Activity Plan for UiO’s Kindergarten

Play, joy and humor in a motivating learning environment!
# Table of Contents

Welcome to the University kindergarten ................................................................................. 3

The purpose, values and tasks of the kindergarten ................................................................. 3
  * The kindergarten’s statement of purpose .................................................................. 3
  * The kindergarten’s values and pedagogical activities ............................................. 3

Care .......................................................................................................................................... 4
  * Adaptation ...................................................................................................................... 5
  * Collaboration between young and older children .................................................... 5

Children’s participation ........................................................................................................... 6

Play ........................................................................................................................................... 7

Learning .................................................................................................................................. 8

Learning areas ........................................................................................................................ 9
  * Communication, language and text .......................................................................... 10
  * Body, movement and health ...................................................................................... 10
  * Art, culture and creativity .......................................................................................... 10
  * Nature, environment and technology ...................................................................... 11
  * Ethics, religion and philosophy ................................................................................ 12
  * Local communities and society ................................................................................ 12
  * Numbers, spaces and shapes ..................................................................................... 13

Use of ICT ............................................................................................................................... 13

The transition from kindergarten to school ........................................................................ 14

Observation and planning .................................................................................................... 15

Documentation and assessment ............................................................................................ 15

Goals of competence ............................................................................................................. 17
Welcome to the University kindergarten

This is an activity plan that outlines the pedagogical content of the kindergarten. The plan applies to the entire kindergarten and takes precedence over the semester plan and annual plan of the individual departments.

Practical information can be found in a separate information booklet.

The purpose, values and tasks of the kindergarten

The kindergarten’s pedagogical activities are subject to the Norwegian Kindergarten Act laid down by the Ministry of Education and Research. The Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens comprises the regulations that accompany the Kindergarten Act. Our activity plan is a local adaptation of these.

The Kindergarten’s statement of purpose

The Kindergarten shall, in collaboration and close understanding with the home, safeguard the children’s need for care and play, and promote learning and formation as a basis for an all-round development. The Kindergarten shall be based on fundamental values in the Christian and humanist heritage and tradition, such as respect for human dignity and nature, on intellectual freedom, charity, forgiveness, equality and solidarity, values that also appear in different religions and beliefs and are rooted in human rights.

The children shall be able to develop their creative zest, sense of wonder and need to investigate. They shall learn to take care of themselves, each other and nature. The children shall develop basic knowledge and skills. They shall have the right to participate in accordance with their age and abilities.

The Kindergartens shall meet the children with trust and respect, and acknowledge the intrinsic value of childhood. They shall contribute to well-being and joy in play and learning, and shall be a challenging and safe place for community life and friendship. The Kindergarten shall promote democracy and equality and counteract all forms of discrimination.

Kindergarten Act Section 1, Purpose)

Amended in Act No.119 of 19 December 2008 (entry into force 1 August 2010 pursuant to decree No. 828 of 18 June 2010)

The kindergarten’s values and pedagogical activities

The care, upbringing and instruction in kindergartens shall promote human equality, equal rights, intellectual freedom, tolerance, health and an understanding of sustainable development.

(Kindergarten Act Section 2, Content of kindergartens – unofficial translation)

In the University kindergarten children and parents shall encounter the same basic values in all
departments. The kindergarten staff will bring with them their own attitudes, experience and values, but in practice these must be compatible with the kindergarten’s fundamental principle:

We will create the conditions for a playful, learning and participative community through relationships that demonstrate our acknowledgement of each other.

Interaction is given high priority in the University kindergarten. We have worked for many years to develop respectful communication related to interaction among children, between adults and children, and among adults. Our aim is to make all those we encounter in everyday life feel that they are acknowledged and accepted as who they are. Children have a natural attitude towards humour and joy, and we as adults must support, encourage and nurture this. We want joy and humour to be key components of the interactive relationships in the kindergarten. In a community such as the kindergarten children can learn to show consideration for others’ wishes and intentions, while at the same time being given the opportunity to influence their own daily activities by “letting their voices be heard” and being listened to.

The interaction and sense of community will bear evidence of the adults’ view of care, participation, play and learning. The following sections will provide more details on this.

