

History of Early Education Institutions in Europe

From WWII until the Recent Reforms

edited by **Dorena Caroli**



Transnational History of Education and Civilizations

directed by Dorena Caroli

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This series of volumes aims to publish monographs or collective volumes, both in Italian and other languages, concerning the history of pedagogy as widely understood within the Italian university field M-Ped/02. The studies will address issues that include the history of pedagogical ideas, education and educational institutions in general, and, in particular, preschool institutions and children's literature. Particular attention will be devoted to transnational and comparative dimensions of the educational problems and to pedagogical transfers of the past, which allows us to grasp the circulation of educational models and reciprocal influences at an institutional and cultural level. The multiple approaches of cultural history will also be adopted for the interpretation of the educational reforms and institutions of the different historical periods.

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Summary

Dorena Caroli, <i>Introduction</i>	7
PART I	
Catherine Bouve, <i>De la garde à l'accueil. Les crèches françaises de 1945 à 1995, au carrefour d'une redéfinition de leurs normes politiques, sociales et pédagogiques</i>	23
Claudine Marissal, <i>Les crèches en Belgique, un service collectif dans la tourmente du genre (19^e-début 21^e siècle)</i>	49
PART II	
Johannes Westberg, <i>The Rise of a Universal and Integrated Pre-school Sector in Sweden</i>	69
Tora Korsvold, <i>Education and Care Services for Young Children in Norway. From Private Initiative to State Intervention</i>	93
PART III	
Diana Franke-Meyer, <i>The History of Crèches in Germany from 1945 to the Present Day</i>	121
Janet de Vigne, <i>'Why Should I Get a Degree to do a Minimum Wage Job?' ECEC in Scotland, Past and Present</i>	159
PART IV	
Carmen Sanchidrián Blanco, <i>From Care to Education in the Spanish Nurseries for Children Aged 0 to 3 Years (1990–2020)</i>	177
David Salomoni, <i>Childhood and Pre-School Education in Portugal. Between Estado novo, Democracy, and Future Challenges (1945–today)</i>	213

PART V

Tiziana Pironi, <i>The Emergence of Nursery Schools in Bologna (1969–1975)</i>	235
Simona Salustri, <i>The Mondine and Childcare Nurseries. A Century of Struggles for the Protection of Women's Agricultural Labour in Italy</i>	251
Eleni Mousena and Eleni Kainourgiou, <i>Changing the Paradigm in Early Childhood Institutions in Greece 1950–2020</i>	269

PART VI

Aggné Pirka Veronika and Janek Noémi, <i>The Institutionalization of the Day Nursery from 1945 until the 1980s and the Role of Professional Training for Staff</i>	295
Dorena Caroli, <i>The Reform of Day Nurseries in the Soviet Union. Towards a Preschool Education System (1945–1970s)</i>	311
Index	349
The Authors.....	357

Introduction

Dorena Caroli

Over the past thirty years, the history of early childhood educational institutions, now known at the European level as early childhood education and care (ECEC) institutions, has been the subject of numerous studies that have given rise to new historiographical trends. Some are interested in European education policies and social changes that have affected Europe at the beginning of the new millennium, others in the function that these institutions have in the welfare and education systems of different countries or in the role that these institutions have played in family policies.

The birth and development of this historiography seem to have been marked by some important legislative acts, such as the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959). Thanks to the work of Philippe Ariès¹, which reflected on the evolution of the idea of childhood as a cultural construct in relation to the structure of the family and social classes, new studies have investigated unknown aspects and chapters of the history of childhood, its culture and educational institutions. Among the first published studies after the Convention on the Rights on the Child (1989), which was an important impetus for the development of this field of research², are those by Catherine Rollet, Edward C. Melhuish and Peter Moss that highlighted the international perspectives of a research that was taking its first steps in the early nineties³.

At the European level, other important and innovative studies have also followed, such as that by Hugh Cunningham, who offered a very signifi-

¹ P. Ariès, *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Anciènne Régime*, Paris, Plon, 1960; Seuil, 1963 [English trans. R. Baldick, *Centuries of childhood. A Social History of Family life*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1962].

² Z. Moody, *Transnational Treaties on Children's Rights: Norm Building and Circulation in the Twentieth Century*, in «Paedagogica Historica», 50/1-2 (2014), pp. 151-164.

³ C. Rollet, *La politique à l'égard de la petite enfance sous la III^e République. Annexes : bibliographie, index*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1990; E.C. Melhuish, P. Moss (eds.), *Day Care for Young Children. International Perspectives*, London and New York, Tavistock/Routledge, 1991.

cant comparative framework for capturing some important aspects of childhood history such as the fight against infant mortality⁴. The history of child abandonment is neglected by the present volume, but is no less important. Among the most interesting studies on the concept of childhood culture is the large collection edited by Egle Becchi and Dominique Julia, which presents new chapters on the history of childhood, educational institutions for early childhood and theories about early childhood⁵.

Step by step, many unpublished aspects of the history of educational institutions aimed at preschool education have been addressed with very different perspectives and methodologies. Among the first to study preschool institutions in depth was Jean-Noël Luc⁶, who studied birth and development in France, a country that has been an important European model in child protection.

The field of research into preschool institutions has since been extended up to more recent times, with considerable insights into the various national contexts since the beginning of the new millennium⁷. These insights were in relation to the development of national school systems on the one hand, and family politics on the other⁸. Some studies, including a recent one edited by Karen Hagemann, Konrad H. Jarausch and Cristina Allemann-Ghionda⁹, compare the history of policies concerning childcare and educational institutions with those on the family, with a wide choice of national cases highlighted. Progressively, the focus has extended to other nations and internationally has included the United States, Africa, Japan and other countries thanks to the monumental work of V. Celia Lascarides and Blythe Farb

⁴ H. Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500*, Harlow, England, London, New York, Pearson Longman, 1995 (2005, 2nd ed.).

