

Initially, in agreement with Levan's parent, we defined activities for two hours and developed special visual aids in tabular form, clearly showing the activities - music, physical exercises, playing the cubes - that the boy liked to participate in. So when Levan was coming to the kindergarten, we had physical exercises with children performing different movements, accompanied by music, and then playing with the cubes. Working with him, we used the strategy of physical assistance, and visual cues (cards with pictures).

As advised by the specialists, at the end of each activity we helped Levan to mark the completed activity on his chart and name the next activity.

Currently, Levan spends 4 hours a day in the kindergarten, during this period he is not refusing to stay in the group without his mother and goes to different activity areas. He also shows less intensity of stereotyped and stimulating actions.

Levan looks through the picture books, points at familiar objects and animates them with physical movements, e.g. hair washing movements when he sees the shampoo or hair brushing movements when he sees the brush. He also points at the animals he knows (horse, dog), likes to take pictures by phone and browse them.

If asked to do so, Levan gets involved in his favorite activities; he observes other children and tries to imitate them. After getting involved, he stops the stereotyped and stimulating movements. He is not against changing the environment and going out of the classroom, plays with dolls ("feeds them", "takes them to bed"). With adult's support Levan is able to take turns during the playtime (playing the train, washing hands).

*Theacher*

## LADO, 5 YEARS

It was the beginning of the 2013 school year... There were lots of children's photos on kindergarten principal's desk. As teachers, we got information that a child with special needs was going to join us. His diagnosis was cerebral palsy and mental retardation.

Two teachers were chosen by our kindergarten psychologist and I was one of them. I immediately had a feeling, I wanted this child to be in my group and it happened so. I don't know what was motivating me; maybe it was my interest to deal with challenges, often testing myself and my ability to solve complex tasks. And one more thing, my 4 year old son also had problems at that time. Suddenly, he stopped speaking, as the doctor said because of fear he was receiving treatment and I was very concerned because of his illness luckily he recovered soon.

When Lado came to my group, I knew beforehand I had to overcome difficulties. He didn't play with children, couldn't recognize colors, couldn't count, draw, cut out the figures, he didn't even walk properly, often fell down from the chair, never showed he wanted to eat or to go to the toilet, he used diapers. Lado never said good morning or goodbye to anyone took others' things without permission and never apologized for doing so. Without help he couldn't get upstairs or downstairs. He talked with short phrases, was fond of playing the ball and music lessons. During the day he often asked about the music teacher, wanted to know when she would come and leave, get to the room. He was able to eat independently, but somehow I never gave him a chance to do it. Doing everything myself and supporting him in everything, initially, I thought I was helpful, but it appeared to be my mistake. The kindergarten psychologist and the specialist from the Georgian Portage association helped me to realize it. It was an advantage to work in a team.

The first results were achieved in one month - Lado started to say good morning and goodbye when coming in and out of the kindergarten and his mother was very supportive in this.

It took him more time and also a lot of our efforts to acquire toilet skills. His mother even brought his favorite orange pot to the kindergarten and by spring we managed to take off the diapers. With the intention to prepare Lado for school, we also defined goals like recognizing and naming colors and shapes and counting up to five. We managed with some of these tasks, not with all of them. I can say, I put all my energy and force in this child...

But at one of the trainings we were told “if you work with children with special needs, don’t think you are doing something special and you are kinder than others. You should know it’s your obligation”... I thought a lot about it.. Sometimes I agree .... Sometimes not... I don’t think the feeling of obligation is enough to do such work.

*Theacher*

## NATA, 5 YEARS

When at the request of the kindergarten, I visited it as a member of the Georgian Portage Association multidisciplinary team, first I talked with the parent, teacher and psychologist and also observed the child in the kindergarten environment.

It was already one year that Nata was attending the kindergarten, but she spent most of the time in the resource room with the psychologist, having one hour pre-planned individual lessons and after this she wandered around the kindergarten, going to different groups, to the music hall. She protested at staying in her classroom. All the time during the day she was attended by her mother, who still failed to control her behavior.

As it was problematic for Nata to get involved in group activities and she protested at going to her classroom, it was desirable to limit her initial stay (for about two weeks) in the kindergarten by one hour, just to let her get adapted to the environment. The instructional plan was designed considering Nata's favorite activities, providing an opportunity to gradually increase the time she spends in the kindergarten.