Care

Children are entitled to care and shall be treated with care. The staff at kindergartens have a professional ethical obligation to provide care to all children at their kindergarten. The obligation of care requires staff to be attentive and open to the uniqueness of each individual child, and to the uniqueness of the situation and the group.

(Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens, 2006:23).

We want to be aware of each individual child in the group, to provide closeness, to be attentive and to show acknowledgement and empathy. The most important needs of each child will be met so that their intrinsic value will be nurtured. Care will characterize every situation in everyday life. The children will be given the encouragement, help, comfort and protection they need to ensure the establishment of the necessary trust towards both adults and the other children. This is not only a matter of the relationships between children and adults, but also of the children’s care for each other. This can be expressed by making it possible for them to help each other with daily tasks or to
give comfort to another child who may be upset. Children often express how they feel – both in body language and verbal language. We will take their emotional expressions seriously; we must accept anger and frustration as well as joy and humour. This requires staff who demonstrate awareness and understanding and who focus on the child’s perspective. In our view this is important and fundamental for building a child’s self-esteem.

**Adaptation**

We place emphasis on the children experiencing security and trust in their relationships with adults, other children and the kindergarten environment. To make the transition to the kindergarten as smooth as possible, the child will be assigned a contact person from the department staff. As far as practicalities allow, this adult will welcome the child in the morning, play with the child, and will be the person who takes care of the child’s dressing and undressing, rest periods and the like. This is the procedure during the first period. Gradually this adult will be the child’s link to making contact with more adults and with the other children. The contact person will also constitute a link between the home and the kindergarten, a situation where important information can be exchanged. There are differences in the length of the adaptation period since it will vary from one child to another.

We also have an adaptation period on the transition between the department for small children and that for older children. In late spring, when it has been clarified which children are to be transferred to the building for older children, the children visit their respective departments for a period of time. They do this together with one of the staff they know from the building for small children. This helps to create a sense of security and predictability, and the children thus have plenty of time to get to know the staff and children as well as the routines and tasks in the department where they are to start in the autumn. In addition each child has his/her own individual ‘helpmate’ who is one of the oldest children in the kindergarten. These helpmates can give the new arrivals guidance, help them and make them familiar with the new surroundings. In the adaptation period we give priority to what the helpmates think is important for the new children to know. We want bonds between the children to be formed in this way.

**Collaboration between young and older children**

Our aim is to view the kindergarten as one unit, even though it is physically divided into two buildings, and we therefore have a visiting scheme between the departments. This can take the form of spontaneous or planned visits for both individuals and groups. Through this we want to strengthen the ‘we’ feeling in the kindergarten, to maintain established bonds and to create new ones. We also have joint play periods in the outdoor area when the children feel safe in their groups and are used to everyday kindergarten life. This can also create relationships across the age groups.
Moreover, the collaboration between the young and the older children is intended to enable siblings to meet each other in the kindergarten setting.

**Children’s participation**

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was incorporated into Norwegian legislation in 2003. The Kindergarten Act was revised by the Norwegian parliament in 2005, and a new provision was drawn up that came into force from 1 January 2006. The provision is as follows:

> Children in kindergartens shall have the right to express their views on the day-to-day activities of the kindergarten. Children shall regularly be given the opportunity to take active part in planning and assessing the activities of the kindergarten. The children’s views shall be given due weight according to their age and maturity.

(Kindergarten Act Section 3, Children’s right to participate).

Assisting, contributing, helping, influencing and taking active part are synonymous with participating. These terms show that participation does not mean that each individual child is always allowed to decide what is best for him/herself. Participation has a wider meaning than that of simply offering children different choices. The staff must endeavour to give the children physical and mental space so that they will be visible in a social context. The children shall participate in influencing the content of the kindergarten through their ideas, interests, knowledge and skills. They shall feel that they are of importance for the community, and that their experience counts. In this way we can nurture children’s curiosity, creativity and desire to learn. Allowing children to participate entails them having to give consideration to others’ choices and opinions while also experiencing that they themselves are of significance and have the power to influence the situation.

