

SPACE AS A 'THIRD EDUCATOR' IN INTEGRATED 0-6 EDUCATION SYSTEMS: BETWEEN REAL AND VIRTUAL

LO SPAZIO COME 'TERZO EDUCATORE' NEI SISTEMI EDUCATIVI INTEGRATI 0-6 ANNI: TRA REALE E VIRTUALE



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Double Blind Peer Review

Citazione

Buccolo, M., Ferro Allodola, V., & Amatori, G. (2024). Space as a 'third educator' in integrated 0-6 education systems: between real and virtual. *Giornale Italiano di Educazione alla Salute, Sport e Didattica Inclusiva*, 8(2), Edizioni Universitarie Romane.

Doi:

<https://doi.org/10.32043/gsd.v8i2.1221>

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gsdjournal.it

ISSN: 2532-3296

ABSTRACT

Space expresses care and respect for the child's spatial-cognitive-emotional exploration needs, a kind of "intermediate area," a transition between the child's self and the world. Space is the "third educator" (Edwards, Gandini, Forman, 2014), a necessary pedagogical category for assuming and knowing our existence. The quality of spaces goes hand in hand with the quality of learning, paying attention - at the same time - to the choice of technological aids that configure that "virtual space" to which children must be educated.

Lo spazio esprime la cura ed il rispetto dei bisogni di esplorazione spaziale-cognitiva-emotiva del bambino, una sorta di "area intermedia", di transizione fra il sé del bambino e il mondo. Lo spazio è il "terzo educatore" (Edwards, Gandini, Forman, 2014), una categoria pedagogica necessaria per assumere e conoscere la nostra esistenza. La qualità degli spazi va di pari passo con la qualità dell'apprendimento, prestando attenzione - al contempo - alla scelta dei sussidi tecnologici che configurano quello "spazio virtuale" a cui i bambini devono essere educati.

KEYWORDS

Space; children; learning; technology; 0-6 education systems
Spazio; bambini; apprendimento; sistemi educativi integrati 0-6

Received 24/06/2024

Accepted 24/06/2024

Published 24/06/2024

Introduction¹

Space is one of the determining factors in the learning process for the 0-6 age group. The Italian pedagogical tradition can boast significant pedagogues — Maria Montessori, Rosa and Carolina Agazzi, Giuseppina Pizzigoni, Loris Malaguzzi — who have investigated the concept of space, how it should be organized, and how important it is as an educating factor. A well-structured space positively influences the physical and psychological development of children: educational relationships, emotions, affections, and the emotional sphere develop. Within a welcoming, clean, and structured space, a child grows and matures healthily and correctly, experiences sensory and motor activities, learns, creates, communicates, thinks, listens. Space provides many stimuli that children naturally grasp if it is designed and offered appropriately. Space is therefore the "third educator" (Edwards, Gandini, Forman, 2014), a necessary pedagogical category to take on and understand our existence (Kant). The quality of spaces goes hand in hand with the quality of learning. In the digital era, it is also important to choose technological aids that shape the "virtual space," whose use must first and foremost be familiar to adults and above all "balanced" with respect to children's developmental processes and stages (Cambi, Pinto Minerva, 2023). Spaces must correspond to the evolutionary history of those who inhabit them and must provide children with the opportunity to act in those spaces. In this way, history and identity can develop together, using real, fantastic, and virtual elements. The living environment is the place where children can experience beauty, contributing to promoting well-being. Various studies also highlight the potential of beauty and the experience of beauty in influencing well-being (Martinez-Martí, Avia, & Hernandez-Lloreda, 2014) of human beings as an holistic and encompassing experience involving emotions, cognitive abilities, reflective capabilities, and socio-relational skills (Zhang, Piff, Iyer, Koleva, & Keltner, 2014). The study we present falls within this theoretical background and concerns the Municipality of Rome, which — in order to ensure the quality standards of educational services for ages 0-6 — has committed to enhancing the educational role of the professionals involved through courses on pedagogical themes aimed at expanding knowledge and enhancing skills in light of the changes introduced by Law 107/2015, Legislative Decree 65/2017, and guidelines on the integrated educational system for ages 0-6.

