More Opportunities for Every Child

# THE STATE OF THE ART ON EARLY DETECTION OF DIFFICULTIES IN KINDERGARTEN

## A European case study report

Maggiolini S., Molteni P., Aseda M. M., Averty M., Baquero E. T.,Borowska B., Castelnovo E., Chmurzynska I., Ciprian Z., Czech Dysput A., d'Alonzo L., Del Mar Gomez M., Domagała-Zyśk E., Dudit C., Le Mouillour S., Legal J., Martynowska K., Monguzzi V., Osete Y., Potiron A., Sala R., Salas Labayen M. R., Smietanska B., Zanfroni E.

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# Abstract

This essay stems from a reflection on potential training courses addressed to kindergarten teachers, working with children of 3-6 years of age. In particular, the data reported derive from a phase of the action research promoted within the Erasmus+ European project More Opportunities for Every Child (MOEC), which involved colleagues from Italy, France, Spain and Poland in order to investigate the possibility to build efficient observational instruments to detect the difficulties of pre-primary students.

The outcomes of the project call for a growing necessity to promote a structured reflection on the fundamental value of efficient observation, which should be incremented through the training offer addressed to teachers, and on other aspects deserving special attention, such as educational strategies to guarantee quality, the promotion of true communities of practice, the development of professional skills, increasingly suited to support the educational and learning growth of each child in kindergarten.



Keywords: Education of teachers • Early detection • Sharing good practices • Observation • Early childhood

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Ethics statement: All the data collected during our research was undertaken and processed in compliance with the robust ethical procedures in place at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore (IT), coordinator of the MOEC project, in compliance with data protection legislation in the IT, and in compliance with the Italian Privacy Law. The names of the participants are not revealed in any public document, and it will not be possible to lead back to specifically analysed data as they are part of a generic data collection. To guarantee a higher willingness to listen and pay attention to the researcher, and to avoid loss of precious material for the study, each participant needed to give his/her consent to record focus groups by signing a dedicated form.


Authors: Maggiolini S.[1], Molteni P., Aseda M. M., Averty M., Baquero E. T.,Borowska B., Castelnovo E., Chmurzynska I., Ciprian Z., Czech Dysput A., d'Alonzo L., Del Mar Gomez M., Domagała-Zyśk E., Dudit C., Le Mouillour S., Legal J., Martynowska K., Monguzzi V., Osete Y., Potiron A., Sala R., Salas Labayen M. R., Smietanska B., Zanfroni E.

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# Research background and State of the Art

# 1

The possibility of readily identifying the presence of difficulties, discomfort or developmental disorders during the earliest years of age of a child, and accordingly planning appropriate educational offers, is undoubtedly one of the milestones of general and special needs pedagogy, but it is also a fundamental objective of European and international educational policies.

It is indeed evident how such identification, far from formulating clinical diagnoses or fossilizing evaluations, constitutes a key prerequisite for planning activities, devising intervention strategies, modulating relational modes and thus allowing the reflection to be guided in a mindful and sound way, while avoiding the risk of inaccuracies or gross mistakes. In order for this goal to become feasible and sustainable over time, however, it is essential to promote its conditions, so that the opportunities inherent in the early detection of difficulties do not depend on factors which are internal or external to the organization itself (e.g. the skills of each teacher, the resources of the institute, a possible support from specialists, an inclusive culture promoted by the school, the receptiveness of the Principal, etc.), but are rather a structural component to educational and teaching processes in kindergarten age.

This last aspect calls for different work plans: structuring specific educational offers based on the real needs of teachers, in terms of observation, identification and sharing of child's early difficulties signs; defining pedagogical protocols and tools to support not only the daily action of the teacher, but also a culture of thoughtfulness, of an attitude constantly aimed at finding the meaning of one's own work, and as a measure to avoid the risk – especially in some educational contexts – of translating established routines and practices into a passive and mechanical execution of tasks and sequences; promoting materials and good practices that are already in place, following the example of other European countries; developing a professional *habitus*, and therefore stable and systematically-usable skills, i.e. the ability of reporting data by means of analysis grids or other structured materials; implementing appropriate communication and relational strategies and effective synergies, thus promoting a productive and harmonious work environment, in which the child can be observed under a common and shared perspective, without wasting time and resources.

It is in this theoretical framework that the **EU project MOEC – *More Opportunities for Every Child*** – was created, funded by the European Commission within the KA2 Eramus+ program – *Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices*. Specifically, during the first year of work, each partner country (France, represented by the Université Catholique de l'Ouest, Anger; Spain, by the Universidad Pontificia Comillas, Madrid; Poland, by the Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski Jana Pawła II, Lublin) led by Italy, with the leading institution Centro Studi e Ricerche sulla Disabilità e la Marginalità (CeDisMa) of the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, has started, with each kindergarten involved, a structured path aimed both at understanding and clearly defining the educational needs of teachers, and at building shared languages and perspectives regarding the detection of any difficulties of kindergarten children.