Allowing children to participate does not mean that we as adults will be vague and non-committal so that the children alone assume responsibility for the content of the kindergarten. We will contribute input and ideas, but always in close collaboration with the children. Hence we will not only see the children, but also attempt to understand their intentions. We must use the children’s own ways of expressing themselves as a starting point, and these will vary from person to person. We must listen and try to interpret their body language, and be observant of their interests, actions, different expressions, and gradually also their verbal language. When we work on eliciting children’s viewpoints it is important that what they express has consequences for our pedagogical work. A close interaction between children and adults will enable us to identify joint goals, content and methods for this work. In other words, it is not only the adults who are responsible for the direction the kindergarten’s content and methods are to take. Allowing children to participate
requires adults who show empathy, respect and tolerance. This will provide an excellent platform for these values to be reflected in relationships between the children. We must ensure that the children are not ‘forced’ to decide if they are uncertain. If this should become a practice, the children will have little opportunity to express uncertainty, or they can be made responsible for decisions they are not capable of judging the consequences of. We adults must use critical reflection in our work with children and their participation, and this means we must allow room for flexibility in our planning.

**Play**

Play is the most important form of expression for children, and it must therefore occupy a dominant place in their life in the kindergarten. Section 2 of the Kindergarten Act states:

*Kindergartens shall provide children with opportunities for play, self-expression and meaningful experiences and activities in a safe and at the same time challenging environment.*

Play is a general human phenomenon in which children possess considerable competence and commitment. Play can include joy and humour and is a fundamental form of life and learning that can strengthen children’s vitality. Through their bodily actions, children as young as the age of one show that they understand each other’s purpose and meaning in mutual play. They shout and laugh, dance and clap themselves into relationships, friendship and communities. At the same time as play is children’s personal aesthetic expression, which has its own intrinsic value, it also has an instrumental function: learning through play. Through play children can challenge themselves physically in both fine and gross motor skills. They also learn to wait their turn, show care for or receive care from others, recognize and understand other people’s feelings, practise seeing things from other people’s perspectives, postpone their own needs and wishes, tackle conflicts, take the initiative, participate, assert their own opinions and needs, feel joy and relaxation, understand the signals of play and take on different roles. Children can also express and process impulses and impressions through play.

By creating the conditions for a good community of play, we provide opportunities for children to establish friendship. Being able to take part in play and acquire friends is fundamental for children’s well-being and meaning making in the kindergarten. We regard play as the most important area for learning, and we therefore make goal-oriented efforts to develop friendship relationships and to give all the children experience of play.

The content of the kindergarten should inspire the children’s imagination, creativity and
development. We will provide time and space so that play can develop creatively. It is important to bring to light the opportunities that exist so that the children are able to express themselves and master interaction with other children. Our view is that this is affected by adults’ generosity and that the space we give provides flexibility. We feel that allowing space for physical play on the same footing as other forms of play is a prerequisite for meeting the needs of all children – girls as well as boys. The complex society of today gives children many impressions. In play they are able to express themselves on their own terms without adults setting too narrow limits for how they are to carry out an activity or express themselves in play.

We aim to give children the experience of being able to resolve conflicts or of being given guidance from staff to solve problems that arise during play. This requires active adults who assess both the situations and their own role.

**Learning**

Learning takes place throughout life and in most of the settings we are involved in, and is a basic requirement for our development as human beings.

*Kindergartens shall provide basic knowledge and skills in key and relevant areas.*

*Kindergartens shall nurture children’s curiosity, creativity and desire to learn and offer challenges based on the child’s interests, knowledge and skills.*

*(Kindergarten Act Section 2, Content of kindergartens)*

The learning that takes place in kindergartens gives children informal and formal knowledge that is reflected in their relationships, knowledge and skills. Children learn by participating actively in different learning processes, and we can see that the day-to-day situations in particular provide opportunities for considerable learning.

Our aim is to create a motivating learning environment where children learn from other children and adults and are inspired by them. Children thirst for knowledge; they are curious and often have a genuine desire to learn. It is therefore vital for us that staff meet each child where he or she currently stands, and that they follow up the children’s curiosity and their need to investigate. This means that there must not be too many planned activities: time must be allocated for wonderment and philosophizing – not least in ‘here and now’ situations.

We offer various projects in which we give children the opportunity to influence the content. This may be in connection with the various learning areas or with more specific areas that we want to give children knowledge and experience of. Shorter and longer projects can be run parallel to these, arising from the children’s interests – either through something we observe in the children’s group
or something that an individual child has brought to our notice.

