Experiences of newly recruited educators in Early Childhood Services: a phenomenological-hermeneutic study

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Abstract

The initial training programs for educators in Early Childhood Services need to be integrated within specific training characterised by recursive self-sustaining circularity, able to produce professional skills. The present work analyses the model and the perspective realised in the municipality of Foligno (Italy). Such a pattern is found in phenomenological-hermeneutic research, a time of tight integration of the perspectives that guide the childcare workers, maximizing moments of action, reflection, and appraisal. This tool has made it possible to investigate the Early Childhood Educators' perception of their role, and the characteristics of the educational profession addressed to children up to three years old. Educators have been able to rethink their skills and practices.

KEYWORDS: Early Childhood Services, Self-Reflection, New Recruits, Training, Phenomenological-Hermeneutic Research.

1. Introduction

In Italy, Early childhood education and care is organised in the 'integrated system 0-6' that was introduced by law 107/2015 and is regulated by the Legislative Decree 65/2017. The integrated system is part of the education system and is organised into two separate levels that welcome children according to their age: the 'educational services for childhood' for pupils aged between 0 and 3 years 'nursery school', for children aged between 3 and 6 years old.

Since the 2019/2020 school year, Italy raised the minimum qualification for early childhood educators (0–3 years) to a 3-year bachelor's degree (ISCED 6) in educational science. As Miller (2008) and Nutbrown (2012) stated, 'qualification is the foundation for quality'. The newly early years educators have therefore followed the same academic-training course, whereas the senior educators come from different educational backgrounds. This is important for further reflections of this article. Nurseries have organisational and operating methods that vary according to their opening times and sizes. However, their general purpose is to develop the autonomy, identity, and competencies of children, also ensuring their well-being, meals and rest. ECEC services for children aged 0-3 are run directly or indirectly by the municipalities, based on the criteria defined by regional regulations. The recruitment system for early childhood educators is also run at municipal level. The Ministry of Education and Merit (MIM), has a general responsibility for the allocation of financial resources to local authorities, for the provision of educational guidelines and for the promotion of the integrated system at the local level. However, irrespective of the recruitment situation, it is important to strengthen the quality of provision by developing and maintaining high expectations from the initial preparation period (Feinman-Nemser, 2001). While in the schools the service training and induction courses are partly coordinated at the ministerial level, this is not the case for Early Childhood Services. According to the most recent European and Italian studies and regulations and

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in line with the principles of lifelong learning and adult education the issue of in-service training of personnel involved in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is central to children's wellness. The importance of policies aimed at maintaining the quality of professional training was reaffirmed at a European level in the 2000s:

> *"Education and training have a crucial role to play in meeting the many socio-economic, demographic, environmental and technological challenges facing Europe and its citizens today and, in the years, ahead. [...] Efficient investment in human capital through education and training systems is an essential component of Europe's strategy [...]. High-quality education and training systems, which are both efficient and equitable, are crucial for Europe's success and for enhancing employability. The major challenge is to ensure the acquisition of key competencies by everyone while developing the excellence and attractiveness at all levels of education and training that will allow Europe to retain a strong global role" (CEU, 2009, pp. 2-3).*

Steinnes (2014) suggested that obtaining qualifications helps to be 'good', but this is not enough. Steinnes asserted that other factors such as knowing the cultural background of the children and their families and experiences of working with children in different contexts are equally important. Nevertheless, the idea of nursery work as a professional occupation is undercut by the culturally and historically evolved common belief that working with younger children is a matter of 'common sense'. Vincent and Braun's (2011) research also found that for students studying childhood, the emphasis was on work with young children being largely a matter of 'common sense' rather than a repository of a specific knowledge and skill set. Many studies, underline that the first years of teaching can be a critical period for the professionalization process of teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Wang, Odell & Schwille, 2008). What Snoeck says for teachers can also be extended to early childhood educators.