⁵ E. Becchi, D. Julia (eds.), *Histoire de l'enfance. Tome I: De l'Antiquité au XVIII^e siècle. Tome II: Du XVIII^e siècle à nos jours*, Paris, Seuil, 1998.

⁶ See for example J.-N. Luc, *L'invention du jeune enfant au XIX^e siècle. De la salle d'asile à l'école maternelle*, Paris, Berlin, 1997, pp. 392-398.

⁷ E. Melhuish, K. Petrogiannis, *Early Childhood Care and Education: International Perspectives*, London, Routledge, 2006; T. Bertram, C. Pascal, *Early Childhood Policies and Systems In Eight Countries*, Cham, Switzerland, Springer International, 2016.

⁸ See K. Scheiwe, H. Willekens (eds.), *Child Care and Preschool Development in Europe. Institutional Perspectives*, Houndsmills, Basingstoke Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009; H. Willekens, K. Scheiwe, K. Nawrotzki (eds.), *The Development of Early Childhood Education in Europe and North America. Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

⁹ K. Hagemann, K.H. Jarausch, C. Allemann-Ghionda (eds.), *Children, Families, and States. Time Policies of Childcare, Preschool, and Primary Education in Europe*, New York, Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2011.

Hinitz¹⁰, who focused on the circulation of Froebel's, Montessori's and other educational methods at the international level within these institutions.

The chapters collected in this volume present the reconstruction of the history of services for children, and in particular of infant-toddler centres from the second postwar period to recent decades (in some cases until 2000–2010), with a focus on the transformations mainly in services and educational theories aimed at the 0–3 years age range. In fact, despite the trend at the European level of education systems for 0–6-year-olds converging towards preschool education, in the past, a great variety of institutions for younger children were present in different national contexts. In the past, there was a real division of early childhood services, which were either caring or educational services for preschool-aged children. As Diana Sousa and Peter Moss argue:

From the start, therefore, the early childhood sector was split, between 'child-care' services and school or kindergarten services, usually overseen by different branches of government, and differing in terms of regulation, funding, type of provision, workforce and primary purpose. Today a handful of countries have moved beyond this initial split and created a completely integrated early childhood service¹¹.

Although numerous studies are available on institutions for groups of children aged 3–6 in various countries, intended as preschool institutions (from *salle d'asiles*, *écoles maternelles*, kindergarten, nursery schools, *detskie sady*), these chapters try to deepen the history of the institutions meant for to the 0–3 age group in order to complete the study of cases absent in other published volumes and offer a picture of the complexity of the current situation. The aim is to illustrate the changes that have taken place in various countries in the context of post-World War II welfare reforms, although some have more detail and depth than others.

These institutions for early childhood, which arose in most European countries on the basis of Firmin Marbeau's French model, played a fundamental role in countering the consequences of the war, facilitating the return

¹⁰ V. Celia Lascarides, B.F. Hinitz (eds.), *History of Early Childhood Education*, New York and London, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2000; B. Farb Hinitz (ed.), *The Hidden History of Early Education*, New York and London, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2013.

¹¹ P. Moss, D. Sousa, *Introducing the special issue on 'Comparative studies in early childhood education: past, present and future'*, in «Comparative education», 58/3 (2022), p. 288.

of women to the workforce, and contributing to a more inclusive policy towards children from more disadvantaged social backgrounds¹².

At different times, a slow transformation of these institutions in an educational sense took place in the postwar period. The desire to elaborate and adopt new educational strategies, thanks to the studies of child developmental psychology that resumed after World War II, has made it possible to significantly renew the educational methods adopted in these institutions, also contributing to an improvement in staff training and a greater engagement of parents in services that have also become increasingly important for the development of the concept of parenthood. The changes that have taken place have contributed to emancipating these institutions from being mere providers of assistance to education, bringing them closer and closer to real preschool institutions. In some cases, it was also possible to observe the international circulation of educational methods, as well as reciprocal pedagogical influences in different European countries¹³.

Unlike the research that has produced some social history and/or sociology studies, the present chapters try to offer some historical-educational insights into the different phases of the reforms and the legislative acts that mark the changes. The different authors describe the characteristics of different national contexts in a macro-historical perspective, with a periodization that sometimes approaches the current reforms, in other cases the reconstruction concerns the characteristics of two decades or the study of a particular case. The attention to the historiographical production that accompanies the studies in this collection also has the purpose of relating the results of the studies collected here with the research done so far in order to offer teaching and research tool for students and doctoral students, in a field that deserves considerable further investigations.

This collection is made up of thirteen chapters (written by 15 authors) divided into six parts. The first part contains chapters on France and Belgium. *Catherine Bouve* reconstructs the history of nurseries in France from 1945 to 1995 with attention to the main reforms, particularly the renewal of educational methods and the protagonists of these concepts. It is a context that is particularly sensitive to the reception and debate of pedagogical concepts that stimulate the growth of the child. In fact, crèches originated in France, becoming an international model. *Claudine Marissal* describes both the development of the nursery network and the role of feminist or-

¹² D. Caroli, *Day nurseries and childcare in Europe, 1800–1939*, London, Palgrave, 2017, pp. 3-59.

¹³ S. Rayna, F. Laevers, *Understanding Children from 0 to 3 Years of Age and Its Implications for Education. What's New on the Babies's Side? Origins and Evolutions*, in «European Early Childhood Education Research Journal», 19/2 (2011), pp. 161-172.