

Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference of the Journal Scuola Democratica

REINVENTING EDUCATION

2-5 June 2021

VOLUME I

Citizenship, Work and The Global Age

ASSOCIAZIONE "PER SCUOLA DEMOCRATICA"

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Citizenship, Work and The Global Age

ASSOCIAZIONE "PER SCUOLA DEMOCRATICA"
Via Francesco Satolli, 30 – 00165 - Rome, Italy

Edited by

The Organizing Committee the 2nd International Conference of the Journal Scuola Democratica

https://www.rivisteweb.it/issn/1129-731X

Published by: ASSOCIAZIONE "PER SCUOLA DEMOCRATICA"

Via Francesco Satolli, 30 – 00165 – Rome, Italy

Published in Open Access

This book is digitally available at:

https://www.scuoladem ocratica-conference.net/proceedings-2/

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How to cite a proceeding from this Volume. APA citation system:

Author, N., Author, S., (2021). «Title», in *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference of the Journal Scuola Democratica "Reinventing Education",* **VOL. 1,** *Citizenship, Work and The Global Age,* **pp-pp**

ISBN 978-88-944888-6-9

Title **Proceedings of the Second International Conference of the Journal "Scuola Democratica" – Reinventing Education VOLUME I Citizenship, Work and The Global Age**

This volume contains papers presented in the 2nd International Conference of the Journal "Scuola Democratica" which took place online on 2-5 June 2021. The Conference was devoted to the needs and prospects of Reinventing Education.

The challenges posed by the contemporary world have long required a rethinking of educational concepts, policies and practices. The question about education 'for what' as well as 'how' and 'for whom' has become unavoidable and yet it largely remained elusive due to a tenacious attachment to the ideas and routines of the past which are now far off the radical transformations required of educational systems. Scenarios, reflections and practices fostering the possibility of change towards the reinvention of the educational field as a driver of more general and global changes have been centerstage topics at the Conference. Multidisciplinary approach from experts from different disciplinary communities, including sociology, pedagogy, psychology, economics, architecture, political science has brought together researchers, decision makers and educators from all around the world to investigate constraints and opportunities for reinventing education.

The Conference has been an opportunity to present and discuss empirical and theoretical works from a variety of disciplines and fields covering education and thus promoting a trans- and inter-disciplinary discussion on urgent topics; to foster debates among experts and professionals; to diffuse research findings all over international scientific networks and practitioners' mainstreams; to launch further strategies and networking alliances on local, national and international scale; to provide a new space for debate and evidences to educational policies. In this framework, more than 800 participants, including academics, educators, university students, had the opportunity to engage in a productive and fruitful dialogue based on research, analyses and critics, most of which have been published in this volume in their full version.

ISBN 978-88-944888-6-9

Citizenship, Work and The Global Age
A Premise

What is education for? This philosophical question cannot be answered ignoring contributions from social and educational sciences. The growing focus on learning outcomes should have prompted discussion on the values and aims in defining policy objectives and developing accountability systems and evidence-based approaches. Whereas for years public discourse on education has most frequently been confined to a merely sector-based perspective, without addressing the relationship (i.e., interdependency and/or autonomy) with globalised societies or to face the new challenges of contemporary's world. The relationship between education and society and the issue of aims can be observed in a new context which has seen the weakening of the society-nation equation and the strengthening of global dimensions.

The crisis born of the pandemic is more and more global and multidimensional. It inevitably obliges to ask what the post-pandemic socio-economic scenarios could be and what challenges might emerge from the transformations of education and training systems and policies. Many researchers and observers think that the most relevant of these challenges is that of inequalities between and within countries. The medium-long term nature of many of these challenges poses a complex question: does the pandemic tend to widen or narrow the time-space horizons of people perceptions, rationalities, and decisions?

