

## ORIENTEERING

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The ability to orient oneself in space starts at a very young age. The child orients himself/herself in space through the body in indoor environments (roll, slither, crawl, run) and learns to move among others and among the objects of the classroom.

The experience of orienteering allows children, from a very young age, to become attentive observers and to recognise the reference points in the surrounding environment (classroom, hall and garden) and, later, with frequent outings in the neighbourhood and in the city, when they will attend preschool.

The children observe and tell you what they see: a house with a red gate, the supermarket where they go with their mother, and even what they might not see again at a second visit, for example the fire engine with the siren or dog poo on the footpath. Orienteering occurs through sight, but also through touch and fragrances (trees and plants to touch, flowerbeds).

On their outings, the children tell you what they have seen, attempting to narrate a story in which the events happen in sequence. "We saw a pole, then a bench, then two roads and we took the straight one." In verbalisation, topological (above-below, high-low, right-left) and dimensional (near-far, narrow-wide, tall-short) elements emerge.

This precious verbalisation is then set on a map that keeps track of their memories. The maps can refer to any environment (school hall – school garden, public park, school to home route).

The map can be individual, where each child tracks his/her own personal memory made of reference points, traced through drawings sketched on a moleskine or notebooks which children often carry with them. The map becomes collective when the children decide together, through demanding discussions, which reference points of their route to choose, helping themselves with visual supports such as drawings and photographs previously taken by them or by the teachers.

Reading their maps and, subsequently, the maps of the city, they are able to indicate a point on the map and reach it. At times, the teacher arrives to a previously set point and asks the children to take him/her back to the school pretending not to remember the way. The orientation ability was also recognised by the parents during the weekend because they wanted to see the places already visited with the class and the children showed that they remembered the route.

Orienteering is a sport that was born in Scandinavia. The goal is to achieve set control points (lanterns), in a large open area, with the assistance of a map that represents the area and to develop individual route choices.

Several projects, described herein, tell of several games in which the children look for the lanterns set on one point of the map.

We can state that doing orienteering at preschool transmits extraordinary skills to the child. It hones the ability to concentrate, reason and take decisions independently. From the relational point of view, orienteering strongly stimulates cooperation between children who help each other in case of indecision and difficulty and it increases self-esteem and self-confidence.