As adults we must share our knowledge and experience, but we also aim to focus on how learning takes place among the children themselves. We know that children motivate and imitate each other through play, and we want to create frameworks that enable them to guide and learn from each other.

Children have different skills that those in their peer group can benefit from, and they often employ approaches that can be clearer and more specific than those of adults. This means that we must give the children time, space and a sense of security in day-to-day kindergarten activities in order to create good conditions for them to learn from each other.

We want to create a safe environment that acknowledges the children so that they develop respect and tolerance for their own and others’ skills and competence and feel secure enough to ask questions if there is anything they wonder about. By behaving in an encouraging and supportive manner we aim to motivate the children to work on what they struggle with. We want all the children to experience coping and to regard themselves as valuable members of the kindergarten community.

**Learning areas**

The framework plan for kindergartens (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006) outlines seven different learning areas. The purpose of working on these areas is as follows:

*Kindergartens shall give children knowledge in key and relevant areas. Kindergartens shall nurture children’s curiosity, creativity and desire to learn and offer challenges based on the children’s interests, knowledge and skills.*

*(Kindergarten Act Section 2, Content of kindergartens)*

The areas cover a wide field and will seldom be employed in isolation. Several subjects can also be represented simultaneously in a project or in day-to-day kindergarten activities. The framework plan does not provide guidelines for how this is to be carried out, but there are wide opportunities for alternative processes. Actions and reflections connected to the learning areas often occur through the social interaction that takes place in play and daily activities. Adaptation of the learning areas must take place on the basis of the children’s prerequisites and interests and the local society. We also regard this as part of the child’s participation.
Communication, language and text
Developing good language is an important part of the content of kindergartens. Communication takes place through an interplay of receiving and interpreting messages and sending messages oneself. Both verbal and non-verbal communication play a key role in developing rich language. Varied and rich experiences are decisive for understanding concepts and connections. We want to provide space and time for reading aloud, conversations, songs, rhymes and rules. We will give the children varied experiences of the world of language by paving the way for an active use of language and also by being good language role models: listening, using our imagination and being open for the children’s input into language journeys. In addition we work on the written language and on creating texts, where the children experience having their thoughts and experiences written down with the help of an adult.

Body, movement and health
Children are physically active, and they often express themselves though their bodies. Through physical activity children learn about the world and about themselves. Through sensory impressions and movement they gain experience, skills and knowledge in various areas. The contact they have with others often starts with body language and body signals. They run, climb, dance and often have a mutual language through the body. We want to inspire the children to seek out physical challenges by creating suitable conditions in the environment. We also have regular access to the gym at Blindern. Going out for walks and spending time outdoors at the kindergarten is an important part of our day-to-day activities. We regard meeting others in physical activity as a means of increasing tolerance for being close to each other. By ensuring that the children are given the opportunity to explore and challenge their own physical skills, we want them to experience the joy and mastery of movement. Along with a good diet, alternation between rest and activity is important for the development of a healthy body.

Art, culture and creativity
We place emphasis on giving the children the opportunity to experience art and culture and to express themselves aesthetically. In our view, experiencing cultural events together and doing or creating shared activities promotes a feeling of belonging. Rich experiences of art, culture and
aesthetics will give children a multitude of opportunities for sensory perception, experience, experimentation, creative activities, thoughts and communication. Children create their own culture which can be types of play, forms of communication and humour. We want to be aware of such modes of expression and to meet and accept them.

Our kindergarten works a lot with aesthetic learning areas. Over the years we have accrued a wide range of competencies in this field. This can be expressed through what we do in our everyday activities: songs, music, dance, arts and crafts, drama, visual arts, playing with language etc. These activities take place in both formal and informal situations. As a supplement to this we visit theatres, cinemas and museums in the city. In our view it is important to experience aesthetic and cultural activities since they give great joy and enhance the spirit of belonging, as well as providing inspiration for playing and learning. It is important to see the whole person – as creative and as having numerous possibilities for expressing him/herself.

*Nature, environment and technology*

Nature provides a multitude of experiences and activities at all times of the year and in all weathers. Nature is a source of varied experiences that can create the foundation for positive relationships. Encounters with the natural environment can also provide inspiration for aesthetic expressions. This learning area helps children to become familiar with and gain an understanding of plants, animals, landscape, seasons and environmental preservation. We motivate the children to develop a sense of wonder and to experiment and systemise, in addition to conversing with them on how our surroundings function and are mutually dependent.