For decades, the field of education and training has witnessed continuous growth in globalization and internationalization: just think of the role of the large-scale assessment surveys and the increasing influence of international organisations. Phenomena and concepts such as policy mobility (lending and borrowing) or – within another field of research – policy learning, as well as global scaling up, global-local hybridization and policy assemblage might find a useful opportunity of debate and in-depth analysis in this stream. This might also be true of the related issue regarding how comparative research must be carried out and of the relationship between some government 'technologies' adopted in the latest cycle of policies – for example, quasi-market, evaluation, and autonomy of schools and universities – and the ever more criticized neo-liberal paradigm. In this framework, without any revival of the political or methodological nationalism, a critical rethinking of the national dimension, perhaps too hurriedly assumed to be 'obsolete', can be useful also for a comparative reflection. As to our continent we are in the presence not only of globalization of educational policies, but also of their Europeanisation, due to the extent of the European Commission's strategy and its Open Method of Coordination. Beyond the official distinction between formal, non-formal, and unformal learning, it seems European initiatives and programmes shape a new policy world preparing the future of education, particularly through different expert networks, new ways of conceptualizing knowledge, and disseminating standards. On these issues there is no lack of reflections and research, some of which very critical indeed, whose results deserve to be broadly shared and discussed, too.

The equipping of the new generations with the tools – knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values – to live in a plural and interconnected world is delicate matter indeed in Europe. It is the issue at stake for the encounters – and at times clashes – between old and new visions and

forms of pluralism and secularism. Around this theme are developed educational policies and strongly heterogeneous curricula. Such topic is linked also to the variability in young people's competences and attitudes towards 'cultural otherness'.

Life-long learning is another question of notable importance at international level as it implies both a diverse temporal horizon for education and its link to the dimensions of work. And a different approach to the relationship between school and extra-scholastic (life-wide) learning is also implied. From this stems the necessity of greater investment for example in both the early years (ECEC) and the adult education. We might ask, however, how much has been done to achieve this goal, and whether it risks remaining a fascinating but largely unfinished project for a long time.

Within a general rethinking of the aims and the means at the disposal of education systems, many papers ask whether until now enough has been done to educate towards citizenship and democracy and whether various national educational systems have adopted this issue as their core mission.

A second group of questions derives from some crucial challenges – such as the dramatic deterioration of the biosphere, the climate, and the health – which impose both the necessity of rethinking this mission in a planetary context and redefining the 'citizenship' as a concept not merely national, but multi-level, that is ranging from global to local; and in our continent European, too. How deeply are our nations presently involved in the task of educating their citizens in terms of knowledge of global and trans-national issues? And are they striving to build a collective common consciousness in Europe? What help is being given in this sense by proposals elaborated and experiences promoted by international organizations or the EU?

Finally, starting from infant and primary schools, what weight does citizenship education have in schools, what approaches are adopted and what have shown to be the most effective? What didactics are applied and what seem to be the most promising experiences? To what extent are teachers prepared and motivated and students interested in it? Universities and adult education should also play a role in citizenship education. What proposals and significant experiences can be described and examined?

The Volume also includes contributions on the relationship between education and economic systems which is a classic subject of social science. During the twentieth century, the functionalist perspective established a close link between 'school for the masses' and the construction of individuals personalities conforming to values and social objectives. Professions have then become more and more specialized and therefore requiring ever more targeted skills. Hence, the insistence on the need to train future workers in technical and technological skills, as well as more recently in the 'soft skills' climate, increasingly necessary in certain sectors of the economy (Industry 4.0). The alliance between the functionalist perspective and the neoliberal visions finds its conceptual and practical pivot in the employability conceptual frame. On the other hand, since the 1970s, critical research has highlighted that formal education system contributes to the reproduction of inequalities, confirming and strengthening hierarchies and power relations between different actors of the economic system. These lines of investigation have underlined the weight of cultural and social capital in determining school performance, but also the inflation of educational credentials as a combined effect of mass schooling and changes in the economic system. In more recent times, the fragmentation of the educational and training systems, because of the

multiplication of public and private agencies in charge of training citizens, in addition to the explosion of the non-formal and informal as learning places (e.g., on the Internet), challenges the school to maintain its primacy as a place responsible for training workers. Moreover, it questions its ability to continue to represent a social elevator and / or a place of social justice.

