

Research project: Pensare In grande: Percorsi inclusivi nella prima infanzia 0-6.

“Thinking Big: Inclusive Early Childhood Education and Care

Duration: 2021-2025

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Abstract

The great strategic importance of integrated education and care interventions in the 0-6 age group is widely acknowledged at political, scientific and institutional level. Research has shown that Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is crucial both for the development of individuals and for the early identification of difficulties. (Motiejunaite, 2021, Starting Strong VI, 2021).

There is evidence that children from disadvantaged backgrounds benefit most from participation (Frawley, 2014). At the same time, however, according to the latest OECD data on the participation of children with special educational needs or at risk of social exclusion, only a quarter (27%) of these children are placed in early education settings (Council of Europe Recommendation, 2022). In Italy, there are significant regional disparities in participation in educational services, to the detriment of families living in the south of the country and in smaller municipalities (Istat report 2022).

The inter-university research project Thinking Big is intended as a key for the implementation of quality inclusion in services for children from 0 to 6 years. It studies inclusive processes in Italy and internationally to help professionals develop the potential of all individuals to the highest possible level, with a holistic view of child development (Pedagogical Guidelines of the Integrated Education System, 2021).

It links to research-training by providing interventions and dialogue between educators, teachers, managers in 0-6 services to implement the link between theory,

cultures, practices and inclusive policies and to create synergies and virtuous circles between families and early childhood services.

The research questions reflect the aims and ambitions of the project: is inclusive action based on comprehensive and unified planning on a collegial basis, or is it based solely on individual responsibility? Is there, in addition to a sense of caring for the youngest, a sense of “caring for meaning”, i.e. an in-depth search that brings intentions, values and meanings that are valid beyond a mere welfare dimension, back into the centre of the discussion? Are opportunities created in which one has the courage to experiment?

The project consists of two main parts: the development of a structured design based on the existing literature, and an initial exploratory survey phase, using a questionnaire to collect perceptions of the quality of inclusion within early childhood structures, to identify existing good practices and to highlight critical points to be addressed from a bottom-up perspective. From a methodological point of view, an interpretative mixed-methods research paradigm will be adopted and the data collected will provide reflections and guidelines for standardising pedagogical practices from an inclusive perspective.

Project related publications

Amadori, G., Maggiolini, S. & Macchia, V. (Eds.). (2022). *Pensare IN Grande*.

L'educazione inclusiva per l'infanzia di oggi e di domani, Lecce: Pensa MultiMedia.

Macchia, V. & Torri, S. (2023). Early childhood education and care 0-6: The state of the art of the national and international regulatory framework from an inclusive perspective. *Formazione & Insegnamento*, 21(1), 155-164. https://doi.org/10.7346/fei-XXI-01-23_20