



Working group 1: Children's identity and the quality of ECEC services

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- **Coordinator's presentation**

Crucial issue: the importance of uniting ECEC policies and their quality.

To do this, it is necessary to establish a common concept on the identity of the children in order to reflect on the quality of ECEC.

Fortunati shows a series of images of Istituto degli Innocenti's artistic legacy, explaining that the artistic representation reflects the historical development of the child's identity, from the idea of a child who is weak and passive, to the idea the child as:

- A person
- Rightholder
- Endowed with creative potential
- (A person) under development
- A protagonist of his/her own processes of growth and development

Education enables the expression of potential development. Society accepts the responsibility to provide a context to develop children's potential capacities.

The specific responsibility is to make quality services available in order to reach this objective.

- **Necessary elements to ensure the quality of ECEC**

1. Stability of physical and extra familial context of relationships, which enables the child to establish its benchmarks.
2. Regularity: children need time references with the daily rhythm of experience, but also flexibility, depending on their needs
3. Continued and meaningful dialogue with families.

- **Other necessary conditions:**



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- Context of relationship depending on the child's identity, importance of physical space (which encourages the exploration of the child).
 - Rethinking the role of the educator: educator and infant are two subjects in horizontal and cooperative relationship.
 - Collective reflection among educators: the need to discuss, share experiences, documentation, etc..

Two aspects to deepen

1. The child protagonist of the curriculum
2. The child protagonist of inclusion policies

1. The curriculum.

Compared with an interpretation of the curriculum as uniformity and application of homogeneous models and default this is a curriculum based on understanding and expand individual skills, focusing on diversity.

The curriculum of early childhood education is very complex, it needs:

- patience for children to express themselves
- organizational context to facilitate creative expression, distinct for each child
- it should not impose, but offer opportunities
- reflection, collegial documentation, exchange of experiences, also with parents (attention to mental representations and stereotypes instead of looking to the capabilities of their own children).

Myths to be avoided by educators

- Certainty: linking education to change rather than certainty.
- The results: increasing emphasis on organizing opportunities rather than results.



2. Social inclusion. From the real to the possible.

Importance of promoting the child's potential before being affected by problems. The first two years of life are key stages of individual development, there is no other time in life when so many significant learning concentrate.

The investment is profitable at this stage, it takes fewer resources for higher yields. The universality and quality of ECEC services appears to be proportional to the representation of children as power and competence.

- **Conclusions**

- Approach on quality, universal, natural expectation of parents, means a recognition of the community as a right for all children, no longer linked to special needs.
- There is a very strong link between greater quantity and quality of services and:

1. employment rate
2. equity
3. balance of responsibilities fathers / mothers
4. preventing school failure
5. quality of life

Opting for

Universal services, affordable for everyone.

Increase responsibility of all people.

Quantity and quality, including

- state of quality monitoring
- financial support



QUALITY AND EQUITY

Debate

Interventions of participants: main questions emerged

1. At which age universal access to ECEC services must be offered?
2. How early incorporation undermines the right to identity? All activities are organized by adults, there is little space to be with other children, to be alone, to do nothing ... If you are not guaranteed one-to-one relation with each baby, it is better not to go
3. A representative of a municipal service in Italy says they have very organized services, all activity is regulated, planned like in real schools (in Nordic countries they are more free, flexible, with a more individual approach). In Italy we would have to change the pattern, finding a balance between an individual approach and another more diversified.
4. Responsible policies for children in Emilia Romagna on the link between free access for all and quality. The difficult thing is to get consensus among politicians on gratuity. Key point: quality with affordable costs promotes inclusion.

Coordinator's intervention

Is there an age which is "good" to go to a ECEC service? Impossible to determine, there is not a better age, but an appropriate age for each child and each mother, is a choice for parents, especially mothers, according to reality, in an environment in which mother and father enjoy their relationship with the child. This certainly also depends on their employment situation and perspectives.

When we speak of universal obligation is not in sense of "compulsory" but rather in the sense of "warranty", to indicate the possibility to have access to services or even the freedom of parents to choose between different options, or also to choose the age of access.

We share a concern about the rigid system in which services are often organised. This would be an opportunity to offer structured moments in balance with more individualized ones, moments of rest, moments to stay alone.



Participant (Responsible for Social Policies, Piedmont): male parents are still scarcely involved concerning working permits etc.. this partially depends as well on the fact that employers are reluctant to give parental permissions.

Coordinator : men are less involved in educational activities. In Norway there is a tendency to include more males in ECEC services.

It would be great a change in that sense, but how can this happen? From one perspective, now parents share more tasks, although the father is more oriented to playing activities.

Participant (from Southern Italy) : ECEC services are lacking in southern Italy (Bari). How can we influence policies? This cannot be measured in strictly economic terms, because it is not such as raising pigs. How can we lay the grounds for a different system and how can we fight against that contingent character of politics? This is a country with resources.

Coordinator : public system does not work in many cases, but developing good policies is a different issue.

Our standards of conscience and convergence are high, the quality indicators are clear. The problem is that politicians still have not taken interest in the subject to deploy resources. He is not very optimistic.

The key is to share experiences, raise awareness, promote networking to influence the political level. It is not only to understand but to effect, to provoke change in policies.

Participant: in Spain the issue of early childhood care is included in the political agenda and, in recent years, there has been an increase in the state budget for ECEC services.

Final Comment (Coordinator)

He highlights the strategic role of the network to help influence European policy.

Our watchword should be” **SHARING EXPERIENCES TO TRANSFORM**” 