The issue of the reproduction of inequalities and differential returns of educational qualifications fuels lively and stimulating interdisciplinary debates: economic stagnation, mass unemployment and job instability affect the inclusion of young generations in the labour market. Recently, in the context of lifelong learning policies, the relationship between training and work has become increasingly central, but the definition of the goals of these policies is not neutral: in the neoliberal mantra it is a question of guaranteeing the adaptability, employability and autonomy of each individual, so that one can occupy a place in society according to the dominant values. There is no shortage of critical voices about this individualistic and functionalist interpretation of the Lifelong Learning vision. On the other hand, even the supporters of neoliberal-inspired policies want an inclusive training offer (from a meritocratic perspective), as it is essential for recruiting resources and supporting flexible production systems focused on knowledge.

The attention of scholars focuses on the effects of the 'knowledge society' in the educational system of European countries. In this perspective, several studies have focused attention on the orientation processes that contribute to the reproduction of inequalities as the students from the lower classes tend to orient themselves, and are oriented by their teachers, towards the vocational paths, stigmatized within the educational systems.

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Rethinking Professional Roles in Contemporary ECEC by Reducing the Gap between Health and Education: Lessons Learned from the Pandemic Crisis

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ABSTRACT: *In the last months, ECEC practitioners in all European countries have been facing the challenge of continuing their educational work despite the constraints and limitations imposed by the pandemic crisis. Under the pressure of health security during and after lockdown family life, children's daily experience and professional practices have dramatically changed (OECD, 2020). New rules have been set and different educational strategies have been invented and enacted. More reflection and discussion are required to provide practitioners with adequate support to respond to the 'social health' emergencies generated by the pandemic – especially regarding prevention/support actions for disadvantaged families and children (educational poverty, migration, economic/environmental disadvantage, disabilities, special needs). This paper discusses the need to develop an 'interdisciplinary-based' professional language and culture for ECEC educators, and to revisit their expertise in light of how the COVID-19 emergency has changed their educational responsibilities, calling for new competences and richer professional development. Responding to emergencies implies intercepting signs of vulnerability in children and families as they first appear in the daily life of ECEC settings. This can be most effectively done through community work based on stronger networking relationships with other practitioners and services, especially health professionals and paediatricians. The post-pandemic crisis highlights the need to invest locally in the professional development of ECEC educators as key «tutors in resilience» (Cyrulnik, Malaguti, 2005) as well as in that of paediatricians and other practitioners, based on the assumption that social health includes the physical and mental health of children and of the entire community. This means rethinking both how CPD (continuing professional development) is organized and its contents. As a starting point for reflecting on these issues, I draw here on preliminary findings from a family survey about children's experiences during the initial 2020 COVID-19 lockdown (Mantovani et al., 2021). which was administered through the paediatric network SICuPP (Italian Society of Primary Care Paediatricians – Lombardy) in Northern Italy. This study is itself the outcome of promising collaboration with a network of paediatricians in a region of Italy that has been severely affected by the COVID-19 emergency.*

KEYWORDS: *ECEC Practitioners, Wellbeing, Health, Interdisciplinary*

Introduction

In this paper, I explore the need to rethink professional roles in contemporary early childhood education and care (ECEC) services, within a multidisciplinary strategy that connects education and health. I outline how the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the educational responsibilities of ECEC practitioners working in the 0-6 sector, highlighting the need for new interdisciplinary-based competencies and richer professional development.