As Nata liked to stay in the resource room, it was desirable to design first 15-20 minutes group play for small groups (4-5 children), with the main aim of teaching Nata to take turns, control impulses and follow the rules of the game. Together with the teacher, Nata's favorite activities (rolling the ball, modeling) were planned.

After the play in the resource room, the children were told to go back to their classroom. Nata showed less protest when going together with other children. At the same time, in the resource room, she was shown the visual table of planned activities.

Slowly, Nata got accustomed to eating with a spoon/fork, and she understood the need to take turns and stay in a queue when playing the “Train” or with a ball. At that time her presence in the kindergarten increased to two hours a day.

Grouping in categories and recognizing several colors were added to Nata’s educational goals. By the end of the year, Nata stayed in the kindergarten for four hours a day, spending most of this time in the classroom, but spending some time with the special education teacher in the resource room engaged in individual lessons and group activities. The resource teacher helped Nata to get accustomed to the kindergarten daily schedule (by using the visual daily routine table), to be aware of the sequence of activities. Besides this, in the resource room, they worked on the introduction of behavior rules and acquiring desired behavior. Nata also learned to recognize human emotions so as to understand when people get angry, sorry or happy and what causes all these emotions in them.

By the end of the year, Nata attended the morning meeting together with her peers, listening to the music and learning different topics with the assistance of visual materials. She learned how to play with peers, to share the toys, to participate in group activities; she was able to follow the rules and short instructions, deal with simple tasks with an adult’s assistance. Nata got involved in music and dance activities, stood in line, and tried to repeat some physical exercises. In future it is planned to continue working to increase the amount of time she spends in the kindergarten and prepare her for going to for school.

*Portage multidisciplinary team member*

## NINO, 4 YEARS

It's already two years that Nino, a child with special needs, attends our kindergarten. She has been diagnosed with microcephaly and epilepsy. Though she attended another kindergarten for one year before she came to us, the period of adaptation appeared to be quite difficult - she was misbehaving, biting other children, running out of the classroom. Nino couldn't speak and failed to follow instructions. Initially, most of the children did not want to play with her. We had problems with the parents too. They did not want their children to be in the group with Nino. The teachers also complained, thinking that Nino required a specially assigned person during the whole day. They were concerned how to adjust the whole group activity to Nino's activities. I tried to explain that they had to adjust Nino's activity to the whole group activities. For me, as for the preschool special education teacher, it was clear that I had to work in all these directions.

When Nino's mother first met the kindergarten teachers, the specialist from the support team was also invited to the meeting to speak with teachers how to deal generally with the situation, when Nino had seizures and what should be done in her specific case.

As initially Nino often manifested her behavior in tantrums, trying to get out of the classroom and throwing the toys around, the decision was made to observe her during the whole day. The observation was conducted by the specialist of the kindergartens' supporting group. Below are provided the notes of the observation:

**Coming to the kindergarten** - Nino shows mother (by shaking the head) she doesn't want to go to the kindergarten, but sits quietly when comes to the classroom and doesn't cry for her. If Nino sees her mother standing in the corridor, she opens the door and goes out, smiles and communicates with her. She follows the adult's instructions (by holding a hand) and comes back to the classroom. She does not try to go out when she sees that her mother is not standing in the corridor.

**Breakfast** – Nino has breakfast with the teacher’s assistance. When the teacher goes to another child, she tries to continue her breakfast independently. The teacher worries that she can’t help other children because of Nino (though she sees that most of the children can have breakfast independently). After Nino finishes her breakfast, she gets up and starts playing, then screams. The teacher takes her to the carpet and gives her a box with toys. Looking at her, other children also get up from their tables and join Nino. The teacher is concerned that not everyone has finished the breakfast, and how to explain to children that only Nino can play. (The observer sees that the children who have already finished their breakfast but were waiting for others got up from the tables.) Soon, the teacher and her assistant take children to the music hall. Nino follows the teacher, holding her hand.

**Music and movement** – The assistant says the toys are left scattered all around the room and goes back to the classroom. The teacher also complains she failed to fill in the registration journal as Nino requires her presence all the time and also goes to the classroom. The teacher of dancing and the special education teacher, who recently joined the group, stay with the children. Immediately the music and movement starts, Nino comes in front of the teacher and tries to repeat her movements with her assistance. She performs movements like clapping the hands and jumping (it continues for 15 minutes).

