

Education and Childhood: Changing Policies and Practices for a Child-Centered Welfare System

Edited by Anna Milione and Maura Tripi

Childhood policies and Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services—considered central to the current European agenda for tackling inequalities linked to social background and throughout the life course—serve multiple purposes that underlie different social representations of children, as well as of caregiving and educational roles and responsibilities (Sabatinelli 2016; Saraceno 2017; Naldini and Saraceno 2020). A historical and cross-cultural perspective allows us to understand how these policies change over time, and to view childhood as a structural component of society, and care and education as social constructs (Qvortrup, Bardy, Sgritta, Wintersberger 1994; Sgritta 1994).

The process of redefining early childhood services from an educational standpoint has been deeply influenced by the constructivist and interpretive perspectives of the new childhood studies paradigm. This paradigm views the child, from birth, as a “subject endowed with agency” (Hengst and Zeiher 2004), a protagonist in their own growth process, and a co-constructor of multiple and complex forms of knowledge (Qvortrup 2004, Corsaro 2020). More recently, we observe the spread of the childism approach from a reconstructionist perspective, aimed at a profound reworking of the relationship between the adult and child worlds (Tripi 2025, Wall 2022).

In Italy, in the absence of an organic reform, childhood policies evolve between «inertia and innovation» (Sabatinelli 2016) as a corollary to other policies, through additions and amendments lacking a coherent overall framework. Within the framework of children’s and adolescents’ rights (UN Convention, 1989), Law 285/97 contributed to an initial reframing of early childhood services in socio-educational terms, while the framework law for the reorganization of the social interventions and services system (Law 328/00) reconfirmed their social purpose, listing them among interventions for the promotion and support of family responsibilities (Milione 2004; 2015). Only Legislative Decree 65/2017, with the establishment of the Integrated Education and Care System for the 0-6 age group, definitively included them among universal educational services (Tripi 2022).

While it is possible to observe a new sensitivity in legislation that establishes the educational nature of early childhood services—from a perspective also attentive to children’s needs and rights to well-being and cognitive, emotional, and relational development (cf. Pedagogical Guidelines, 2022; National Guidelines for Early Childhood Educational Services, Ministry of Education 2022)—a crucial challenge remains. This concerns the political, institutional, and cultural processes required to make these services effective as a universal measure accessible to all boys and girls (Milione 2024). While the State has assumed financial responsibility for preschools (ages 3–6), for nurseries and the various types of educational services for the 0-3 age group there is neither an individual subjective right to access nor a guaranteed mechanism for public funding. Despite having transitioned into the area of educational policies, nurseries still retain their original identity as «services available upon individual request», rather than as an enforceable universal entitlement.

Furthermore, within the framework outlined by the NRRP (National Recovery and Resilience Plan) investments, a significant heterogeneity emerges across regional contexts regarding their capacity to design and manage services, alongside several inconsistencies concerning the underlying vision and purposes. Among these, the expansion of educational services is primarily viewed as a tool to promote female employment and work-life balance, while losing sight of the primary value these services hold for young boys and girls. As extensively documented in literature, attending early childhood educational services constitutes an important opportunity for cognitive and relational development, with positive effects that translate into the subsequent schooling path (Musatti and Picchio, 2010). Early childhood educational services represent an important tool for countering social inequalities, as they foster early access to quality educational opportunities and contribute to reducing the effects of educational poverty and socioeconomic disparities (Ottaviano and Capretti, 2018; Bosisio and Santero, 2020). Indeed, numerous studies have found a positive correlation between early childhood service attendance and subsequent academic success, as well as a significant reduction in school drop-out and early school leaving phenomena (Saraceno 2021).

In light of this, the purpose of this Special Issue is to promote a multidisciplinary and transnational debate around public policies for childhood, namely to solicit studies and analyses centered on the agency and subjective right of access of children to personal development, which can translate into clear policy indications.

From this perspective, we encourage the submission of empirical or theoretical contributions addressing the following thematic axes:

- **Universalism and inequalities:** access to 0-6 services as a tool to counter social inequalities of origin and educational poverty; the definition of LEPs (*Livelli Essenziali delle Prestazioni* / Essential Performance Levels); economic, cultural, and social barriers hindering the participation of all children.
- **Childhood policies and action plans (NRRP, National Action Plan for the Child Guarantee):** critical analysis of recent measures and investments, local governance models, and territorial gaps (North-South, urban areas, and internal/rural areas); policy goals and potential trade-offs between quantitative expansion and quality standards; regional processes accompanying the establishment of Integrated 0-6 Hubs.
- **Care work and professionalism:** working conditions of early childhood educators, initial and in-service training, qualified staff shortages (labor shortage), and the social recognition of the profession.
- **Pedagogical perspectives and children's agency:** innovative educational models and practices; relationships between different segments within the integrated 0-6 system and other school cycles; active participation and decision-making of boys and girls within educational contexts.
- **Support for families with children:** collaboration and multi-sectoral integration of interventions favoring childhood and families during the first thousand days; practices of innovation and integration of social, healthcare, and educational services for the 0-6 age group.