> *"Becoming a teacher should be seen as a gradual process, including initial education, the induction phase and continuing professional development. The point at which newly qualified teachers transfer from Initial Teacher Education and move to professional life is seen as crucial for further professional commitment and development, and for reducing the number of teachers leaving the profession" (ivi, p. 13).*

Effective induction programs should provide all new teachers with systematic personal, social, and professional support in the early years of their careers (Langdon et al., 2016; Cumming, 2017; Cumming et al., 2022). They can therefore also help improve school and teacher performance (ivi, p.13). Three areas can define the professional journey to ensure staff are fully supported in their employment. In the Initial training future educators study the most important theoretical approaches and understand the immediate competencies required at work through university traineeship activities. The induction period enables educators to decline and apply their knowledge and competencies to the needs and expectations of their employment context. Ongoing education and training are based on the existing skills in the context and respond to individuals' learning needs which may be identified through self-reflection, appraisal, the emerging needs of an employer or policy change. In summary, it can be said that while initial programs are focused on entry to a profession, the focus of induction is more contextualized and the emphasis is more practical and organised around the specific needs of an employer, groups of children and their families. According to the European final report entitled "Early childhood education and care: how to recruit, train and motivate well-qualified staff":

> *"systems that are able to make clear links between the two stages of preparation are more likely to improve the quality of training, support retention and enable individuals to thrive in the sector. Typically, this development of clear links is achieved through:*
> * *the use of a common set of personal, professional, and social competencies for initial training and induction.*
> * *the development and application of a clear set of ethical values.*
> * *ensuring that every trainee/student has the opportunity to undertake significant periods of practice in ECEC settings as part of their initial programme.*
> * *initial training programs whose content encourages reflection, analysis of effective practice and opportunities to learn from practice" (p. 95).*

Initial training experiences for early childhood educators working in the nursery sector are currently not widely available in Italy and are organized in a variety of ways.

This paper focuses on Initial training experiences which is configured as a virtuous practice both for the organizational structure and for the contents and evaluation tools used.

2. The training course for newly early childhood educators in Foligno

In 2022, following the recruitment of fourteen early childhood educators, Maria Filomia, the coordinator of the Foligno Municipality's nursery services, designed a training course for new teachers. The participants were between thirty and fifty-five years old, with previous

educational experience (in nurseries and elsewhere). The course, which consisted of 10 meetings held mainly on Saturdays, dealt with many topics related to the educational profession, such as care, well-being, observation, educational planning, play and illustrated books. The lessons alternated between frontal teaching proposals and experiential workshops. As the literature on the subject highlights, the initial training programmes for teacher induction into school activity need to be integrated within a recursive self-sustaining circularity, able to produce professional skills (Mangione, 2016). Based on these assumptions, the course was enriched with tools to support professional reflection, self-analysis and comparison between peers. Specifically, it's been integrated into hermeneutic research activity.

3. Phenomenological-hermeneutic research: materials and methods

Within the framework of the training activities proposed by the Municipality of Foligno for newly hired educators in both public and private crèches of the same Municipality, phenomenological-hermeneutic research was proposed to encourage and support a reflection by the newly hired educators on their role as educators. The analysis of their experiences brings out critical and supportive elements in the relationship with children and their families (Langdridge, 2007).

The phenomenological-hermeneutic approach is concerned with the world of life and human experience as it is lived and is particularly suited to illuminating details and seemingly trivial aspects of experience that may sometimes or often be taken for granted in a person's life, to give meaning to these aspects and thereby achieve a sense of understanding (Wilson, 2015).

Phenomenological research contemplates the possibility of new meanings emerging about a phenomenon that brings "something forgotten to visibility" (Harman, 2007). What we can consider the real 'challenge' of phenomenology is the fact of describing what is given to us in the immediate experience without being 'hindered by preconceptions and theoretical notions' (van Manen, 2023). It is a type of research that is done with people and not on people, it places the individual with his experiences at the centre and supports him in activating his healthy resources. The researcher conducted an online introductory meeting with newly recruited educators. The researcher introduced herself to the educators and the objectives of the research were discussed:

- promoting reflection upon educational practice and intervention.
- exploring expectations of one's work.
- investigating any critical issues related to work at the crèche in relation to children and their families.
- bringing out the supportive elements in the relationship with families and children.

The subsequent phases of the research intervention were then co-organised with the educators. The agreed research plan consisted of three phases: the testimony collection phase, the content analysis phase and the restitution phase.