¹ For scientific evaluation purposes only, it is specified that Maria Buccolo is the author of Paragraphs 3, 4, 5; Valerio Ferro Allodola of Paragraph 2; Gianluca Amatori of Paragraph 6. The introduction and conclusions are common to the three authors.

1. The evolution of the concept of space in early childhood education 0-6

In the current pedagogical debate, one of the most discussed themes is the organization of space within educational services dedicated to early childhood. This is because there has been an increase in awareness and the amount of studies regarding the importance of the physical environment in which a child's development takes place. Space can be defined as an educational context in which every object, word, action, and human interaction are woven together, becoming a vital presence. The most significant educational models for early childhood have always strongly considered the role of the context, viewing it as complementary and not incidental to the success of educational action. This vision has its roots in the writings of John Dewey (*Experience and Education*, 1958), where an experience is deemed valid if it leads to certain connections, which - only when they have meaning - become knowledge.

Similarly, in the thinking of Maria Montessori, the educational environment, when free from conditions that repress or inhibit the potential of children, represented one of the most important factors in enabling a child to construct themselves. Dewey and Montessori were the leading figures in the new pedagogical direction known as "activism," which placed focus not on ideal adults or abstract behavioral models but on the children themselves. Both emphasized the child's activity (hence the term "activism") and underscored that at the heart of educational reflection and practices should be the child's free activity, emphasizing the importance of developing a new awareness regarding the organization of spaces and the freedom of movement, both physical and intellectual, for children.

The ideas of these authors have influenced and continue to be a fundamental reference point for early childhood education, where the care of the relational context has always been a fruitful channel in guiding the child from being an object of education to a conscious subject, constructing together with the community their learning possibilities. Montessori believed that education begins at birth, lasts throughout life, and that every educational context in which a child is immersed can become a potential educator. Based on the certainty that one cannot truly understand any living being without observing them in their natural environment, Montessori developed the concept of an "adult observer" of the child in their life environment (Montessori, 1948), overturning prevailing educational views of her time. It is no longer about a directive, adult-centered education that imparts knowledge but about providing "aid to life." Thus, she believed that the best educational environment should be a space where the child can experience psychic and physical freedom; where they can find the best conditions for spontaneous

development. In order to allow such freedom of expression for the child, the space, whether physical or social, must be prepared by the adult to facilitate learning experiences. Indirectly educating through the environment is thus a cornerstone of Montessori pedagogy. The adult does not give directives to the child but consciously prepares an environment for them based on careful observation (Montessori, 2017).

Dewey also believed in this approach, stating, "The only way adults consciously control the type of education immature beings get is by controlling the environment in which they act, think, and feel. We never educate directly, but indirectly through the environment. Whether we allow the environment to do this work randomly or design it for this purpose makes a big difference" (Dewey, 1951). For children, the correct development of attitudes and predispositions necessary for life occurs not through the "direct transmission of beliefs, emotions, and knowledge, but through the mediation of the environment" (Dewey, 1951). Regarding the pedagogical design of physical space, Montessori emphasized that the space should be welcoming: beautiful yet devoid of unnecessary things. Beauty does not lie in a manufactured environment full of objects but rather in essential simplicity.

According to Montessori, the furnishings in an educational environment should be child-sized, with inviting and pleasant spaces that allow them to move freely and work independently. Children should have the opportunity to care for and respect the environment, alongside their peers. Montessori termed these activities accessible to young children — which relate to personal care as well as environmental care — as "practical life" activities (Montessori, 1956).