The aim is twofold: first, to focus on a few possible lessons for the future, from the perspective of ECEC practitioners; second, to argue for the development and deployment of specific professional competences in early childhood education, to ensure a healthy community for all children and families. The paper is divided into three parts: first, I share a few of the lessons learned from the pandemic experience, with a focus on the role of ECEC professionals; then, I report findings from a recent Italian study which investigated how families reacted to the emergency; finally, I propose some directions and actions for the future.

1. The systemic resilience of the education system

There is a broad global consensus on the leading role of ECEC practitioners during the COVID-19 emergency. Despite the incredible difficulties and challenges caused by the pandemic, educators acted as key responders in the crisis, suddenly finding themselves on the frontline: although most ECEC educators lacked any formal preparation for the pandemic scenario, they refocused their efforts around issues of health, wellbeing, and community education, modifying their own role and responsibilities within the community. Given that the system was forced to overlook concerns about staff preparedness, ECEC educators displayed a noteworthy capacity to keep the education system *alive* (an ability that has also been defined as «collective agentic action», Campbell, 2020, 340).

Education practitioners adjusted their educational routines, rules, and practices to continue fulfilling their educational role; they creatively revisited how they provided education, learning, and wellbeing; and wherever possible, they provided remote resources to ensure that children received educational and learning opportunities despite the limitations and constraints imposed by the emergency (Pramling, 2020). They provided families and children with support in dealing with the new rules and routines within a safe environment. In addition, ECEC practitioners experimented with new forms of parent-teacher communication, introducing flexible modes of remaining in touch with and providing support to parents, despite the huge challenges involved in educating young children remotely.

And interesting results emerged. For example, recent research involving a small sample of Latino parents from low-income backgrounds (Soltero-Gonzàlez, Gillanders, 2021) examined the implications of the pandemic for school-home relationships, finding that the challenges of the pandemic have fostered positive changes in the way teachers and parents interact. Good outcomes included: a more dialogical approach, a more authentic home school partnership, increased parental involvement, and a deeper knowledge of children's everyday lives in their homes on the part of educators (Soltero-Gonzàlez *et al.*, 2021). These positive outcomes, which are also confirmed by other European studies (e.g., Italian studies on parents and educators' perceptions on remote learning in pandemic the pandemic context: Antonietti *et al.*, 2021; Gigli, Trentini, 2021) – highlight the need to offer educators adequate support to reinforce and keep these new practices and attitudes alive in the post pandemic era.

ECEC's educators reacted as individuals, but also as a system, developing «community responses» (Cambpell, 2020; OECD, 2020). Professional collaboration – meaning «joint work around a shared focus» (Campbell, 2020) – in responding to these challenges was crucial at many levels: between educators and parents; between parents and children; between educators and other practitioners working in the community; and between early years' educators and preschool teachers. ECEC educators functioned as «bridges» over systemic gaps that were not filled by other institutions during the emergency (Azorìn, 2020).

As Campbell argues in a recent article: «teachers and school leaders have been able to creatively and collaboratively rethink how they support the learning, development and well-being of their communities now and are beginning to consider what this could mean for the future» (Campbell, 2020, 338).

Although we know that there are cross-cultural differences in how early childhood services reacted to the pandemic crisis, as is beginning to emerge from research and national reports (Park *et al.* 2020; Pramling Samuelsson *et al.* 2020). overall, ECEC professionals have displayed impressive professional capital and agency. However, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic go far beyond these positive outcomes. The impact of the public health emergency on the lives of children, families, and educators is far from being positive. Today, millions of children and families are experiencing exacerbated condition of poverty; a high number of families are at risk and lack healthy living conditions, while many educators face increasing stress and uncertainty (Save the Children, 2020). The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic raises key questions about the continued resilience of early childhood practitioners over the coming months. We should not underestimate the personal and professional consequences of their emergency efforts, and this leads us to the second lesson learned.