3.1 Testimony collection phase

To investigate the aforementioned dimensions and encourage reflection, a semi-structured open-ended written questionnaire was administered to the participants. This methodological instrument was chosen because it presents a survey scheme that is neither completely directive nor completely standardised but has intermediate degrees of both types. The questions are decided by the researcher but not the content. That is, the respondents do not have to choose from the response alternatives provided by the researcher before going into the field but can freely answer according to their own conceptual categories and in their logical order (Cellini, 2009), initiating a guided self-reflection process. The questionnaire was emailed to the educators who were invited to fill it in and send it in within two weeks. All 14 educators replied on time.

3.2 Content analysis phase

The questionnaires were read several times and after that the individual answers to the questions were analysed. The narratives were subjected to content analysis according to the phenomenological-hermeneutic method proposed by Montesperelli (1998). The contents relating to the same themes were systematised into a series of containers. The categories into which the testimonies were divided, according to the standards defined by the COREQ (Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research) CheckList (Tong et al., 2007), have a phenomenological character as they emerge through the criterion of evidence (Lauro Grotto et al., 2014). The narrative units that emerged from the questionnaires were organised into a series of phenomenological categories (Mantovani & Spagnolli, 2003; Smith, 2003; Reid et al.,2005). They were thus structured based on an analysis of the unravelling and meaning-making processes of the participants' experiences (Tringali et al., 2024). Here we will focus on the results grouped into four macro-categories: expectations, the relationship with the families, the relationship with the children and images related to one's work, as shown in the Table 1.

4. Restitution phase and result

The results were then shared with the educators during three online meetings lasting 1.5 hours each: the phenomenological categories were analyzed and discussed by the participants. In this phase, the hermeneutic circularity process was initiated. The hermeneutic process consists of a dialogue with the dimension of *Otherness* producing a constant

Table 1 - Structure of the narrative units identified in the questionnaires examined.

Categories	Subcategories
The relationship with the children	Difficulties in caring for the children (difficulties in settling in, difficulties related to managing children's anger, difficulties in managing conflicts, difficulties in helping children develop concentration, difficulties related to certain daily activities) Children's gifts (smiles, wonder, achievements, bonds)
Images related to one's work	Chaos- Heart and Mind- Colour and Warmth- The Sun- The Rainbow- A Mountain Landscape- A Seed- A Sunflower- A Butterfly- A Seagull- A Serene Child- The Foundations of a Home
Expectations	When expectations are not remembered When the job matches one's expectations When work exceeds one's expectations When one's expectations are disappointed
The relationship with the families	The importance of working with the families Difficulties (difficulties in gaining the trust of families, difficulties in understanding the peculiarities of each family, language difficulties, difficulties when families bring sick children to school) Gratitude and trust

reshuffling of concepts and interpretations (Ferro Allodola, 2014; Tringali et. al., 2021) It is worth emphasising the participative and collaborative climate that characterised these meetings. Through a dynamic and circular process, it was fostered the new recruits' reflection on the subjective reworking of their being educators. As a further development of the research plan, a request was made to have a specific exploration of the experiences not only of the newly recruited but of all the educators of the nurseries in Foligno. The results are described in this article by quoting what the educators themselves said. Opinions are described as op.

4.1 Expectation

About expectations, it is possible to identify three polarities of responses in which: the job corresponds to one's expectations (Op.12; Op.8) or exceeds them (Op.5) and when expectations are disregarded (Op.8). These three areas are analysed below.

WHEN THE JOB MATCHES ONE'S EXPECTATIONS

For most educators, the work they do seems to fully correspond to their expectations. These narratives are emblematic:

"Express myself at my best, it is stimulating and allows me to grow continuously... Fortunately, thanks to my university path and the acquired skills during the internship, I have had the opportunity to choose and practice a job that satisfies me" (Op.12).

"Living with children daily, accompanying them in their growth and achievement of autonomy, and supporting families in the very first years of

life is an emotion that has remained unchanged over time" (Op.8).

WHEN WORK EXCEEDS ONE'S EXPECTATIONS

In some cases, expectations are exceeded:

"The expectations I had before starting this work were far exceeded" (Op.5).