Therefore, the materials presented should always undergo scrutiny based on the direct experience they invite. Similarly, Malaguzzi, years later, focused on the significance of space in childhood, referring to it as the "third educator." Right from the initial moments of his experience in Reggio Emilia's educational services, Malaguzzi placed emphasis on the environment and the complex interactions reflected within it, central to school environment design.

Numerous reflections led to the creation of a space most conducive to developing children's cognitive abilities, starting from Dewey's concept of intentional education: "Intentional education means a specially selected environment, selected based on materials and methods that specifically promote growth in the desired direction" (Dewey, 1951).

From this reflection, it is clear that there is a close relationship between space quality and learning quality: "Education consists of complex interactions, many of which only occur if the environment also participates" (Malaguzzi, 2014). Whether termed "teacher environment" as Montessori did (1956) or "third educator" as Malaguzzi described it, it is evident that to ensure a quality education, a new context must be constructed, capable of supporting ongoing processes to create a true curriculum for early childhood education centered on spaces for learning. This highlights the close relationship between environment and context.

The educational context takes shape in spaces and places that become essential elements of the educational approach, where a thoughtful and intentional design of the environment is no longer neglectable. The environment speaks and is interpreted in its meanings by those who observe it through their professional experience. Every element acquires equal importance: the structure's architecture, wall colors, furnishings, materials and their arrangement, open spaces, relationships, listening, and languages. These spaces should be conceived and designed as an integral part of urban planning, not just belonging to pedagogy and architecture but embraced by a network of relationships that intertwine with politics, culture, and society as a whole.

2. The experience of "joint training" for educators and teachers to ensure the quality of educational spaces 0-6.

Based on various scientific evidence produced in different fields, all strategic guidance documents developed at the international level in recent years, and particularly since 2018, emphasize the need to invest in early childhood (EU, 2018; 2019; 2021). In the early years of life, the environment in which a child grows up is that of the family, and when available and accessible, educational services. Interventions aimed at providing children with the best opportunities for health and cognitive and socio-relational development must aim to provide economic, educational, and service support to families so that they can best fulfill their parenting roles (Guerra, Luciano, 2024).

Therefore, early childhood centers and schools are fundamental spaces to ensure better growth opportunities for all. The new three-year training plan for educational and school staff in Rome Capital starts from an awareness of the importance of the role that 0-6 services play in children's growth and their future prospects, aiming to support the valuable work that educators and teachers do daily. The training has been focused on recognizing participation in research and

documentation of good practices as criteria to enhance and encourage professionalism through innovative learning methods and quality training programs. The training has also been structured as a continuous learning environment, fostering opportunities for professional growth and development for the entire educational community.

To ensure the quality standards of 0-6 services, the Department of Educational Services of Rome Capital has committed to enhancing the educational role of professionals involved through courses on pedagogical topics to expand knowledge and enhance skills in light of the changes introduced by L-107/2015, legislative decree 65/2017, and guidelines on the integrated 0-6 system.

All this leads to the conception of designing material and immaterial contents and spaces, reflecting on the organization of educational contents, the structuring of space and time to support children in reviving their interests towards new discoveries. It also means contributing, during the training period, to strengthening internal and external capacities related to the context in which educators and teachers operate. They are indeed called upon to adapt to the operational context, to grasp analogies and differences between different professional situations, engage with colleagues on the educational strategies implemented, evaluate the situation in its complexity (Buccolo, 2019). In-service training provides greater skills, including strengthening self-confidence through reflection on their practices, on their work (Bondioli, Savio, 2018).

Furthermore, it enhances the ability to broaden one's theoretical perspectives by critically reflecting on educational policies and the objectives of the practices carried out in various educational services. In different educational settings, training is conducted following the Research-Intervention model, offering educators and teachers the opportunity to critically question the link between theory and practice in their daily work. In this way, they are encouraged to reorganize the service in which they work, especially concerning spaces to make them increasingly child-friendly.