Walks in the forest and explorations of our outdoor area provide the opportunity for experiences and wonder. We study everything from elk droppings, snails in brick walls, woodlice we find under beams, rubbish in the forest and decomposition to water that freezes to form ice. Children and adults must encourage each other to investigate the diversity of nature. We also reflect on and talk about how we can take care of nature. Together with the children we always sort our rubbish at source for recycling.
**Ethics, religion and philosophy**

These subjects contribute to forming the ways in which we perceive the world and other people, and affect our values and attitudes. Children and adults must reflect on and create experiences of the diversity that is represented in the kindergarten. We want to view differences as a resource for the community. Differences can be expressed in both linguistic and cultural terms, as well as through the individual’s personality and distinctive characteristics.

Kindergartens shall help children to acquire society’s fundamental norms and values, and shall ensure that they develop tolerance and respect for each other’s culture and religion. We must create opportunities for conversations that reflect the children’s wonder, and must allow the children to philosophize on subjects they are speculating about and on questions that arise. In our view it is important to listen to their thoughts and to be supportive and active participants in their philosophizing. We must have an ethical approach in our interaction with the children, which entails staff taking an active role in which we reflect on and are aware of the extent of the influence we have as role models.

**Local communities and society**

Children’s participation in the internal life of the kindergarten may be their first step towards gaining an understanding and experience of taking part in a democratic society. The children shall experience that everyone, regardless of their age and circumstances, forms part of and contributes to the kindergarten community. Moreover, the kindergarten shall help to ensure that children approach the world outside their families and their home with trust and curiosity. We give priority to exploring the kindergarten’s local environment, in the forest and in the city. The kindergarten is not located in the children’s local area but close to their parents’ workplace. The University of Oslo represents a diversity of occupational groups and projects that the kindergarten wishes to make use of.

Through various projects we become familiar with the different cultures, languages and societies
that are represented in the kindergarten. The kindergarten also sponsors an SOS children’s village in Russia. In the older children’s department the children create a café with help of the staff and have displays to sell the products they have made. The money from the sale is sent to the children’s village. The children thus gain an insight into and an understanding of how children in other societies can live, and they experience the pleasure of helping others.

Equality in the pedagogical work is a key component of this learning area. We want the children to experience that boys and girls are equally important for the community and that everyone should be given equal opportunities. This requires an aware staff who can assist the children to operate across traditional gender role patterns.

**Numbers, spaces and shapes**

Children are preoccupied with numbers and counting. They explore spaces and shapes, and they form arguments and search for connections. Children develop their mathematical skills through play, experimentation and everyday activities. Kindergartens therefore have a responsibility for encouraging children in their own investigations and for facilitating early and good stimulation. The task of the adults comprises strengthening and supporting the children’s curiosity, love of mathematics and desire to explore mathematical connections. We can use mathematical terms in everyday life: bigger than, smaller than, how many, how big, what shape etc. Such terms can be woven into songs, conversations, rhymes and rules as well as into literature. Moreover we can use games, bricks and other suitable material for classifying, sorting and the like. The varied use of ICT can further promote the interest in numbers, spaces and shapes.

**Use of ICT**

The *Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens* states that children in kindergartens should be given the opportunity to experience that digital tools can be a source of play, communication and gathering information. We are aware that people have different ways of learning, and we want to support children’s desire to learn through the use of ICT (Information and Communication Technology). We aim to give the children digital competence so that they can make use of digital tools and media in a creative and critical manner.

We have stationary PCs that are connected to the internet in the building for the older children. We use the internet primarily to search for pictures and information on topics the children are preoccupied with. There is always an adult with the children in these situations. We can also use the net to access various websites that offer serious games and tasks for children of kindergarten age. In addition we make use of different learning programmes that develop children’s concepts of
classification and coordination and their ability to concentrate. Good computer games make children active through various challenges, and they are given the chance to experience joy, creativity and mastery of the situation. Different drawing programmes, stories told in pictures, short animated films or music programmes provide such opportunities. We can see that children’s interest in the computer often creates a positive social atmosphere in which they motivate and guide each other. We also have digital cameras and colour printers in the kindergarten that we use together with the children.