Care, along with the complex implications of such a dimension, represents the epistemological foundation of the pedagogical reflection but it is also, and above all, the basis of the practices and processes through which it is declined. The attention to childhood and to the infinite potential contained in what has been defined as the flower of educability[2] has always been a subject of interest and research in the educational field. There are multiple reasons that can be ascribed to organic, evolutionary, and cultural issues. It can be said that: "*at birth, the young of human beings, unlike what happens to other animal species, manifests itself in its condition of psychobiological immaturity and inability to take care of itself, which causes the need for a substantial and prolonged phase of dependence on nursing figures. This neurocerebral fragility has two opposite aspects: that of opportunity, inherent in what has yet to be built and developed; and that of vulnerability, typical of every ongoing reality and with undefined contours*"[3].

Alongside these aspects, it is also important to consider the underlying social factors: each era has been characterized not only by a certain perspective on this specific phase of life, but also by the peculiarity of the responses and the interventions carried out in its favour. Thus, over the years, there has been the emergence, consolidation and even the questioning of theoretical models, principles and approaches that oriented what are defined today as *childcare policies*.

What we are going through nowadays represents a particular, and in some ways unprecedented, historical contingency of many elements that need to be considered in the analysis of the processes aimed at implementing the quality of daily services for the education of children. On the one hand, it thus becomes fundamental to take into account the profound transformations happened within

the social structure in the last decades, which contributed to change traditional family structures, to review management and support models, highlighting the emergence not only of different needs and demands, but also of new issues related to fragility and difficulty of some parents. On the other hand, though, it is equally essential to consider the achievements of children in the field of knowledge, from their earliest life, and the development stages promoting their growth and maturation.

Although we are only at the beginning of a long journey towards a deep understanding of the human mind, it is undeniable that the last decades have been marked by revolutionary achievements, on the one hand forcing to rethink about theoretical and practical paradigms in the field of education and training, while on the other hand confirming ideas or intuitions and providing them with a scientific foundation. In particular, since the 1990s – not by chance defined "*The Decade of the Brain*"[4] – the amount of research carried out in the scientific field has considerably increased, strengthening the necessary association between educational sciences and the knowledge linked to neuro-discoveries. In this regard, worth of mention are the works by Le Doux on the relationship between emotional states and brain structures (*The emotional brain, fear, and the amygdala, in Cellular and molecular neurobiology*, 23 (4-5), 2003, pp. 727-738); those by Damasio, who analyzed the intellectual functioning through an understanding of the cognitive dimension of feelings and consciousness (A.R. Damasio, *Alla ricerca di Spinoza. Emozioni, sentimenti e cervello*, Adelphi, Milan, 2003); the research carried out by Siegel on the connections between neurobiological processes and interpersonal relations, with a focus on all aspects related to the *Mindfulness* approach (D.J. Siegel, *Mindfulness e cervello*, Cortina, Milan, 2009); that by Cozolino, who questions the ways in which social relations shape the cerebral architecture (L. Cozolino, *Il cervello sociale. Neuroscienze delle relazioni umane*, Cortina, Milan, 2008). Highly important, moreover, are the well-known contributions of Rizzolatti and of his research unit (among others, Fogassi, Gallese, Fadiga, Sinigallia) that led to the extraordinary discovery of the mirror neurons, paving the way for a wide and rich series of studies (Rizzolatti, C. Sinigaglia, *So quel che fai. Il cervello che agisce e i neuroni specchio*, Cortina, Milan, 2006). Also, several contributions come from other scientific fields and contexts, which encompass the works of the *National Scientific Council on the Developing Child*, analyzing constructs and dimensions important for the education of kindergarten children, such as the role of resilience[5] and its relevant factors, in relation to the possibility of its rooting since the early age by promoting those essential processes of adaptation

required to face adversities in life; the role of play, either free or structured, as a privileged moment to learn how to process and manage emotions, to experience relational modes, to make decisions, to develop self-regulation mechanisms, enhancing problem-solving abilities and flexible thinking.

Therefore, even in this difficult and uncertain time, there are several reasons to take those transformative, sometimes even generative, opportunities to enhance the extraordinary resources offered by education, starting from its earliest levels, to every child and in particular to those with more difficulties.

Photo by Lucas Alexander, Unsplash

# Teachers' training needs: a theoretical overview

# 2

The analysis of educational needs represents a fundamental subject, particularly at a time when the professional offer is wide and varied, both in presence and in blended mode.