3. Methods and materials

Joint training between educators and teachers (educational groups composed of about 15/20 people) started with a theoretical part on the themes of communication and inclusion for each educational service 0-6, followed by a careful

reflection on educational practices using a research-intervention approach. The training model implemented was as follows:

- identification of the theme, scope, and content, based on shared needs and objectives (personal and related to work with children);
- initial workshop-style training, based on the circular relationship between experience, reflection, and theoretical-methodological deepening, within the group;
- support in designing and identifying observation/evaluation methods and tools on an ongoing basis (regarding the effectiveness of what is proposed);
- implementation of innovative 0-6 educational and organizational proposals by educators and teachers;
- systematic (monthly) meetings for sharing, in-depth discussion, group reflection;
- exchanges with visits to facilities to observe spaces and educational practices for 0-6 year olds;
- field observation by the writer to detect work methods in the nursery and kindergarten;
- completion of a questionnaire on the training path taken;
- webinar to present the training path and observational exchanges in the 0-6 facilities.

The questionnaire, titled "Reflections on the 0-6 training path," administered via Google Form, involved 114 participants - nursery school teachers and kindergarten teachers - and revealed particularly interesting elements regarding the experience of joint training and the concept of the educators' and teachers' environment.

The first part of the questionnaire refers to general data (gender, age, role, institution, years of work experience). It is noted that 97.4% of the sample collected have work experience ranging from 3-5 years. The next section of the questionnaire consisted of specific multiple-choice and open-ended questions.

4. Results and discussion

Compared to the administered questionnaire, we consider it useful, in the context of this contribution, to report the results regarding some specific questions focusing

on: a) the conception of "space" by educators and teachers and its role in the educational process; b) educators' and teachers' ideas about the joint training they have undergone. Regarding Question No. 5 - *Indicate how much you agree with the following statement: "The choice of spaces reflects the pedagogical choices of the educational institution"* the following percentages are recorded: 57.9% strongly agree, 36.8% somewhat agree, and 5.3% disagree. Here are some of the most interesting reasons for these choices:

- The design and organization of spaces in the nursery are a fundamental aspect of educational action. The environment is the place where educational relationships take place, the context loaded with affective meanings, educational and formative connotations, the space of affections, where what matters is how one feels inside it, where experiences, memories, affections develop, through which the child experiences and constructs their identity. Growth and education happen in space.

- Space is viewed as the "third educator." This concept starts from an idea of the child as competent and craftsman of their own development. The educator/teacher is tasked with preparing the development environment after careful observation, design, and material selection.

- Spaces are functional to the goals set by the educational group. There are no well-structured spaces without a precise direction towards which one aims to achieve. Organizing a space according to very specific criteria means offering the child daily the opportunity to evolve towards the chosen educational goal.

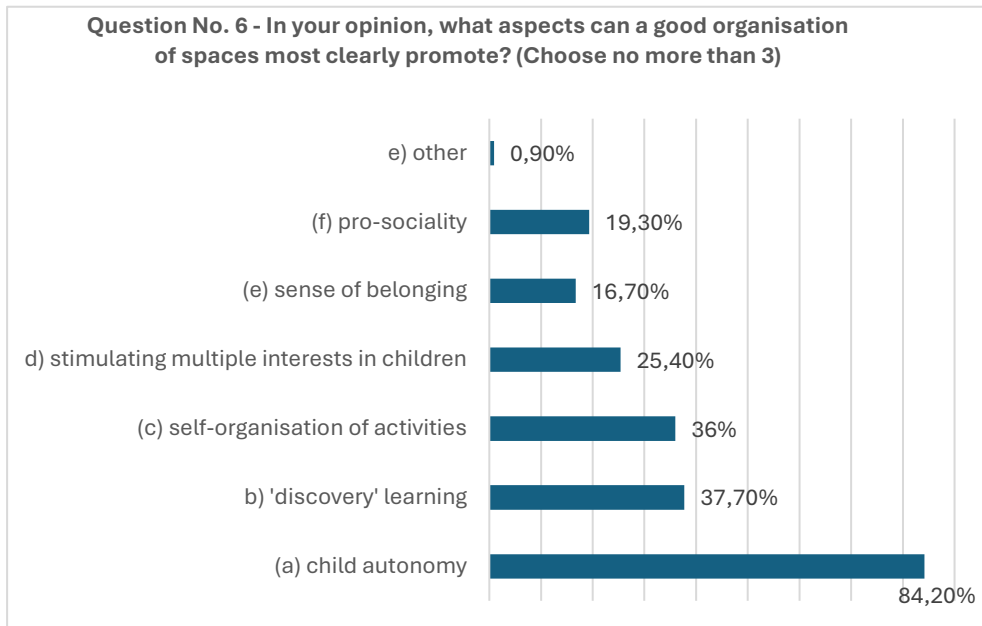
- It is fundamental because it influences children's learning. Safe and welcoming spaces promote active participation and creativity, favoring a more effective and stimulating educational experience.