WHEN ONE'S EXPECTATIONS ARE DISREGARDED

An educator recounts how her expectations were disregarded, highlighting a gap between the theory learned during her studies and the work in the field:

"I suffered from the disconnection between theory and practice. It was a disillusionment. I had expectations that were partly shattered" (Op.7).

Another educator highlights how the world of the nursery is proving to be more complex than expected:

"Some relationships have turned out to be more complex than expected. Especially regarding the relationship with parents and the difficulties in making the context more inclusive" (Op.8).

4.2 The relationship with the families

As Silva underlines "another front on which it is possible to evaluate the positive effects of in-service training is the educators' attitude towards parents: the strengthening of skills and a willingness to listen to the point of view of other social actors on the educational scene, leads educators to become more interested in how parents educate young children at home" (Silva, 2019,

p. 382), even to the extent of adopting some family practices in the service where they work (Peeters & Vandenbroeck, 2011).

The educators seem to have an awareness of how important it is to recognise and value work with the families:

> *"The nursery-family relationship is an aspect that I consider to be of paramount importance as there can be no meaningful and profound education with children if the relationship with their parents is not taken care first. I am strongly aware that being an educator doesn't only mean working with children, but also with their families" (Op.6).*

Working with children's families involves important values such as sincerity (Op1), trust (Op 4), support without judgment and empathy (Op 11). These narratives are exemplary:

> *"My relationship with the families tends to be sincere" (Op.1).*

> *"Already in the first interview and settling-in week I try to lay the foundations for trust, reciprocity and transparency" (Op.4).*

> *"I build an ongoing dialogue without judgement, respecting everyone's time, trying to support their identity as parents" (Op.11).*

To foster a fertile ground for exchange and cooperation, the planning of sharing moments become essential.

Initial meetings are a valuable opportunity to get to know each other:

> *"I usually do... with all the parents and the education team, specific meetings, so that we can get to know each other, but tiptoeing into the lives of two parents who leave, in my arms, what they hold most precious. Everyone can tell their stories, ask questions, remove their doubts, and I always try to answer them calmly, creating a calm situation, a positive climate, looking them in the eyes. I hope that they feel welcomed, trying to create that mutual relationship of trust, collaboration, and involvement, which will then be consolidated over time" (Op.11).*

It is also appropriate, as evidenced by some testimonies, to carve out moments of exchange daily, making parents participate in the educational context:

> *"The moments of sharing, exchange and confrontation with the parents take place daily both at the children's entrance and exit. It is especially at this last moment that the relationship with the families is best nurtured and consolidated. I tell the parent how the educational day went, any progress and achievements of the child and various aspects that I consider significant. Parents can express themselves by asking questions, sharing experiences at home, asking for information, advice, clarifications, ex-pressing doubts, uncertainties, fears, etc" (Op.6).*

The parent-child workshops represent a significant opportunity within the educational project by creating a bridge between the family world and the nursery:

> *"parents, children and teachers can share moments with the aim of enhancing a relationship of trust and authentic educational continuity" (Op.12).*

Some educators also set up receptions for parents during the year to foster dialogue:

> *"Twice a year we organize meetings with families, to have real time to dedicate to each other and also to give each other a line to follow in the educational and formative choices of the children. Despite these meetings, the relationship with the families is complex" (Op.1).*

The construction of the relationship with families is not always easy and educators have been able to return the elements of complexity. These difficulties can be grouped into the following macro-areas:

- DIFFICULTIES IN GAINING THE TRUST OF THE FAMILIES. An educator recounts the difficulty she encountered in gaining the trust of the families. "This year I took on a group of children who had already attended one year of the crèche and who left an educator who had moved to another crèche. Initially, I had to win the trust of the families, who had another contact person" (Op.3).
- DIFFICULTIES IN UNDERSTANDING THE PECULIARITIES OF EACH FAMILY. Each family represents a world of its own: with its own culture, its own values, its own peculiarities, whose specific needs are not always easy to recognise and identify, as witnessed by the narratives: "*In all these years of working in the nurseries I have been able to learn and understand that every single family has to be welcomed with all its peculiarities, which is not always an easy concept to understand or to accept especially at the beginning, each family being a world of its own*"(Op.9).
- LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES. Difficulties increase especially in the presence of language barriers: "*due to misunderstandings at the linguistic level caused by a different spoken language, situations were created that I could define as*

'uncomfortable' ... I remember an episode of a little girl who came to the nursery, suffering from pediculosis. The dialogue with her parents to point out the health problem was impossible because the family spoke only Arabic and, even if they understood, it did not seem to be a reason for them to leave the nursery. This situation went on for a long time and could only be resolved thanks to a figure who acted as a 'linguist-tic bridge' between the nursery staff and the family" (Op.9).