**Reading stories** – After the returning to the classroom, the children are asked to sit at their chairs. The teacher also takes her place and starts to read a story. The assistant takes the bottles to bring fresh water. Instructed by the teacher, Nino also takes her place, but soon she gets up and walks around. There is a noise in the classroom. The teacher continues reading. With the assistance of special education teacher, Nino sits at the far table and together they start assembling the pyramid. Soon, the teacher asks the special education teacher to continue reading and leaves the classroom. The special education teacher tells Nino to sit in a front row. She maintains frequent eye contact

with her. Also, she gets up to her feet and reads the story, using movements, gestures and mime. Sitting in silence, the children are watching her. Nino also follows the reading process. She makes several attempts to get up, but the special education teacher comes close to her and points to stay on a chair, without interrupting the reading process. Nino sits together with children.

**Free play** – The children play whatever they want to play while the teacher and her assistant are busy with papers. Nino plays surrounded by other 6 or 7 children and then she gets up and goes out of the classroom to another group. The special education teacher brings her back to the classroom and points to stay there, but Nino again goes to the door. Once more the teacher gently points Nino to stay at her place. Nino starts to throw the toys from the table, looking at the teacher while she is pointing her to stop, smiles at her and continues throwing toys. The adult leaves her without attention and stands with her back to her (using the ignoring strategy). After one or two minutes, Nino stops throwing the toys, goes to another corner of the room and starts playing. After 10-12 minutes, she gets up again and starts walking around. The special education teacher comes close to Nino, sits her on her knees and continues reading the story (placement strategy).

Nino watches the teacher's face. After the storytelling, she amuses herself independently for several minutes and then again tries to go to another classroom. The adult takes her hand and goes with her to wash the hands. After coming back to the classroom, Nino comes to the window, where the teacher sits, gets to the window and tries to jump from it, looking at the teacher smiling. Initially the teacher pays no attention, but then being concerned for her safety, takes Nino from the window not giving her the chance to climb on it again.

Nino lies on the floor and starts shouting. The teacher takes her out of the class, still screaming and trying to bite her. . The teacher releases her (fixed time exceeds the acceptable; time interval), though she runs to the teacher and again starts

screaming. The other adult tries to switch her attention, takes her by the hand and they go out to the music hall. She gets involved in movement activities. Then the teacher sits her on her knees and watches her face during the singing.

The observation showed that no misbehavior occurred when Nino was busy with activities interesting for her and she misbehaved when she wanted to attract the attention. What she liked most was the music and movement: she usually stood, looked at the teacher and repeated the simple movements. She was able to play with cubes and other playing resources, tried to eat independently and listened to the storytelling when the adult used gesture and mime. She was able to carry out tasks following the rule of “now..... then”.

Together with a specialist of the multidisciplinary team, the intervention plan for Nino has been developed: trying to reinforce Nino’s attempts to eat independently; we let her eat semi-dry food in the group and helped by holding her hand only when eating soup. Being good in imitation and observing other children, soon Nino started to eat independently. As with all other children, we let Nino play after finishing her meals.

While reading the stories and during some other activities when children sat in a circle, we used visual materials for Nino; we also came close to her to maintain eye contact. When we talked or read the books emotionally, using gestures and facial expressions, Nino did not try to get up or to amuse herself by doing something else.

As Nino was able to work independently for 10-12 minutes before she used to get bored and misbehaved, we periodically used the strategy of replacement, so we would come close to her, smile at her and offer some other game.

Using these strategies and working as a team with Nino’s teachers, we’ve achieved quite good results. The meeting for parents with the participation of the kindergarten principal

was also organized. I often attended different activities in Nino's group, facilitating her involvement with other children. This year children are very welcoming and helpful to her. They even give her instructions, how to deal with a task. They love her and are open to play together, to communicate. Nino is also responsive and happy to be with her peers.

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*Special Teacher*

## ANDRO, 5 YEARS

This year Andro came to the kindergarten for the first time. The boy was not included in any other programs and no one had worked with him. From the very beginning, his mother told the kindergarten principal that he had some behavioral issues. She called several teachers to select the group for the boy and it happened that I expressed the initiative to have the boy in my group.

As we entered the class, he turned everything upside down, running to each shelf, taking the toys, tearing them and throwing to the floor. Then he got curious what was on the upper shelves and took the chair to reach the toys. Several times I tried to stop him by saying “don’t take this”, but there was no reaction from him. As some of the toys were fragile, I tried to take them from his hands, but he started shouting, throwing down all the boxes with toys on the floor. I decided to let him try everything to see if he would get interested in some of the toys, but without any result. The boy was taking them and in a minute throwing them down and it continued in this way.

