



# Child Centred Diversity in Quality Early Childhood Education and Care

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**EARLY  
CHILDHOOD  
STUDIES  
WITH  
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# This Presentation

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Brief introduction to the project

The Italian context and examples of practice

Emerging analysis of child-centred practice, drawing on international examples

# Italy: a split system

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Children 5 months old to 3 years old attend Nurseries or alternative services (both municipality-led or private, or cooperative).

The “children’s school” starts usually at 3 and spans over three years. At 6, children enter Primary school. The 3-6 year provision is under the central Administration

“Children’s School”, focussing on a child-centred and constructivist approach. It is characterised by a National Framework

# ITALY: 0-3 year education

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The first democratic Parliamentary Act for Nurseries as a service for the family is: “A five-year plan to improve Public Nurseries, through the National State financial commitment”, Act n. 1044/ 1971.

Early Childhood Educational Services were considered a right for the working families. The organization of the ECEC services was allocated to the Regions; however, each Region has developed a different system and distribution of Nurseries.

# *Rate of coverage for 0-3 ECEC services in some Regions at December 31st, 2015*

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<b>Region</b>	<b>Nurseries</b>		<b>% of children served</b>
Lombardia	24,5	01,3	25,8
Emilia-Romagna	34,2	02,3	36,5
Toscana	30,1	03,0	33,1
Umbria	33,4	08,3	41,8
Campania	03,9	02,5	06,4
Puglia	15,2	02,6	17,7
Basilicata	13,8	00,0	13,8
Calabria	10,1	00,6	10,7
Sicilia	10,6	00,4	11,0
<b>Italy, Total:</b>	<b>20,8</b>	<b>2,0</b>	<b>22,8</b>

*Source: Fortunati, A. ed. Master Document for Monitoring the Developmental Plan of ECEC Services in 2016*

# Participation Structure

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“The sum total of reciprocal sets of communicative rights and obligations held in a given moment among all participants in an encounter” (Erickson 2004, 151). The basic pattern can generalise across different activities and across time. Qualitative observations for the reconstruction of the pattern of participation that takes place in a given institutional practice.

There can be asymmetry of speaking rights, with the teacher setting up the activity, guiding the children’s contributions and allocating the legitimate turn-taking. Pace, content and assessment are selected by the teacher. External objectives (pre-school)

There can be participation structures in which the teacher builds upon the children’s contributions: different ideas are orchestrated; the content, pace and assessment are negotiated in interaction (internal objectives (well-being; self-regulative behaviour))

# The awakening of instruments: Koren Nursery (5 c, 24-30months)

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The teacher says: “Here there is only one rule: close your mouth and what to do with ears? And the eyes?”

The teacher makes drama about the silence of instruments “have you heard anything?” “How do the instruments wake up?” she admonishes the children that the instruments awake gently. Under the blanket, she gently plays the drum as it is wakening up. The teacher shows how an instrument can be played; then she asks firstly to Joan to play the drum, to explore the sound with the hands and the drum sticks. Then asks her whom she would like to pass on the drum [this is a closed question, because the teacher expects Joan calls on the next child; the objective is to support the children’s memorization of their peers]. Then she invites the children to listen to Simon playing the drum. She offers scaffolding to each child in playing the instruments: she explain to Zadie how to keep the instrument correctly and she holds her elbow to let her play; she invites Joan to remain in the music circle and do not disrupt the activity.

# Oldcastle «Jumping and counting» 4 c(26-30m) 1 teacher

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The teacher Alexa has predisposed outdoor a circle composed by some twenty white large tiles, to set up a setting that can afford the connection between children's jumping and counting. T. invites the children to look around for a suitable setting to jump «We can jump here as Sara does, can we jump elsewhere around?». The children note the affordance of the circle of tiles and start jumping, helped by the T.