2. Psychological distress and secondary impact concern education practitioners too

While the agility and resilience demonstrated by ECEC staff and education specialists has been impressive, we should not overlook the fact that for educators, the COVID-19 pandemic posed a key adaptive and transformative challenge, with multiple consequences. The health and wellbeing of educational staff is a critical concern (Jennings *et al.*, 2020). We know that educators' own social and emotional wellbeing influences their ability to support positive mental and social health in others (Eadie *et al.*, 2021). As stated by many authors, the «emotional and psychological» impact of the pandemic – the so-called second pandemic – today bears upon the lives of all those involved in the care of young children (Jennings *et al.*, 2020). The range of personal and emotional issues affecting educators' lives and identities in the current post-pandemic phase is self-evident. Secondary psychological distress and impacts concern education practitioners too.

Today, there is growing consensus that many early childhood educators are experiencing high levels of stress due to new emotional and psychological tensions and contradictions, such as:

- increased workloads and increased responsibility for children's safety and health;
- difficulties and challenges in engaging in dialogue with over-stressed parents about the new rules and routines introduced during the emergency;
- awareness of the possible high level of risk of infection in workplaces;
- job insecurity and uncertainty;
- a lack of training in communicating about health, safety, and wellbeing with worried parents;
- challenges in exchanging their expert knowledge with other stakeholders and practitioners (such as paediatricians, healthcare professionals, and others) within the community.

Given that poor educator wellbeing has significant implications for children's educational and learning outcomes (Eadie *et al.*, 2021). we need to provide early childhood educators with adequate support so as to enhance their wellbeing and self-efficacy (Cumming, Wong, 2018) and thus increase their capacity to deal with the wellbeing issues of the whole community (Jennings *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, research evidence is emerging to suggest that «EC educators felt they were able to sustain strong relationships with children despite the perceived negative impact of the pandemic on their wellbeing» (Eadie *et al.* 2021). encouraging the hope that their experience during the pandemic will inform positive changes in their everyday educational practices following the return to 'normality'. This brings us to the third lesson learnt: the interdisciplinary nature of early childhood education.

3. The interdisciplinary nature of early childhood education

The pandemic crisis shows that a healthy community demands authentic, solid, long-term *intersectional* action via the active involvement and participation of a range of stakeholders and practitioners (OECD, 2020). The mere juxtaposition of different communities, responsibilities, and sectors is far from being a resource, as we have experienced over the past months. In contrast, forming habits of sharing expertise, knowledge, and opinions, and developing consistent practices and behaviour within a systemic framework will be key to recovering community health (Tamburlini, Di Mario *et al.*, 2020).

The problematic aspect of this is that in the aftermath of the pandemic crisis, the conditions under which care, education, and health currently operate are changing, as are their meanings. Therefore, it is becoming more difficult to define shared educational and health goals, apply universal criteria for meeting these goals, and provide tailored responses to the needs of children in individual ECEC services. Consequently, more intersectional and situated actions are required to restore community health over the coming months (Blewitt *et. al.* 2020). However, we first need to learn more about how families with children have coped with the emergency. This information is required to enhance the capacity of the educational system, in strong synergy with the health sector, to respond to the new needs of children and families in the current post-pandemic phase.

The study presented in the next section was designed to fulfil this aim by collecting parents' narratives about their family lives during the spring 2020 lockdown.

4. Brief overview of the study: an example from Italy

The study, entitled *Children and lockdown: the voices of parents* (Mantovani *et al.* 2021). was carried out during the spring 2020 lockdown[1] by the Italian Society of Primary Care Paediatricians (SICuPP)[2] in collaboration with the University of Milan Bicocca and the *spin off* Bambini Bicocca, in Lombardy – the Italian region that was earliest and worst affected by the health emergency. It was based on a family survey involving parents with children aged 1-5 years and 6-10

[1] Between March and May 2020, Italy closed all ECEC services (0-6) and primary schools (5-11) Consequently, educators and teachers organized distance learning to guarantee the continuation of educational/didactics' activities.