- The choice, design, and organization of spaces must reflect the pedagogical choices made by all the figures operating within educational services (taking into account the indications contained in the reference programmatic documents and the motivations underlying these), in order to ensure a real coherence between theoretical principles and educational practice.

- Each structure reflects its own pedagogical ideology, and the Teacher Team designs and creates spaces that reflect the needs of the users, the structure, and above all the territory. In every territory, children and families live and grow daily, providing us with interesting input to modify play spaces: indoors and outdoors. Therefore, our commitment as Teachers and Educators will never cease to renew by designing new fluid and functional spaces in collaboration with educational

institutions. - The environment shapes our brain. Spaces influence learning, and it is crucial to understand how to design them. They must be functional for the child's growth and development of identity, autonomy, interests, and competencies.

The answers collected in Question No. 6 (Graph. 1) - *In your opinion, what aspects can a good organization of spaces promote most prominently? (Select up to 3)* were very interesting



Graph. 1 The answers collected in Question No. 6.

Below are some of the most relevant educational reasons provided by the interviewees:

- One cannot promote children's autonomy without giving them freedom. Children can be offered the freedom to experiment and thus achieve autonomy only if the space in which they can move has been structured in a more than ad hoc manner. The anteroom to autonomy is the responsibility for a well-organized space.

- At first, it is a discovery of the new, then it leads to an awareness of what is offered and consequently to self-organization and then to the freedom to choose one game

over another. This leads to the self-esteem of being able to do things alone. All this makes a child completely autonomous.

- The school environment is the place where one grows and is educated. A good organization of spaces allows children to self-organize in play, to experiment and discover a different and autonomous way of learning, and to meet others in freely chosen contexts.

- Good organization of spaces can promote a variety of aspects, including those related to self-organization of activities and children's autonomy, understanding autonomy not only as the ability to "do things alone," but also as "awareness of oneself in the environment" (Bateson). From this point of view, the environment must be structured clearly, legibly, and with easily accessible materials, taking into account the needs and interests that one intends to promote and support in children.

- In a spatial section context for ages 3-6, boys and girls act in structured corners called Centers of Interest, highly structured to promote the spatial and temporal autonomy of the child: acquiring security and awareness of self and others. These three important elements positively influence the child. These elements are channeled to create new educational proposals personalized within a "fluid" pedagogical educational project.

- Defining precise corners with recognizable furnishings helps young children orient themselves and recognize different activities, experiencing their own identity. Therefore, nursery spaces must be diversified to allow different opportunities, being in groups or alone, exploring, developing autonomy.

Regarding question no. 8 - *The structuring of spaces is varied over the year taking into account the design and in relation to the development, potential, and interests of each child and the group*, 54.4% of the interviewed sample strongly agrees, 33.3% somewhat agrees, and 12.3% disagrees somewhat.