Interested Authors are invited to submit an abstract of **maximum 3,000 characters** (including spaces) by **September 27th**. If accepted, the full-length contribution must be submitted by **January 24th** in accordance with the formatting and guidelines specified below: theoretical contributions of no more than **25,000 characters** (including spaces); empirical research papers of no more than **25,000 characters** (including spaces).

For evaluation purposes, the abstract must be structured into:

- Introduction to the topic;
- Scientific framework, overview of the national and international debate;
- Methodological approach and formulated hypotheses;
- Main and innovative results;
- Essential bibliographical references.

Email address for abstract submissions: welfareergonomia.rel@irpps.cnr.it

Following the notification of acceptance, Authors will be required to register online on the OJS platform web page of the publisher Franco Angeli: <https://ojs.francoangeli.it/ojs/index.php/we/user/register> Once registration is complete, Authors can upload their paper by clicking on the “Make a new submission” link available in the Dashboard. Should the proposed essay not align with the Journal’s themes, the proponents will be notified.

References

- Bosisio R. & Santero A. (2020). “Diversità famigliari e diritti dei bambini. Famiglie omogenitoriali e migranti nei nidi d’infanzia e nella scuola”. *La Rivista Italiana delle Politiche Sociali*. 1(2020), 87-103.
- Corsaro William A. (2020). *Sociologia dell’infanzia*, Milano: Franco Angeli. (Orig. Ed. *Sociology of Childhood*, SAGE, London 2015, Italian translation edited by Colombo M., Aroldi P., Maccarini A.).
- Hengst H. and Zeiher H. (eds.) (2004). *Per una sociologia dell’infanzia*, Milano: Franco Angeli.
- Milione A. (2024). "Early Childhood Education and Care: verso quale welfare?" in L. Gui and A. Salvati *Sfide del welfare. Sostenibilità, co-progettazione, innovazione*, Milano: Franco Angeli, open access.
- Milione A. (2015). *Studi sul welfare educativo italiano. Infanzia e adolescenza in bilico tra domande di cura e educazione, e fragili campi istituzionali*, Roma: Aracne.
- Milione A. (2004), "Le politiche sociali per l’infanzia e l’adolescenza", in Pugliese E. (ed.), *Lo stato sociale in Italia. Un decennio di riforme. Rapporto Irpps-Cnr 2003-2004*, Roma: Donzelli. pp.195-224.
- Musatti T., Picchio, M. (eds.) (2010). *Un luogo per bambini e genitori nella città. Il nido come contesto di sviluppo*. Milano: FrancoAngeli.

Anno XIII - 1/2027

- Ottaviano C., Capretti S. (2018). "Povertà educativa minorile e sistema educativo 0-6. Il ruolo preventivo degli asili nido nell'ambito delle politiche sociali" [journal article]. In *INFANZIA*. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/10446/125274>
- Qvortrup J., Bardy M., Sgritta S., Wintersberger H. (1994). *Childhood Matters. Social Theory, Practice and politics*, Aldershot: Avebury.
- Qvortrup J. (2004). "I bambini e l'infanzia nella struttura sociale", in Hengst H., Zeiher H. (eds.) *Per una sociologia dell'infanzia*, Milano: Franco Angeli.
- Sabatinelli S. (2016). *Politiche per crescere. La prima infanzia tra cura e investimento sociale*, Bologna: il Mulino.
- Saraceno C., Naldini E. (2020). *Sociologia della famiglia*, Bologna: il Mulino.
- Saraceno C. (2017). *L'equivoco della famiglia*, Bari-Roma: Laterza.
- Saraceno C. (2021). *Il Welfare. Tra vecchie e nuove disuguaglianze*, Bologna: il Mulino.
- Sgritta, G.B. (1994). "Infanzia", in *Enciclopedia delle Scienze Sociali*, Roma, Treccani.
- Tripi M. (2025). *Non chiamateli bambini. Un'introduzione al childism*, Ledizioni, LediPublishing.
- Tripi M. (2024). *Come cambiano i nidi d'infanzia. Modelli, percorsi e questioni aperte in Sicilia* (Franco Angeli, open access).
- Wall, J., (2022) "From Childhood studies to Childism: Reconstructing the Scholarly and Social Imaginations", *Children's Geographies*, 20, pp.257-270. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2019.1668912>.