- DIFFICULTIES WHEN FAMILIES BRING SICK CHILDREN TO SCHOOL. A particularly acute problem seems to be that of having to accommodate sick children in the nursery: "*I find that the subject child no longer has the right to 'be sick', there are more and more cases of children attending in poor health, few work permits, little family network and we are seen as mere caregivers*" (Op.4).

One educator adds that according to her, this happens because parents see the kindergarten as a 'car park': "*for some parents, the crèche is solely and exclusively the place where they can leave their child during their absence due to work and other commitments. The non-recognition of the professionalism of the educators and the non-attribution of an educational value to the crèche inevitably generates a difficulty in the relationship, at least as far as I am concerned. To give an example, one only has to think of the bad habit, now rampant, of taking children to nursery school in a less-than-optimal state of health*" (Op.7).

GRATITUDE AND TRUST. Some educators not only expressed the difficulties they experienced in dealing with families, but also talked about what they receive from them in terms of gratitude and trust: "*Parents also give us very precious gifts: they entrust their little ones to us, placing extreme trust in us, they listen to us and ask for our advice*" (Op.5). Gratitude that can become a supportive element for educators: "*Even though it is a job, it is the family's thanks that makes all the difference, because it means that the task you are doing is a positive one and that the relationship that has been established is genuine, one of empathy and trust*" (Op.2).

4.3 The relationship with children

Difficulties in caring for the children. While taking care of children at the crèche, the educators reported encountering multiple difficulties.

INSERTION DIFFICULTIES

The insertion of the child at the nursery is a particularly delicate moment. It is crucial to be able to offer a continuum between parental care and the care offered by the educator, avoiding potentially damaging breaks. The following narrative tells of the difficulties encountered in this regard:

"Let me give you an example: a one-year-old child arrived at nursery school accustomed to being constantly in his mother's arms. The child refused to leave his mother's arms, even to play or go in the stroller. We asked ourselves many questions about this situation, and many times we had to hold back from responding immediately to his requests. At home, the process is still ongoing. In about six months at nursery school the child learned to approach other children, today he is calm and independent. The work we are doing with the parents is still ongoing and he needs daily sweetness" (Op.1).

The child experiences the suffering of separation during the insertion period. But this also happens in later stages for example when children return after a long absence. The following testimony highlights the difficulties encountered by the educator dealing with this situation:

"I remember the episode in which a two-year-old child returned to the nursery after twenty days of absence due to illness. The separation from his mummy was difficult, the child had always been with his mother during all these days and breaking this mother-child bubble seemed almost impossible. When he arrived with his mother in nursery, he was calm but after he understood that his mother had to go away. Suddenly, he started to get angry and cry desperately, so much so that his mother was worried and, taken by a moment of anxiety she wanted to take him home. I tried, calmly and firmly, to explain that the reaction of the child was normal but slowly we would help him to calm down and relax, then involve him in our usual routines. The mother did not seem very convinced by my explanation but slowly we managed to calm the child and face the day with serenity" (Op.12).

DIFFICULTIES IN MANAGING AGGRESSION OF SOME CHILDREN

The educator's task at the crèche is extremely delicate as he or she must find a balance between two types of interaction with the child: on the one hand approval, affection, tolerance, reassurance, encouragement, and on the other hand prohibition of certain behaviours, empowerment, demands, control. The words of this educator are meaningful:

"in taking care of children in the facility I often encounter difficulties. Many times, it takes a long time before we get to the reason for certain behaviours and finding a calm and balanced way to express them is not easy. The main incidents that occur in the daycare centre concern aggression" (Op.1).

