

The profession of Educator of Young Children; a profession meant to welcome children in a respect for diversity-spirit

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In France, the history of welcoming young children has been related to complementary intervention ways that have sometimes provoked contradictory debates. These debates show the evolution of :

- The children's place,
- the relations between families and welcome, early-learning establishments,
- society issues related to young children's education and to working-women.

This history has left a mark on the history of educator of young children's profession.

The evolution of this profession has always been linked:

- to the association representing the profession: FNEJE¹ (created in 1973, as the State Diploma)
- to the group made up of French training centres ²of EJE (Educators of Young Children):

To explain why this profession is meaningful and useful for guiding the work of Respect for Diversity, my speech will develop and will underline the evolution of this profession linked to the French early childhood care methods.³

1 – Primary School Teachers, nursery nurses and auxiliaries to nursery nurses in the crèches

First of all, the hygienic approach of the nursery nurse has developed in the crèches in order to answer to both sanitary and care education needs after the 2nd World War, that is between 1950 and 1980. Nursery nurses and auxiliaries to nursery nurses specialised in paediatrics and childcare looked after the young children.

The Pedagogical approach, a result of active pedagogy, has been developed in the kindergartens (19th century). Kindergartens were progressively institutionalised and led to nursery schools that became widespread in France.

Kindergarten teachers represented the basis of educators of young children. They had to leave these institutions when it was institutionalised. As a matter of fact, the Ministry of Education allowed only to primary (private and public) school teachers to teach, otherwise public financing was forbidden. Children started to go to nursery schools as soon as they were 2 years old thanks to the wide spreading of nursery schools. This opportunity of controlling social injustice needs means that are not presently reunited (no of children/class, pedagogical training of primary school teachers and time availability to work with parents). Primary school teachers attend a general – teaching training for 2 to 10 year-old children and not an educator training. As a consequence, the evolution of their work is difficult.

2 – Origin of Educators of young Children: Kindergarten employees

Kindergarten teachers became educators of young children in 1973. The State Diploma of Educators of Young Children was delivered by the Ministry of Health and had 2 orientations: orientation of educators towards “preschool kindergartens and social kindergartens” ⁴; it is a 2 year-training. The influences of active pedagogy developed in the history of 19th century-kindergartens (Comenius,

¹ FNEJE : National Federation of Educators of Young Children

² AFORTS : (Association of Training Centres and Social Work Researches); it was an agreement committee of training centres of Young Children Educators, then UNITES-

³ this work is a result of our exchanges with trainers « Educator of Young Children » : Agnès LAPALU, Françoise MORETON and of the text « 30 years of State Diploma *Educators of Young Children* by Claudie CHAEBOLDAEFF, headmistress of CERPE (Study and Research Centre of Young Childhood), Aubervilliers.

⁴ Annick GERVAIS-KARPOWICZ ;*Fröbel and kindergartens and kindergarten teachers*.In RENCONTRE – Cahiers du travail social,N°93.94 ,p 51 .



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Pestalozzi Rousseau and Fröbel made up its history in Europe: a fundamental report of recognizing child's abilities and the pedagogical guiding) inspired this development; the educative orientation of the profession was structured by 1980. The profession was instituted; men and women were able to attend it. This modification in accordance with the regulations has not significantly changed the practices: today less the 5% of Educators of Young Children are men). The psychological dimension is completing and enriching their teaching: the child is being recognized as a human being as soon as she/he was born. That is the reason why the psychoanalysis works have been fundamental for a pedagogy centred on the individual early-learning of every child.

Since 1975, the care centres have become welcome centres The profession of educators of young children is also due to the wave of family crèches and to day care centres founded in 1973 depending on social centres, 1981 circular (these part-time day care centres favoured socialisation and limited support to mothers). If we take into consideration the educative and social aspects of their profession, Educators of Young Children may very well be considered as social workers.

As we may see, the situation has evolved : at the very beginning, the child was looked after separately and now we link familial references, social and cultural references to do the same thing.

Educative continuity is thus possible: the child grows up in different environments (crèches, family) where models are different.

Since the 1980ies, the professionalism current has suffered an important change underlining the importance of context (welcome establishments and family) links.

Professional identity is enriched by a new ability: positioning oneself.

3 – In 1993the reform of Educator of Young Children Diploma instituted and admitted the profession of social worker

Reform led by the Ministry of Social Affairs, 2 years and a half of sandwich courses : theory : 1200 hours and 1500 hours of practice. Learning this job with 0 to 7 year-old children involves practising in all welcome establishments, school excepted (multi-welcome, crèches, playgroups, toy libraries, social welcome establishments, hospitals); more and more Educators of Young Children hold important educative and management positions in crèches run by parents on a voluntary basis, maternal assistant-establishments and playgroups. Thanks to this reform, professional practice is now exercised **by linking** other professionals, parents and partners.

A new step in child care has emerged since March 1999. It is based on the circular referring to support networks to parents; it comes from the Inter-Ministry Family Authority. An instituted place was granted to parents. Then the 2002 law places the user in the very heart of the social intervention; educational and social professionals find themselves invested with this professional and parenthood guiding mission. It stipulates explicitly that when working with children parents should be taken into consideration (mother and father), regardless of their presence or absence and of their legal family situation. Working with parents, often limited to a “regulation of good relations”, becomes little by little an educative collaboration for child's sake. How should professionals imagine interventions with children in relation with parents: support or control, guiding or non engagement, once the child is a third party between them?