[2] Principal investigation: Picca (SICuPP-Lombardy) & Mantovani (University of Milan-Bicocca). The main co-investigators were: Bove, Ferri. Further contributors: Braga, Mangiatordi, Ripamonti, Veronese of Unimib and Cravidi, Mariani, Mezzopane, Marinello of SICuPP. This study would not have been possible without the cooperation of pediatricians in designing and administering the questionnaire and the strong participation of all the families who took part in the survey.

years[3]. A convenience sample of 3,443 parents responded to an online questionnaire[4], forwarded to them by local pediatricians[5], concerning their everyday family lives and their opinions about how their children were currently behaving.

The aims of the study were to explore parent's opinions about their children's everyday lives during the lockdown, identify the families' resources and vulnerabilities, and assess the children's developmental changes.

Parents (93% mothers) responded to a set of questions about their child's everyday activities, routines, play, learning and development during the lockdown, and described the impact of the restrictive public health measures on their children's lives. They also responded to questions about the use of technology and their children's reaction to distance education and remote learning experience. A final few open-ended question concerned their worries – as parents – about the future.

Currently, a follow-up questionnaire is being administered to monitor continuity and change in children's behaviours during the 2021 lockdowns, the second phase of the health emergency (Picca, *et.al.*, 2021 *ongoing).*

Despite the limitations of the study (e.g., the participating families were relatively privileged compared to the average Italian family; respondents were mainly mothers; the sample was not statistically representative; the study was a single-region's family survey; we did not use validated misures/scales). the findings – although not generalized – raised some key flags to be included in the debate on how to achieve greater synergies and collaboration between educational and health services within our communities.

4.1. What have we learned from the study?

The first key finding was evidence for «systemic resilience in families», as defined in a previous article (Mantovani *et al.* 2021); that is to say, the capacity of parents and children to positively react to the new and unexpected situation, which is in keeping with the outcomes of other studies (Egan *et al.*, 2021). Almost all parents displayed a form of resilience, in terms of confidence and self-efficacy concerning how they had coped with the difficulties caused by the emergency; this resilience was further enhanced by their capacity to network and establish connections with other parents. 'We made it' was the most frequent response to the question on how they had coped with the emergency overall.

[3] For a more detailed presentation of the research design and methodology, see Mantovani, *et.al.* 2020.

[4] The study considered all ethical research standards: the questionnaire was anonymous, and participation in it was completely voluntary

[5] In all families with children aged 0–14 years are entitled to attend, in addition to a family doctor, a paediatrician in the employ of the National Health Service.

Surprisingly, despite the many restrictions imposed by the pandemic, a significant number of parents of pre-schoolers (60.4%) reported experiencing 'solidarity among parents' (with 31.4% mentioning support, 14.8% indifference, and 9.7% help). as did 60.3% of parents of older children (with 37.3% mentioning support, 18.1% help) (Mantovani *et. al.,* 2021). A smaller percentage of parents, however, had experienced a greater sense of stress, isolation and anxiety.

This key outcome confirms the social nature of resilience (Ungar, 2012) and its «dynamic and interactive nature» (Millican, Middleton, 2020, 3): in other words, «the 'systemic resilience' of families is not only an internal phenomenon, but also operates between the family system and the surrounding environment (other families/the community)» (Mantovani *et al.*, 2021, 39). Interestingly, the role of community relationships and parent-to-parent solidarity emerged as key protective factors that increase families' capacity to respond positively to emergencies.

The second key finding was the perceived capacity of children to react to the new situation. Almost all parents described their children as capable of adapting to the novel scenario. Despite noting a certain amount of distress, due to the lack of opportunities for socialization and interactions with peers, the majority of the parents of the younger age group described their children as willing to accept the limitations (80.6%). as did 83.3% of the older group.