Sara starts to make a rhythmically sequence of jumping (singing«Hoopa! Hoopa! Hoopa!») followed by the other children. The T. takes up the opportunity to introduce the number sequence «we count the jumps, don't we?» she starts counting following Dave's jumps («One, ... six. Six jumps good!»). Now all children try their jumps, with Sara beating her foot synchronically with another child's jumps and counting. Sara has self-selected her role, maybe because she feels most comfortable with the numerical sequence.

# Different Participation structures in Nursery

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Koren: The teacher initiates the activity, gives some keys to interpret the activity [covering the instruments, disposing the pillows in circle, dramatizing the silence]. She assigns turn-taking and invites the children to maintain reciprocal attention. The children are allowed to experiment, with some scaffolding to the teacher. Educational objectives: promote mutual listening and respect; learning to appreciate silence and gentle sounds; support the children experience with sounds.

Old Castle: The teacher predisposes the environmental affordances but does not induce the children into the expected activity. She invites the children to make the connections between the rhythmical sequence of jumps and the counting sequence, in order to promote their understanding of the meaning of the number sequence as a rhythmical progression from one tile to one further ahead. The children self-select in different roles of the activity; the contribution to the overall activity is a joint enterprise

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Torreamarca: [2] the children are now disposed 2 for each table, one in front of the other; the objective is to make a drawing of a wood; they can pick up objects from the big box to make individually a collage. They work alone, but allowed to exchange ideas, tools, help.

[2.1] Ilaria is making a collage by placing all the light objects of a wood near the upper margin of her large paper sheet and the other objects progressively below, according to their weight. Therefore clouds, small leaves and small fruits are above larger leaves and fruits. Accordingly, pebbles are above stones.

The teacher tells her that she should draw a “real” tree “otherwise one cannot understand that it is a wood” as the teacher says, “You have already put this [indexing a piece of bark] you need small branches”

[2.2] The teacher suggests other children to draw a line to mark the separation of the wood and the underwood. She asks Matteo “try to make visible the water flowing from the spring”.

# NewSchool (Reggio-oriented): 4 children (4-5 yo) 1 teacher

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Activity: make a plastic representation of the route they take to come to school, by using small wooden sticks and other objects. The children draw a map. They look at the map. The route has some turns and inclinations.

M: "I put those high trees right here; here, I put the school because we started over there and arrived there [higher]"

Teacher: Why do you make the turn in this way?

A: I would have made also the climb but I wasn't able to

G: "you can make a kind of ladder"

Teacher: "How can you made the ladder?"

A: "Make use of the sticks, a lot underneath, fewer on the top"

Teacher "How many do you put on the bottom and how many on the top?"

A "I try with 3 on the bottom, then 2 and 1 on the top"

M: "we should build it on the chair, which is the hill, how can we make it stable?"

A: "We balance them".

# Different Participation structures in Infants'school

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Torreamarca: Instructional structure of participation: the learners' contributions are evaluated in relation to an implicit model; the teacher selects one privileged cultural model («The realistic representation of Nature» and does not let Ilaria work out her different model (following a different symbolic path). She establishes the pace, the content and the standards for a valuable contribution

NewSchool: during the activity the children have the opportunity to discuss and develop strategies to represent their route to the preschool. Some metacognitive strategies can emerge in an open-ended activity, to solve “real” problems” of fitting elements together, of balance and of representing heterogeneous conditions (climbs, turns, etc.). The teacher poses questions that do not require a univocal answer.

# Being in the present - thinking of the future

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# Overview: Two emerging themes

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Practitioners placing the child in the centre by

- Being in the present: examples from meal time in a Spanish nursery and heuristic play in Croatia
- Thinking of the future: two examples from Denmark (parachute and game)
- Another perspective on 'beings and becomings'? (Uprichard, 2008)

# Being in the present

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Educators arranged environments and timetables to enable opportunities for exploratory or heuristic play (Goldschmied and Jackson, 2004)

Child left alone to explore objects and materials without intervention from educators; child's own pace, response, sequence

- Incidental
- Planned
- Pervasive (part of ECEC setting ethos)

Mainly for younger children (why?)