For question 18 - *Within the training course, has the comparison between educators and teachers been useful in promoting the exchange of information, knowledge from both educational realities? Have common projects arisen in this regard?* - respondents answered as follows: 57.9% somewhat, 27.2% very much, 10.5% slightly, and 4.4% not at all. Some of the most interesting reasons follow:

- Absolutely yes. Collaboration groups have been created for the exchange of ideas and projects to be shared between nursery and kindergarten.

- Two worlds so close yet so distant. Bringing teachers and educators together, experiencing each other's work can only enrich the educational repertoire. Knowing where one's children come from and where they will go offers a complete overview that can only favor the creation of more complete and functional pedagogical and educational ideas.

- For now, the issue remains theoretical, but with the changes being faced, surely the project will be very useful for children, families, and teachers.

- An interesting exchange of ideas emerged from the comparison with the educators, following the mutual observation of the educational practice implemented in educational services for 0-6 years, leading to the development of a common project in my case on body schema using different methodologies but with the same objective.

- Yes, a joint project has been developed on reading two illustrated books on the theme of transitioning to kindergarten. We will begin reading it at the nursery and then they will continue at kindergarten in September, in addition to reading it on the continuity day to be held in May.

- The training course carried out in cooperation with colleagues, nursery educators, and kindergarten teachers from my school, has provided me with a great personal enrichment of an empathic nature. The subjects discussed and the pedagogical discussions have given rise to a common didactic connection. We exchanged ideas and promoted new initiatives to be realized in the future in collaboration with the educational structures where we operate.

- I found the organization of the nursery library interesting, which we will replicate next year in our own setting. More than common projects arising from the course, there was an exchange of practices.

From the discussion with the training course participants, the element of continuity is attributed with meaning, which refers to seeking coherence in the nursery and in kindergarten, respecting ideas that represent the peculiarity of early childhood education and ensuring the respect of children's fundamental needs in their early years. It is a consistency in proposals, behaviors, relationships that also facilitates the transition from one institution to another, benefitting the child, but also their family, which is reassured by this alliance of intentions. In this direction, there are very stimulating examples, but we know that there are further steps to take. We talk about the 0-6 system, in reality, there are still two segments that are trying -

not without difficulty - to enter into dialogue, conditioned by the history they have behind them and by different institutional and managerial realities.

There are intentions that more distinctly characterize the educational project of the nursery and others that are more recurrent in kindergarten. Words like "care," "play," "autonomy" come from the nursery and must be fully embraced in kindergarten. Words like "learning," "development," "skills," "languages" come from kindergarten but must also be applied in the nursery.

5. Real Spaces and Virtual Spaces: Inclusive Design in the 0-6 Age Range

In the historical scenario outlined in the first paragraph and considering the educational experience presented and discussed here, a reflection on the ongoing digital revolution becomes necessary at this point. As is known, starting from the experience of Covid-19, the digital revolution has manifested itself in all its complexity, with its challenges and potentials. The pandemic, with regard to the topic of this work, has revolutionized primarily the concept of "space," marking an epochal transition: from a real dimension to a virtual dimension, including their interconnections such as Integrated Digital Teaching (or "blended learning") (Ferro Allodola, 2021). This "revolution" inevitably extended, during the lockdown, to all economic-social and productive sectors worldwide: education, work, administrations, hospitals, companies, human communication, and social relations. In this context, even the educational services for 0-6-year-olds have had to necessarily reconfigure themselves at an organizational and didactic level; the particular relevance of the "space" element in this delicate phase of developmental age is well known. Organizing the educational space in nurseries and preschools means, in fact, "combining the child's need for emotional intimacy/security with the need for exploration/discovery. In this sense, space qualifies as an intentionally characterized, welcoming, accessible, readable, and functionally differentiated place" (Buccolo, 2024, p. 693). The organization of space should promote and support the multiplicity and quality of relationships, enhance the dimension of small groups, and pay particular attention to the child's ability to reconstruct his or her private and personal sphere within it (Restiglian, 2012). During the pandemic, the traditional physical space of nurseries and preschools, in particular, has transformed into a "virtual space": in front of a screen of a device and in the presence of a reference adult. However, from the data of a 2022 survey - the subject of a collaboration agreement signed between the Department for Family Policies of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Istat, and the University Ca'