This involves different variables: personal, institutional, social, cultural, whose interweaving contributes to form a very articulated and complex structure. Its aim is to help bring out and express the real needs of various school professionals with respect to the development of useful skills in daily activities and to the definition of each worker's profile, with a particular focus on teachers working with students in a critical age such as childhood. In this regard, it is useful to quote Dubar (1980), who defined educational needs as a dialectical process comprising three moments in particular:

- educational needs as hypothetical results of economic standpoints and evolution in jobs and qualifications;
- educational needs as individual representations and motivations in a process of goal setting, requiring an assessment of the current situation and an ability to plan and thus anticipate the future;
- educational needs as differentiated behaviours of different social groups making use of educational opportunities.

This last aspect is, precisely, "*dependent on the relationship between the two previous moments. It involves linking collective situations and individual strategies, the constraints of the economic environment and projects of personal development*" (Dubar C., 1980, quoted in Alessandrini G., 2016, p.88).

In fact, by virtue of all the above and of the inherent social and cultural complexity, it would be reductive to think that such an important operation of the educational process, i.e. the analysis of needs, could be simplistically declined in a list of what is missing or in a sterile measurement of the gap between the professional skills that one already owns and those that one would like to, or should, acquire.

Rather, a survey which significantly aims at reading and understanding the nature of educational needs among explicit statements and implicit messages collected throughout the work described here, using different research methodologies

(focus groups, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews), cannot ignore a careful analysis of the different characteristics of territory, organisations and institutions (macrosystem). These dimensions are indeed intertwined with the understanding of the sum of beliefs, convictions, expectations, and knowledge that people possess, either general, or related to particular epistemological domains (microsystem).

In the light of such considerations, it is believed that an educational need can be conceived as a specific requirement, closely related to the professional skills of individuals and of the team, which is made up not only of what individuals concretely put into practice, but also of what they intend to do and in which ways. Therefore, understanding these needs necessarily implies taking on a multidimensional and complexity-oriented perspective.

This is particularly true if the educational project must be structured inside the school environment, where the interweaving that has just been outlined is enriched through strongly intertwined elements: the personal needs of the teachers, the needs of the single school institution linked to its specific historical and cultural path, government guidelines and directives, requests of the territorial network, special educational needs of students and their families.

The European project Erasmus+ MOEC – *More opportunities for every child* – fits right inside this perspective, within a partnership involving Italian, French, Spanish, and Polish research institutions, and kindergartens. In a wider reference framework, the data reported in this essay represent the results of the first phase of implementation of an educational process aimed at teachers working in the kindergartens involved.

This process involved the development of survey tools aimed at understanding multiple aspects that are fundamental to the implementation of the European project's work plan. One of them is the knowledge of the educational needs of teachers, with regard to early detection of difficulties of kindergarten children.

# Italy

3

## 3.1 Introduction

The Italian model of school inclusion for individuals with disabilities (legislation 118/1971 and 517/1977) boasts over 40 years of ground-breaking experimental work – both theoretical and applied. Drawing on pioneering pedagogical values, which are now internationally recognised, Italy has been one of the first countries in the world to promote the integration of disabled students into traditional education routes (Treelle association, Italian Caritas, Agnelli foundation, 2011).

According to the latest data released by MIUR (Source: MIUR - DGCASIS - Ufficio Gestione Patrimonio Informativo e Statistica – Rilevazioni sulle scuole – May 2019), there is a constant increase in the number of certifications of disability in Italian schools – either public or private: "*compared to 20 years ago, the number of students with certified disabilities has more than doubled (123,862 in the school year 1997/1998). Such an increase, which certainly partially reflects a refinement in the survey process, is noticeably considerable if we consider that, during the last twenty years, the total number of pupils attending Italian schools has even decreased*"[6]. Particularly, in kindergartens, between school year 1997/1998 and school year 2017/2018, the number of children with disabilities increased from 0.8% to 2.1% of the total number of pupils. The same report states: "*the percentage of children with disabilities up to 3 years of age is rather low, 0.6% for children under 3 years of age and 1.3% for 3-year-old children, respectively. For the 4-5-year-old age group, the percentage is higher, 2.1% for 4-year-old children and 2.4% for 5-year-old children, respectively. There is an exceptionally high proportion of students with disabilities over 6 years of age: more than half the children who stay back in kindergarten and move to compulsory education late, have a certification of disability*".

Therefore, it seems obvious to investigate the links between the scientific achievements mentioned above and their actual, practical translation, between the knowledge in the field of the cerebral development of the child and the possibility of identifying early signs of evolutionary alteration, also making use of appropriate tools for educational professionalism.