Many people regard different types of media technology as a threat to free play. We regard it as something that comes in addition to play and as a new language we must learn to master. Children need support from adults to acquire new skills or new ways of thinking – primarily to ensure that the software does not make them passive in the long term. ICT in kindergartens is in continuous development, and this requires the staff to constantly have a critical attitude to the use and content of digital tools.

**The transition from kindergarten to school**

We have a number of special activities designed for the oldest children (the seniors). Through these we want to give the children the basic competence they need to meet new challenges in the best possible manner. They include undertakings that entail creative and aesthetic activities where in creative processes the children are given opportunities to develop their own creativity and to gain experience of mastering different situations and of the social community. In addition they develop their fine motor skills through trying out different painting and drawing techniques and working with clay. The permanent projects are: pottery / Gustav Vigeland and painting / Edvard Munch. The seniors also attend skiing school and go on a trip to a cabin as a conclusion to their time at the kindergarten.

Apart from these activities, the oldest children have a Senior Club where the focus is on preparing them for school. By this we mean activities such as:

- Practice in receiving information in a group and in carrying out specific tasks in different situations.
- Play involving rules: being in focus, following given rules, waiting their turn, collaborating.
- Activities involving the use of language: daring to come forward to express their own thoughts and opinions.
- Mathematical and linguistic terms through play.
We want to create a safe learning environment where there is room for the children to express their individuality. We motivate the children to support and encourage each other, and through these senior activities we hope the children will be well prepared for starting school. Although many of them will not be going to school together, we believe that positive experience of making friends is a good starting point when new friendships are to be formed.

**Observation and planning**

One of our most important ways of achieving good planning is to participate, listen and observe in the children’s groups. We obtain information through conversations with the children and observation. To make it possible for us to understand, we must train our ‘hearing’, i.e. we must have time to stop in the here and now and ask ourselves what the child wants to communicate and what his/her intentions are. Through observation and planning we can achieve an appropriate use of the kindergarten’s human and material resources. We use department meetings and leader meetings to plan the pedagogical content of the kindergarten, and we also have joint staff meetings where we discuss and reflect on various pedagogical topics. The head of each department has the main responsibility for carrying out the plans in the respective department in close collaboration with other department staff.

The new framework plan for the content and tasks of the kindergarten also gives parents more opportunity to participate than was previously the case. In addition to open communication on a daily basis, parent meetings can be an excellent arena for them to give their viewpoints, wishes and feedback on the pedagogical activities. Parents can thus contribute to the planning work. We also want to be able to use the parents’ knowledge and competence in everyday kindergarten activities – for example in project work.

Documentation, reflection and systematic assessment also form the basis of the planning, in addition to conversations with children and with parents.

**Documentation and assessment**

The documentation of kindergartens can provide information for parents, children and the University as the kindergarten authority on the content of the kindergarten. An ethical perspective must be used as a basis for the documentation of the children’s play, learning and work. We must be sensitive and respectful regarding what the individual child says and what should be documented. The child must have the opportunity to influence forms of documentation. All written information is shredded when the child leaves our kindergarten. Observation, planning, assessment and documentation must form the basis of a critical and reflective practice so that we can create
professional development and change.

Methods of documentation and assessment will vary from one department to another and from year to year. Examples can be conversations with the children, what the children express in the form of different displays, making up fairytales/drawing, and their own reflections on a story/fairytale/experience (creating text), photomontages and practice with stories.

In addition, weekly plans are drawn up, as well as monthly reports, semester or annual plans and an activity plan. Nonetheless we regard the daily contact between the children and the staff, and between the parents and the staff, as the most fundamental source of our documentation and assessment.

We conduct evaluations regularly at department meetings, and we hold two annual meetings where we evaluate the past semester based on our semester or annual plans.
We hope the children will in the course of their time in kindergarten acquired a good basic competence through:

- Positive experiences with establishing friendships and good relations
- Flexibility and empathy
- Tolerance, consideration and respect
- Experience of mastering
- Creative and constructive processes
- Song and music
- Experience of making choices
- Establishing independence
- Stories, fairytales and conversations
- Commencing understanding of letters and numbers
- Exploring and curiosity
- Experience of joy with out-door activities and understanding of environment protection

Pay, joy and humor in a motivating learning environment!