This difficulty is illustrated by the following account:

"In my group there is a child with whom I get along well, but sometimes it is difficult to manage his moments of frustration. He would shout, cry, wriggle, throw objects and hit his classmates. He is a highly intelligent and exuberant child, but sometimes difficult to contain during play moments and to monitor so that he does not hurt himself" (Op.3).

Expressions of anger by young children are normal and are often related to their inability to recognise their wishes, their frustrations, and their speech difficulties. It would be desirable for educators to have the time to be able to recognise the specific needs of the child at these junctures. However, as the following account points out, sometimes due to workload they do not have the opportunity to do so: "I find it difficult to take care of such young children who have different needs from each other. This year, I have a group of younger children (3 months-1 year). There is a very lively child who is going through a particularly aggressive phase, she bites and often pushes the others... Her management is complicated in the large group. The difficulty lies in making her understand that certain behaviour is not appropriate to the place, and she mustn't hurt others" (Op.2). If the educator, due to too many work burdens, leans towards control and reprimands the child, children will tend to rebel.

DIFFICULTIES IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Some educators have reported finding it particularly difficult when aggressive situations arise within a group of children, whereby a child hits, pulls hair, or pushes a peer: "*Dealing with peer disputes: shouting, pushing, biting, etc*" (Op.6). Educators do not always seem to be aware that peer conflict is a fundamental moment in the child's psycho-affective development, as witnessed by this account:

"I often witness quarrels, pushes, and spitefulness, and this hurts my heart because in them, even though they are so small, I already see the competition, rivalry, and frustration of adults. I try to teach them tolerance, respect, and sharing because this is what school, family, and society should teach. They must be helped to develop a certain sensitivity for each child. How? Perhaps by teaching them to be more compassionate, and less selfish" (Op.14).

The educator's role should not be to avoid conflict in the peer group, because in this manner they deprive the child of an important growth moment. Rather, they can provide child tools to manage conflict.

DIFFICULTIES IN HELPING CHILDREN DEVELOP CONCENTRATION

Two educators dwelt on the children's difficulty in "*staying focused on things*" due to too many stimuli:

"they are not used to stay on top of the things, experiences and activities that are offered. The level of concentration is lowered because there are too many stimuli" (Op.4).

"The use of tablets, mobile phones from a very early age causes children to have difficulty using their imagination. they have shorter and shorter attention spans, and they struggle to move independently in free play" (Op.8).

DIFFICULTIES RELATED TO DAILY ACTIVITIES

There are specific moments that appear to be more critical, bathing routine and nap time for example, as one educator well explained:

"The management of the bathing routine was also a critical moment last year when I had a group of 12-24 months children... this moment is very delicate, and each child would need more individual attention and maximum calm" (Op.2).

"Many children quickly get used to sleeping together. Some children overreact, this year we had to have one child sleep outside the sleep room. This way he is calmer and does not wake up repeatedly" (Op.2).

CHILDREN'S GIFTS

Alongside the difficulties encountered are the gifts the educators receive while working with the children. These include spontaneity, smiles (Op.12), wonder (Op.4), achievements (Op.3) and ties (Op.2). These statements are exemplary: "*The smile of children is the greatest gift they can give me*" (Op.12); "*the continuous astonishment of their eyes, the 'wonder'*" (Op.4); "*Children's achievements, their first experiences, the moment when you see the satisfaction of being able to do something that was previously difficult for them*" (Op.4); "*With the children you create good bonds, particularly with your own section the children create a real bond of attachment as they recognise you as a reference figure*" (Op.2).

4.4 Images related to one's work

Finally, in Table 2 are the images used by educators to represent their work at the nursery school.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The research has limitations due to the small number of subjects involved and the focus on only female participants, which may warrant further study. Future studies should aim to expand the number of participants. The data collected through the interview show a profession complex not only for the audience it addresses but for the personal involvement that entails. Starting the reflection on the answers of educators'

Table 2 - Images used by educators to represent their work at the nursery school.