Tensions with health and safety regulations, competing with other priorities?

# Spaghetti and meatballs: total sensory experience

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*The girl observes the whole process attentively. She explores the pieces [of spaghetti] and sucks on them, then picks up the fork and explores the utensil. She tests the prongs of the fork and its handle. ... Mario has a piece of spaghetti in his hand and the educator takes his hand and tries to put it on the plate, but the child does not release the spaghetti, so she chooses to leave it that way. The boy continues to explore the spaghetti.*

Observation from Spanish Nursery

# Sensory balls: observing, arranging, watching

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*A boy aged 1.3 yrs. started playing with transparent sensory balls that were located near the window. He was trying to explore the small particles inside the balls. The sunlight that went through the window made the balls look even more intriguing and raised his attention.*

*At first he was lining up the balls on the window bench and after that he started putting one on top of the other. A boy aged 1.6 yrs. joined him, observed him for a few minutes and then started handing him the balls*

Observation from Croatia nursery

# Competing priorities

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*The teacher observes the children that explore the musk. The children touch and smell it, rip off some tufts to make a close observation. The teacher proposes to observe the musk through a magnifier. The children explore and the teacher supports their sensory exploration by asking them question (Italy)*

Educators notice opportunities to promote development

- Uncertainty about when to step in and move children on and when to step back and let them just be.

# Thinking of the future

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When and how educators choose to respond is the result of professional 'attention, engagement and intelligent caring' (Arnold, 2005) and informed by

- Knowledge from being alongside child 'in their world' – **immediate needs**
- Knowledge of developmental trajectories – **next steps**
- Awareness of children's right to participation in society – **future possibilities**

# Anticipating children's needs/intentions

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*The children [Age range: 2-4] begin lifting and lowering their arms. This makes the cloth of the parachute move like waves. Practitioner 1 throws a ball into the parachute. "Out on the big ocean, a little ship sails. Where is it going, where it's going. It's going tooooo... Sejer! "The ball rolls off the parachute and the boy, Sejer, runs for it, but the girl, Elijah, grabs it, but Practitioner 2, who stands next to Elijah takes the ball, and gives it to Sejer while repeating from the song: "It's going to Sejer." ... As they all get ready for the next round, Kaye again starts to jump up and down and makes big waves with the parachute, and several of the other children are drawn into to this way of making waves. At one point, Practitioner 2 puts her hand on Kaye's shoulder and asks him to join the song [By this she may indicate that he is a little too wild/excited]. ....,*

Observation from Danish Kindergarten

# Preparing for challenges ahead

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*One female educator [P1] plays UNO with two boys [age 5] at a table. They discuss the overall scores. Sigurd says he leads by “a thousand millions”. P1 decides to write the down the score. They start to play. At one moment, Sigurd must face that he has to pick up 6 cards. He has just laughed at P1, because it seemed as if she were to pick up cards, but she was able to put down a card that increased the amount of cards that needed to be picked up and that passed the ‘punishment’ on to Sigurd. P1 giggles disarmingly as if she want take the edge of the situation, so Sigurd does not take it too hard.*

Observation from Danish Kindergarten

# Preparing for challenges ahead

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- One of [the educator's] goals is to provide the children with a positive experiences of playing games together with others. She hopes that this will encourage the children to play games with others (children) later on their institutional life (for instance in [after-school club], school etc.). She believes that this might be an activity that will help them develop relations and friendships to other children.

# Educators thinking of the (child's) future

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Managing fine balance between **anticipation** of another's responding (based on knowledge of what children are likely to want to do) and sensitively **sowing the seeds** of the learning children will need in the future.

Informed by academic study but also by informal knowledge picked up through participating in the work of that particular setting.

Anticipatory encouragement and future-orientated shaping of learning – awareness of how child wants to be, but also what they might want to become

Georgeson 2018

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