In addition, parents reported some «unexpected improvements», as already observed in a previous work (Mantovani *et. al.* 2021, 42). such as: improvements in relationship with parents (40.8%) (this result is consistent with recent national research findings: Cusinato *et al.* 2020); improvements in relationships among siblings (32.8%); gains in linguistic development (50.1% of the younger children); improvements in the capacity to play alone (39.1% younger; 31.2% older).

While relaying these positive outcomes, which are borne out by other Italian studies (e.g., Balenzano *et al.*, 2020; Gigli, 2020). our respondents did not deny that their children had suffered due to the interruption of their social/play relationships with peers: for the majority of parents, in both the younger and older age groups, the greatest difficulty was not being able to attend school, followed by a lack of exercise and outdoor activities.

The third key finding was the parents' relatively positive perception of the distance learning experience (in Italian called LEAD[6] *Educational connections at distance* or DAD *didactic at distance*). Many parents in both groups viewed the distance learning offered by ECEC practitioners and teachers as 'positive on the whole', as noticed by other Italian studies (Gigli, Trentini, 2021). while only a small percentage rated the

[6] MIUR (2020). Commissione Infanzia e sistema Integrato Zero-sei. Orientamenti Pedagogici Sui Lead. Legami Educativi A Distanza (https://www.MIUR.gov.it/orientamenti-pedagogici-sui-legami-educativi-a-distanza-per-nido-e-infanzia-lead-).

experience as 'negative'. Not surprisingly, some critical issues emerged too: notably, a lack of interaction with teachers; excessive demands on parents – as has also emerged from other Italian studies (e.g., Pastori, Pagani *et al.*, 2021) – and too much homework assigned to the children. A major concern expressed by parents was the excessive use of technology. This is an important finding that should continue to be monitored going forward.

Alongside these positive results, the data revealed some areas of vulnerability that call for new systemic actions and interventions, including:

- changes in eating and sleeping patterns;
- changes in mood, typically for the worse;
- an increase in irritability and unreasonable behaviour;
- increased television viewing;
- excessive use of digital technologies;
- poorer and more intermittent concentration, especially in older children;
- increased fear of going out and meeting other people again, especially in the older age group;
- difficulty keeping rules.

Although the data suggest partially divergent outcomes for the two age groups, in both cases, the disruption of normal routines affected the way children behaved during the lockdown.

The final key finding was the effectiveness of the collaboration between the educational sector and the health sector. This study may be viewed as «an example and an outcome of promising collaboration between the educational and health sectors» (Mantovani *et al.* 2020, 14). given that these two areas are called to work together to design appropriate research, and develop strategies, for responding more effectively to the new needs of families and children in the post-pandemic period. Without the strength of the paediatricians' community-based network, it would not have been possible to reach such a high number of families during a challenging public health emergency; at the same time, the interplay of health and educational perspectives in the process of both developing the questionnaire and interpreting the data enhanced the research group's capacity to detect families' resources and needs within a systemic framework.

These results, although we cannot generalize from them, raise some key points which should be taken into account in the discussion on how to reduce the distance between health and education:

- first, the need to respond to the new needs of children and families more quickly and effectively: both ECEC educators and pediatricians regularly see children and have the opportunity to intervene at an early stage, also representing a major source of support and counselling of parents;
- then, the need to design new observational tools for continuing to monitor the identified areas of vulnerability over the coming

months, via interdisciplinary professional development and inter-professional work;
- finally, the need to develop a shared perspective and language for ECEC and healthcare practitioners that will enable them to urgently discern the conditions required for individuals and communities to maximize their health potential.

As stated in the recent Nayec 2019 report, «early childhood [education] is an interdisciplinary, collaborative, and systems-oriented profession. An interdisciplinary, systems-oriented perspective is essential if professionals, particularly as they advance in their practice, are to integrate multiple sources of knowledge into a coherent approach to their work» (Nayec, 2019, 8).