Finally, Andro came to the door and pulled the handle down, but I was there and managed to close it. Trying to open the door, he began crying. I stood there and didn’t let him get out. He started crying even louder, kicking the door with his feet. Remembering his mother’s words that he often played with the cars and cubes, I offered him several cars I had, but he didn’t pay any attention and threw some of them back to me. When he could not reach the door, he turned to me and bit my hand. I couldn’t calm him down even with all the toys around us and decided to take him out from the classroom. We visited all the groups, went to the yard and then called his mother to take the boy home. I also asked mother to stay with us in the group next day.

The kindergarten principal applied to the Kindergarten agency to have recommendations from the multidisciplinary team specialists. Andro and his mother came to the classroom and started to play with cubes they brought from home. They constructed and demolished the castle, repeating this activity again and again. As soon as Andro got involved in the play his mother left the room. Andro continued playing and after 4-5 minutes he started rolling on the carpet, but I was still satisfied as he wasn’t disruptive and

I gave him several cars.

By that time the other children also moved to the carpet, but Andro immediately got up and started to walk around the room. Suddenly the door opened and the assistant came in. Andro rushed to the door, maybe remembering that his mother was standing outside. I didn't want to let him out and asked him to come back, but he fell on the floor and started crying. I still stood at the door, not letting him get out, so he tried to bite me. Having the specialist observing the child, I told her that he had already bitten me several times and she gave me some recommendations: first of all, ask him to stop crying and then hold his hand, not allowing him to bite.

I tried to do so but he was continuously complaining and asking to go out. I wanted to take him out for a walk, but the specialist explained that such response would reinforce the negative behavior, so he would repeat such behavior whenever he wanted to go out. She advised me to switch his attention to something else, but he cried and screamed even more loudly. As we saw the surprised faces of other children and didn't want them to watch Andro in this situation, we decided to take him out to another room. When we did so, he jumped to the window and started throwing around everything that was there.

Finally, when Andro calmed down, I took him back to the room. He didn't ask to go out, but continued throwing the toys around. Then he came to the toy house and looked at it. Knowing that it was fragile (made of many small pieces) and it would be impossible to assemble it again if destroyed, I tried not to let him get on the chair, but again and again he tried to do so. I didn't want him to destroy that house, so I took it and put on a table. To my surprise, he came to the table, took the house very gently, and went to the carpet and start playing with it. The observer came close and helped him to put some details that had fallen out back in place. The boy didn't protest at having her so close. He even tried to see how firmly the details were fixed and seemed to be satisfied. Instead of fixing all the other details, the observer gave him some other details and Andro tried to fix them but it was difficult for him, so the observer held his hand and helped to fix firmly. I noticed satisfaction on his face.

Today I understood, the toys are not for the shelves and everything that is in the classroom is for children. You shouldn't keep anything there if they are not for the children.

Next day the assisting specialist came and tried to use a different technique of communication.

As soon as Andro came into the room, he went to the shelf and looked at toys. He took them, looked and then threw them on the floor. I told him to take them and put them back in place, but he didn't pay any attention to me. Then he noticed the toy mixer and began shouting, showing that he wanted it. The specialist took the toy and pronounced "give me". At first Andro tried to shout, but at third request, he understood what he was asked to do and repeated "give me". The boy got the toy, but when he got bored with it, the specialist took it from him. Andro repeated "give me", but the specialist asked him to put the cubes that were on the floor to the box. She came to him and helped to pick the cubes. Expressing protest but still picking the toys, the boy put all the cubes in the box very quickly to get the desired toy. As he finished the task, he got it. This happened several times, so that when he wanted something, Andro was following one-step simple instructions.

After all this, the team working with Andro and his mother got together. I was given some recommendations how to work with the assistance of the kindergarten psychologist and also the specialist whom I was able to address in case of need. I was advised to make the notes, but to be honest, I don't like writing notes, especially in the kindergarten, when you don't have time for this, but I decided to keep "the diary" if it would simplify my work.

The roles between me, my assistant and the psychologist were distributed for Andro's one hour presence in the kindergarten, deciding that it was I who would stay with him for most of the time, so he would be able to follow my instructions. My assistant was assigned the responsibility to manage the group activities and the psychologist to help during the breakfast time, if at that time Andro was with us.