Image	Opinion
Chaos	"The image it evokes is one of chaos, or disorder only present where one feels free and at home" (Op.1).
Heart and Mind	"Heart (first) and Mind' at the service of children, a bodily in dialogue, between bodies in a relationship, where the child feels free to create and express him/herself' (Op.11).
A colourful painting	"A kind's painting the that children know how to do with brushes, where many colours that overlap and mix together, always in a different and magical way" (Op.3).
The Sun	"It is the sun rising on my new day even though there are clouds in the sky" (Op.13).
A rainbow	"A rainbow in the beginning and end of which there is me, but in the middle of which there are the colours of all the children, each with their own hues, shades and attitudes: red carefree vivacity, indigo sweetness, yellow politeness, green sharing, blue determination, orange patience and violet selflessness, or that's how I like to think of them" (Op.14).
A mountain landscape	"A beautiful mountain landscape with Tibetan bridges, climbs, streams, small animals... an explosion of nature with its beauties and criticalities, where everything is possible and can be experienced by having Respect and Care for oneself and all that is part of it" (Op.4).
A seed	"A seed that is planted and watered every day until it grows and blossoms. Ours is a work in progress in which the child grows, and we as educators grow every day together with the children" (Op.10).
A sunflower	"Sunflower is my favourite flower. The sunflower is the most joyful of all flowers in nature. It conveys cheerfulness with its yellow colour. As the legend of the sunflower goes, it was not always a bright colour, it was an ugly flower, and no one wanted to be near it until the sun decided to help it. It embraced it and with its shining rays, it immediately glowed a bright yellow almost like gold. From that day on, the flower became the tallest and most beautiful in the garden. I want to be the sun for the children, to accompany them through this short stretch of life, to stimulate their curiosity, to bring out their interests, to face fears and challenges together, to help them believe strongly in themselves, and I, a step back, look at them admired" (Op.10).
A butterfly	"A butterfly which, having emerged from its cocoon, unfurls its large, colourful wings and makes its first flight. For me, the butterfly is a symbol of constructive effort" (Op.10).
A seagull	"That of a seagull slowly preparing to take flight to new horizons" (Op.7).
A serene child	"A calm and competent child, placed in an environment he/she knows and in which he/she feels free, respects rules, other children and learns" (Op.2).
The foundations of a house	"The foundations of a home, it is in the daycare centre where, in cooperation with the parents, the foundations are laid for forming the child's identity. Moreover, we educators also grow and learn new things together with the children" (Op.5).

backwards, that is, from the last question analysed (about the image of one's work), we observe a romantic vision of one's work and sometimes an idealized vision of childhood. The dynamics of confrontation and quarrels between children, for example, are part of the growth processes and are positive steps (Di Pietro, Savio, 2021). Early childhood educators have a job in which unforeseen events can become a resource if welcomed and managed through group dynamics, but they can also be very frustrating. Although many difficulties have been identified, educators possess all the emotional and professional resources to find effective solutions. Physical and emotional care seems to be perceived as more important than educational design and organizational activities in general. While the literature shows a strong relationship between all components (care and educative design) of the profession (Bosi, 2015). The basis of any educational design is the sharing of visions and underlying values. Some aspects of the professional vision should be shared and explained further with more experienced educators. We believe that this model can favour this type of sharing and personal reflection. For this reason, future activities may benefit from the presence of senior educators during the discussion phase. The model here described proves to be functional to the exploitation of a great diversity of newly qualified educators and to set a moment of realignment given the following professional development in the educational context. The model represents a mode for reflecting on their competencies and defining new training developments. Within the framework of ECEC, induction training of educational staff can increase the general well-being of the children, the educators themselves, and the children's parents, thanks to a real engagement of all the staff operating in ECEC services. Therefore, this cannot be training imposed top-down; on the contrary, professional training must be bottom-up, involving all the subjects in the selected context, according to generate reflexive processes (Balduzzi & Lazzari, 2015). In this paper, we have shown educators' reflections related to perceived professional effectiveness, but the number of subjects involved is limited. Nevertheless, some confirmations can be found in the literature on the topic (Halle, 2010). It could be functional to extend similar experiences (Garvis& Manning, 2015). In which the first advantage is to give yourself time for reflection, comparison, and professional growth. A gift that every profession deserves.

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