4 – In order to work with children working with parents becomes compulsory

Working with parents leads inevitably to admitting family and cultural values of the young child, his family, social, economical situation. This demand has grown compulsory in all welcome establishments. Educators of Young Children respect the singularity of each child and admit her/his family values and her/his environment. At the same time, they manage an educative project where all the children are involved.



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5 – In August 2000, the decree on early childhood establishments gives a legal framework

Renewed for welcome establishments and for welcoming young children on the territory: this decree regulates all welcome establishments and services and places the Educator of Young Children in the very heart of social and educative intervention with young children and their family. The decree focuses on a double aspect:

- taking into consideration child's singularity and her/his familial attachment
- establishment - project development by professionals; these projects represent a mutual reference of values, educative purposes and rules and regulations in welcome establishments; this educative project cannot be separated from the territory early childhood social project.

Answers to analysed and hierarchical needs in a territory should be built in order to have a territory early childhood system: family sociological and family situation analyses, neighbourhood or town equipment networking, care - demand coordination in order to identify the needs and to give adequate answers; to initiate an educative guide of social and cultural coeducation.

The Educator of Young Children is a social worker placed between social intervention and prevention. But here prevention is linked to profession foundation. In this context "prevention" involves: to create conditions for an accessible educative and quality guiding. That means:

- differences will neither be stigmatized nor denied,
- each child will be guided and will find her/his place, regardless of her/his peculiarities.

That means managing and guiding the negotiation process. Exercising this prevention means developing educative intervention means that were thought and managed by taking into consideration each child and all the children at the same time.

That also means:

- guiding the child's awakening to the others. To do this, adults should respect diversity and should manage the inequalities in the public service framework;
- managing the acknowledgement process of family and cultural links, of differences as soon as they appear;
- doing the necessary steps to understand or at least to try to find out the meaning and proposing the necessary guiding steps of a collective functioning.

To resume, the welcome should be imagined before, during and after the child's subscription in the establishment. The young child's socialisation process is being founded while she/he is in the early childhood equipment. That is why the child should be guided in a context where her/his first experiences away from her/his family start; she/he should also be guided to be a part of the society.

" The Early childhood education is the learning foundation all through one's life. We think that fair access to education and a genuine welcome can strengthen this foundation for the children and satisfy family educative and social needs⁵. ».

6 – November 2005 reform of Educator of Young Children Diploma

The training of Educator of Young Children represents nowadays: 1500 hours of theoretical training and 60 weeks of work experience, that is 3 years of full-time sandwich courses. A State Diploma is delivered in the end. Candidates are selected before attending this training.

- 1 – Training is divided in 4 fields: child and family welcome and guide : 400 hours
- 2 – Educative Actions for young children: 600 h
- 3 – Professional Communication: 250 h
- 4 – Institutional and Partnership Dynamics: 250 h

The Profession of Educator of Young Children involves:

⁵ Sylvie RAYNA and John BENNETT. *Welcome and educate early childhood* Lyon, INRP (National Institute of Pedagogical Research) 2005, p 26.



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- working with children,
- being in contact their parents,

in an establishment and in relation with the environment.

Consequently, territory (neighbourhood, municipality) prevention is part of the job.

Both the reform and the August 2000 decree related to welcome establishments of young children **stipulate that the Educator of Young Children has no longer a welcome establishment-related responsibility, but a responsibility that takes into consideration all situations a child could face in a confined territory.** That implies mainly **to know how to manage inequalities and, at the same time, respect diversity.**

3 years of training are needed now. In France, the profession of Educator of Young Children, as all the other social work –related professions needs harmonisation in order to favour complementary and links. This training also belongs to the European framework of agreement references of Bologna: harmonisation of diplomas and of education standards.

The reform shows the recent evolutions: because of his ability of linking people, the educator of young children will have to pursue children guiding together with professional teams; he will consider respect for diversity. He will be in charge of organising welcome conditions according to each child's situation, but he will keep in mind the group of children as a whole.

Conclusion : what professionalism ?

The professionalism, the unique way of exercising one's profession in a certain context according to one's projects and experience, asks for the following capacities:

- to pay attention to each member,
- to build a different and appropriate guiding answer,
- to reunite all the partners surrounding the child and keep in touch with her/his parents

living in the territory (neighbourhood, town, village).

What is at stake when we speak about the training of Educators of Young Children in the present-day context where the diversity awareness has grown necessary?

Possible solutions and answers:

- to consider the original culture of each child and its manifestations,
- to consider gender (male, female),
- to collaborate with parents,
- to match education and social issues,
- to guide a socialisation that has its origins in the diversity awareness; there are many other ways people are different, and that should prevail on conventionality,
- to conceive the appropriate, varying and comprehensive conditions to welcome children and their parents,
- to know how to work as a team and in a common territory (neighbourhood, municipality) in order:
 - to create accessibility conditions to the welcome establishments for all,
 - to be able to work in a mutual educative guiding framework

Dear Professional(s), what is at stake when we speak about the reform of the diploma? To weave a social link for an educative project of social inclusion.

The project and the accent we have stressed on the respect for diversity can help us enrich this work. All the interest of our Department Educators of Young Children and of our school, lays in working as partner of the DECET network, as the latter holds a project supported by the Foundation Bernard Van Leer.



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