: to stay on it, you would need many branches
ALSO "APPELLO" (CIRCLE TIME) BECAME A MOMENT TO EXPERIMENT BALANCE AND MOVEMENT

"Appello" at the park

We moved to Resistenza Park for a whole morning and we started with “appello” like every other day. When the teacher was calling, children had to jump the ditch in order to go and get their photos.
The teacher was saying to each child how he should jump (on one or two feet) and on which colored dots to go in order to take his photo for “appello”.
Leonardo: I was doing the “ruotola”, I was with my belly down and I was trying to be a turtle. Also Edo F. was rolling. When we slip, we put our hands down. But I had my legs up and also my hands.

Teacher: but were you leaning on something?

Leonardo: I was leaning only with my belly
During a moment of free play Leonardo tried to step on two tin cans trying to balance. Then we asked him to show the game to his mates, who were cheering for him.

*Alice:* Leo, stay still so you don’t fall!
Then everyone wanted to try
BALANCE AND LIFE SKILLS

Through these proposals that made children experiment balance and discovering what it is, we supported the development of some life skills, like:

- **Solve a problem**: We proposed the various tools without explaining them how to use them: the children themselves had to try until they found a way to use them, also taking advantage of their mates’ ideas.

- **Creativity**: Everyone used a lot of creativity in using them.
Self-consciousness about their own limits. Children never pushed themselves over when they weren’t feeling safe, they just asked for help to their mates or to the teacher.

Coping with emotions. Most of all with the fear to fall.

Relational abilities. Being able to tell with your words what you did with your body.