### **Recommendations:**

- First of all it is necessary to elaborate the daily routine (permanently repeating set of actions) of Andro's presence in the kindergarten;
- It is also necessary to create a visual schedule of planned activities, so Andro would be able to get desired items in turn for doing some concrete activities. He has to know what activities he has to do, to get the desired result.
- As the most desirable reinforcement for Andro is to go out, he has to know that he will be able to go out after the accomplishment of three or four tasks.
- Considering Andro's interests and the resources available in the kindergarten, at this stage the timeframe of his presence in the group can be set as 40 minutes or maximum 1 hour. For this time, it is desired to divide the group into two smaller groups. After the accomplishment of 3 or 4 tasks, requiring about 20-25 minutes in the classroom, Andro would be taken outside for about 5 minutes for a swing in the yard, followed by another 20-25 minutes in the classroom on group activities and then going home.
- If Andro objects at being in the classroom or attempts to get out when he is already there, just close the door and explain to him by showing the visual schedule that he will be able to go out after he accomplishes several activities.
- After you see that Andro stays calm for one hour, add some more activities to his schedule, explaining any changes beforehand and continue working in the same way, using the visual schedule.
- The presence of the extra helping person and the teacher's assistant is necessary to keep the normal daily routine for the whole group in Andro's presence.
- It is desirable for Andro to get included in early development program, so the family has to address the Social Service Agency covering the place of their residence.

## **From the notes:**

27.03.2014

“Andro came at 10: 40. He was a little bit irritated and very soon he asked to go out. I told him “No” and asked to look for something interesting for him. He pulled down the wooden cubes and left them in 2 minutes. I tried to act as a psychologist and pointed him to put the cubes in the box. He protested, but quickly fulfilled the task. Then I gave him colored cubes and we played: I told “it is a blue cube”, he repeated “blue”, I said: let’s build a house... he repeated “house”.. Then he looked at the door and asked to go out. I hold his hands and started skipping round and round. He liked it and then we hopped and clapped.

Today Andro came close to children and lay on the carpet. We also played with cushions. I threw them to me and he returned. Today I feel satisfaction ☺“

28. 03. 2014

“As soon as Andro came, he passed the shelves with toys, but with less interest. I offered him the cubes again, but he got interested only for a few minutes and then went to the door. I hold his hand and skipped round and round with him, then we rolled on the carpet... he seemed to be satisfied.

Today we have a very special result. Andro didn’t protest my kiss. It was for the first time when he let me kiss him. “

03. 04. 2014

“Andro came and directly went to the children having their breakfast. Looking very calm, he ran around the tables, smiling at the children. I handed him some bread, he took it and even ate it. He had never done so before. I gave him the cubes we played with some days ago. He put the cubes in the box at my instruction. Then we took the washing machine, for a while he amused himself independently and then I felt he was bored. I tried skipping and it worked. Then I tried to switch his attention and offered him big cubes that we never played before. We played for several minutes and then he asked for the skittles. I pointed to put the cubes in the box first and he did so, so then I gave him the skittles. Later I rolled a ball to him and he repeat-

ed my action. We were still playing when mother came. Without any protest, he put the ball in its place before he went home. Today both of us, me and Andro are satisfied. ☺“

04. 04. 2014

“Today Andro came with his father. He walked around the group, came to me and started to look for something. I offered him some buttered bread, he took it, but after some bites put it on the table. We took the skittles, but he didn’t want to play and asked for cubes. I asked him to put the skittles in their place first and then gave him the cubes, but he didn’t want to play with them neither. Andro didn’t show interest in skipping either. Then suddenly his attention was attracted by the heating pipes. He looked at them carefully, listening to the noises coming from them and even didn’t notice that his mother had come and wanted to take him home. Andro didn’t want to follow her and held my hand. Together we went to the yard, played a little on a swing until he went home.”

07.04.2014

“Today Andro was calm when he came to the kindergarten. As usual he ran around the children and went to the cubes. We took them and played, then put them back before we switched to play the skittles; I showed him a big picture book. I was pointing at the pictures, naming them and Andro was repeating the names. He was quite amused and then we played skittles. At that moment I started physical exercises with other children and asked the assistant to bring Andro too. We held hands and tried to repeat the exercises. It was the first day he got involved in this task.”

14. 04. 2014

“Today the situation was stable -I offered Andro new mosaics and he played it for a while with my assistance.

*Theacher*