

This document is part of an experimental project I am carrying out at The First 1,000 Days, a newsletter that takes on the perspective of children. If you're interested in finding out more about the way I write stories, you can sign up to my mailing list [here](#).

How does this work? This document will change and evolve constantly. You can read through as I prepare it to transform it into a series, you can ask questions, make comments, requests or observations.

The only rule to comment here is to respect others.

I look forward to your input!

Thanks,

Irene Caselli

The First 1,000 Days

P.S. I have borrowed the idea from my friends and supporters at [Slow News](#) in Italy. Grazie, Alberto!

Do we need early education spaces?

Felipito Tacatún is learning to write. As he practices his elaborate “z”s and curvy “m”s, all of a sudden, a letter pops out of his notebook and starts singing and dancing along the lines of the page. When Felipito asks the letter what it is, the letter answers that she is a “plapla”. Felipito is surprised: there is no “plapla” in the alphabet he learnt at school. So what now?

This is the beginning of a short story by María Elena Walsh, the late Argentine writer whose songs and stories are a staple for many Argentine children.

When Felipito shows the singing and dancing “plapla” to his teacher, total chaos ensues in the school, with every pupil lined up to see the letter. And now, says the story, “plapla”s don’t appear in the alphabet, and every time that a child by accident writes one, teachers lock these unruly letters away so that nobody finds out. “Letters have not been made to dance, but to keep quiet one next to the other, haven’t they?”, ends the story.

Whenever I hear the story [read out loud by Walsh herself](#) together with my son Lorenzo, who is a big fan of her work, I always end up reflecting about what role creativity plays in our early education spaces and how many creative “plaplas” we sacrifice to maintain the order that is needed to make schools work.

This is one of the initial questions that has prompted me to ask myself about early education spaces. (Felipito may already be in primary school, but nowadays letters are taught already at kindergarten level in many countries worldwide.)

With the coronavirus outbreak, many parents have become more involved in their children's education because they've been at home with them following what they do on a daily basis, and many parents have started asking whether early education spaces are necessary at all and whether home-learning can be more effective. At the same time, Covid has also left clear that public schools in many countries serve not only as places of learning, but they are places where children get their one meal a day, or where they can get extra support, especially when dealing with disabilities. And then let me also state the obvious: parents who have a full-time job and have no other childcare available *need* early education spaces to create time so they can earn a salary.

In 2019 I wrote [a short piece](#) about the need for free daycare for all children. At the time I was still at The Correspondent, and many members pushed back against my piece saying that money shouldn't only go to daycare centers but should also be given to those parents that wish to keep their children at home, and that early education spaces are not necessarily the best option for children.

I've been thinking about early education since, and Covid disruptions have deepened my interest in the topic. I would like to investigate it, but it's too broad an issue to tackle for one newsletter. In order to plan out a series, I would love to think along with you, and have your comments. This document will grow, and change over time.

Initial structure

What is early education – what options are available, what ages are we talking about

What do we expect as parents from early education – play, learning, socialising, nutrition, childcare

What do early education spaces provide

How many types of early education spaces can we find

What are the alternatives - stay-at-home / community learning / ???

What does data tell us? Are more parents opting in or out of early education? What kind of new alternatives are coming up?