Indeed, in order to promote exchange and dialogue, new interdisciplinary and cross-sectional professional development interventions are required, together with the capacity to introduce new behaviours. For example: early childhood educators need to expand their view of children's daily lives and routines by including issues such as health and safety, redefining their practices accordingly to promote the children's wellbeing (broadly defined to include the «right to health, play, affection», Bradford, 2012). They should make their implicit or tacit knowledge (the so-called «folk pedagogies» or «implicit assumptions», Bruner, 1996) of children's socioemotional and physical health and wellbeing explicit in order to promote a more authentic dialogue with parents and other professionals, including parents from different cultural or linguistic backgrounds. At the same time, healthcare professionals should pay more attention to the 'context' in which children live. They would benefit from the first-hand knowledge about the lives of children in their 'natural context' that is characteristic of educational expertise.

Equally, educators would benefit from learning more about the 'indicators of vulnerability' detected by paediatricians, in relation to key aspects of health such as eating, sleeping, exercise, attention, and so on.

Both require new lens through which to urgently discern the conditions needed by individuals and communities to maximize their health potential, develop joint strategies with other practitioners, and further reinforce the community ties and relationships developed during the lockdown period.

This implies promoting systematic and inter-professional dialogue among different groups of practitioners: each group of stakeholders, no matter what sector they work in and what families they interact with, brings perspectives that can ground plans in the needs of children and their families and help young families connect with services that support their growth and systemic health. Promoting networking and multisectoral collaboration among the different agencies that provide support to families with young children (in the health, education, social

and community sectors among others) is a key priority for contemporary ECE (UNESCO, 2020).

6. Further directions and implementations

As we have learned from both the lessons of the pandemic crisis and the, albeit not generalizable, research findings presented above, new, more intersectional actions and work are required to respond to families' needs and offer them empowering settings. Possible actions include, for example:

- including the voices of families, educators, and healthcare professionals when making plans for responding to the new needs of young children and families;
- investing in novel/flexible and inter-professional in-service training of both ECEC practitioners and healthcare professionals;
- training educators in developing tools to map the 'health status' of families with young children, in collaboration with local paediatrician networks and other community health professionals, with a view to identifying vulnerabilities and resources as early as possible;
- providing guidelines for prevention and health education programmes for communities; prioritizing information sharing and partnerships across services that deliver education and health to children;
- reinforcing social relationships, social cohesion, and parent-to-parent solidarity in the community as 'key protective factors'.

The core assumptions here are that networks of cooperation among local health and education agencies need to be strengthened, with a view to ensuring the delivery of healthcare and education services, and to designing and implementing new agile and sustainable tools in support of preventive community intervention.

Conclusion

In sum, in the current post-pandemic period, ECEC practitioners and health professionals can play a crucial role in reducing the gap between health and education, by acting to 'observe deeply, listen deeply and connect deeply', with a view to becoming health guarantors or «tutors in resilience» (Cyrulnik, Malaguti, 2005). The underlying assumption, as stated earlier, is that social health includes the physical but also the mental health of children and of the entire community.

This means rethinking both the organization and content of ECEC continuing professional development. Responding to emergencies implies intercepting signs of vulnerability in children and families as they first appear in the daily life of ECEC settings. This can be most

effectively done through community work based on stronger networking relationships with other practitioners and services (OECD, 2020). especially health professionals and paediatricians.

We know that detecting families' needs and resources in our contemporary society is far from easy, especially when recent phenomena, such as parents' growing insecurity concerning how to ensure their children's health and safety, parental fears and stressors, and practitioners' anxieties or difficulties surrounding the negotiating and communicating of new rules and routines to families, have all been exacerbated by the ongoing emergency.

Nonetheless, working in this direction represents both a key responsibility for the ECE community and an excellent opportunity for both sectors – education and health – to reinvent their practices, via a bottom-up process of reflexivity and innovation from within, based on dialogue, reciprocal learning, and inter-professionalism.

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