Foscari Venice – substantial resilience from early childhood services emerges. Many difficulties were encountered by most of these services: 88% of the surveyed facility managers reported increased extraordinary costs in the 2020/2021 educational year, 85% reported increased operating costs, 39% had to suspend services due to the spread of the pandemic, and 29% had to reduce the number of children enrolled.

Nevertheless, early childhood educational services have identified responses to the health emergency and the constraints that this has imposed on service modalities. 72% have initiated extraordinary contact channels with families, developing forms of pedagogical support, 68% have activated different and innovative offers, and 51% have hired new staff to ensure the same levels of service as the pre-pandemic period (Istat, 2022). In recent years, early childhood services have gained increasing scientific and socio-cultural attention, promoting research paths concerning possible factors capable of significantly influencing the promotion of the quality levels that characterize such services (Amatori, Maggiolini, Macchia, 2021). The scientific and cultural paradigm of reference is that of "inclusive education" which - working on multiple fronts - aims to ensure a barrier-free, collaborative, and fair environment; whereby "fair" it is not simply meant to ensure access to spaces and contexts - a necessary but not sufficient condition - but rather the real modification of contexts so that there is full and active participation in the formative processes for everyone. In this regard, the Index for Inclusion (Booth and Ainscow, 2008) for analyzing the quality of inclusive design in schools considers, among the resources to be introduced, aids, technologies, and materials necessary to ensure the school participation of each student. The Index is organized so that each indicator corresponds to a series of questions, thus facilitating the self-assessment process of subjects and school organizations that use this analysis tool. The focus is therefore on technologies as a means of communication, support for learning, and an opportunity to make contexts accessible. With some exceptions such as Braille materials or large-print texts, the reference is to tools and strategies that can facilitate practices aimed at valuing differences. The perspective is aimed at the classroom, to diversify the educational offer. The New Index for Inclusion (Booth and Ainscow, 2014) - focusing on the changed conditions of today's schools - presents some important innovations compared to the 2008 edition that "concern [...] the clarification of the role of values in designing for inclusion and the deepening of the curriculum contents as a fundamental element of this design work" (Dovigo, 2017, p. 121).

The New Index allows for the structuring of effective inclusive pathways that consider the wide range of diversity increasingly present within the school context: disabilities, learning difficulties, cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic, gender, and relational differences. On the other hand, it is undeniable that the media are increasingly pervasive in the daily lives of children; educational services for ages 0-6 have not only been affected - perhaps more than others - by the pandemic crisis, but "find themselves at a crossroads: making educational settings digital-free and therefore preserving traditional experiences; or planning for a gradual introduction of digital tools among those available to children within the facilities [...]. [Let us try to think] that new technologies can "work better" (that is, be used consciously, preventing risks and enhancing opportunities) if Media Education pathways are initiated starting from early childhood, involving parents in the first instance and then - gradually with their growth - also the children" (Di Bari, 2019, p. 3). One cannot overlook a "virtual world" that has strongly integrated into the "real world," starting from early childhood. Consequently, the educational question does not so much concern the use or non-use of digital technologies - echoing the decades-old debate between the "apocalyptic and integrated" (Eco, 2001) - but rather the appropriate and enriching management of them, avoiding abuse and tendencies towards dependence. Discussions about "digital overexposure" and childhood trapped by social media and video games, which generate discomfort and loneliness, are also found in the Childhood (at risk) Atlas 2023, edited by Save the Children, where it is stated that "However, the opposite is also true. There is also a risk of [isolation] if one is excluded from the online world, lacks access to networks, or is devoid of digital skills" (Save the Children, 2023, p. 13). Educational services for ages 0-6 should therefore provide training primarily aimed at pedagogical coordinators, educators, and teachers, based on Media Education (Cambi, 2019; Buckingham, 2007) as a theoretical dimension and on laboratory didactics as a practical dimension. The National Guidelines for the Curriculum (2012; 2018) also stress the need for pathways to be initiated before a child reaches the age of six, aimed at experimenting with the various languages with which the child comes into contact in their daily life.

Interesting directions in this regard come from Di Bari's research (2019, pp. 8-9):

- 1) Media Education can go beyond school boundaries and also involve early childhood;
- 2) Nurseries and preschools have the tools and methodologies to address media in original and creative ways;

3) Educational services for ages 0-6 can fulfill the role of raising awareness, informing, and educating families on the topic, and perhaps they are the only ones with the opportunity to do so;

4) Media Education can play a central role in building and promoting continuity between nurseries and preschools, through a dialogue among educators and teachers, but also through experiences that involve children of various age groups;

5) Digital tools can facilitate more participatory forms of documentation by children;

6) New technologies can be integrated into nurseries and preschools if they are considered tools that expand (rather than replace) traditional possibilities for children's experiences.

From the points considered, it is clear that digital media in early childhood require a rigorous pedagogical perspective that should, on one hand, be wary of immediate simplicity, understanding the complexity that underlies and determines it (Marangi, 2023); on the other hand, it should not shrink from the transformations that technologies bring, not only concerning already established skills but also considering a new way of perceiving and conceiving key themes such as relationships, engagement, communication, and interaction (Marangi, Guerra, Premoli, Dodi, 2022). Ideally, not setting the physical dimension against the digital one, but creating methods and practices that can skillfully weave the two perspectives strategically, with clear and coherent pedagogical purposes.

Conclusion

The contribution aimed to start from the evolution of the concept of space in early childhood education, referring to the theoretical elaborations and educational models of the main scholars on the topic. This historical framework has constituted the scientific reference platform for the design of the research presented here.

The experience of the joint training path for educators and teachers was configured as in-service training and included individual and collective spaces for reflection on oneself, on one's own practices, on how these intersect with those of others, and unfold within work contexts. In this sense, the implemented experience does not take the form of a "classic updating course" as it foresees, over time, a circular relationship between classroom training (of a laboratory and reflective nature) and training through implementation in daily work with children. In this way, educators

and teachers are accompanied and supported in processes of conscious innovation of practice and in group reflection on what happens, progressively deepening and appropriating theories and methods to operate intentionally.

The perspective of inclusive education in the 0-6 age range, finally, is essential in the design of the educational practices of today's school, as indicated by the main international and national documents, starting from the Index for Inclusion, in its various editions. In this scenario, Pedagogy certainly cannot "remain silent" (Cambi, 2020, p. 56), on the contrary, it must take on (courageously) precise commitments regarding these issues, which are to investigate, understand, and evaluate the risks, but also the potential that new technologies contain within themselves in educational and formative practices.

It is an commitment, among other things, supported by the European Union document NGEU (Next Generation EU) and by the PNRR (National Recovery and Resilience Plan), which point out the keywords for redesigning the post Covid-19 future: inclusion, sustainability, and personalization of learning. However, the crux of the matter remains the conscious, critical, and creative use of digital technologies in children which - if used through careful adult mediation - allow them to enhance their experiences, thus representing significant formative opportunities.

It is therefore necessary to continue investing in the training of teachers, educators, and families for the conscious and critical use of new technologies, so that the "digital transition" can be seen as an opportunity for human and social growth. The world of education, in this sense, is called to "monitor" the risks - human and social primarily - of this transition, articulating its main role, namely to configure itself as a "pedagogy of prevention".

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