As part of the E+ MOEC – *More Opportunities for Every Child* – project, each national research team carried out, during the first year, an exploratory survey

aimed at understanding the educational needs of the teachers of the involved kindergartens, in terms of inclusion, difficulties/developmental disorders at age 0-6 and scientific tools to detect signs of potential issues, recognized by national and international literature. The design, structure and results of the research carried out by the Italian working group – CeDisMa – and by the two participating kindergartens, IC Falcone-Borsellino (Offanengo -CR) and Gabrio Piola (Giussano-MB), will be presented below.

## 3.2 Research Methodology

The analysis of educational needs lies within a research program adopting a structured methodology, consistent with the twofold requirement of the survey itself: to obtain qualitative answers, which would make sense of the real needs of the school and its professionals, and at the same time, to obtain, through as many participants as possible, quantitatively significant data.

More specifically, the objectives of this research can be summarized as follows:

- to carry out an early identification of the knowhow possessed by teachers, in terms of investigating their previous educational experience;
- to identify the needs of teachers with respect to a particular subject - i.e. the early detection of difficulties – which is considered significantly important, not so much in terms of contents, as in relation to the methodologies of the educational intervention they consider as qualitatively more effective.

The choice of the study type was therefore oriented towards the realization of an action-research, i.e. a methodology of participatory investigation, carried out by people directly involved within an organization or institution, in order to address emerging critical issues and outline possible future prospects (Amado G. & Levy A., 2002; Boog B., Coenenen H & Keune L., 2001; Reason P. & Bradbury H, 2001).

The survey was carried out using three data-collection techniques commonly used in pedagogical research: questionnaire, focus group and *semi-structured interview*.

The **questionnaire**, provided electronically, consists of 31 closed-ended, multiple choice and open-ended questions, divided into 4 areas (FIGURE 1):

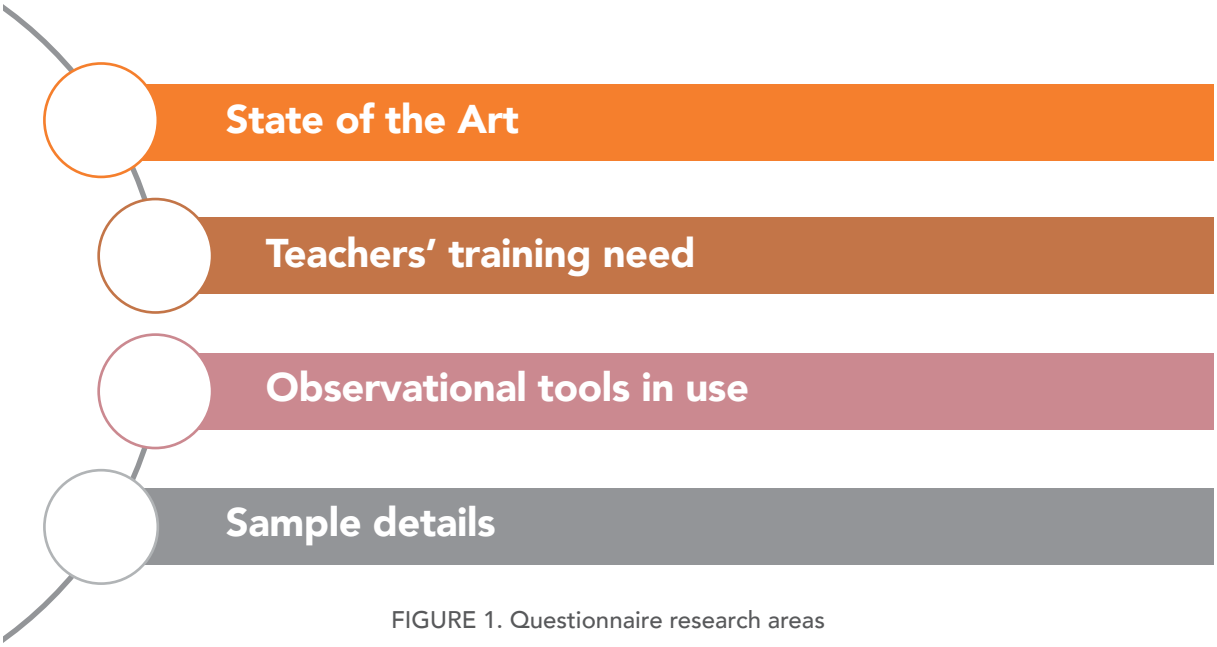


FIGURE 1. Questionnaire research areas

As already mentioned, this essay is mainly focused on the second area of interest. At the same time, the methods of the **focus group** (Krueger R. A., 1994; Bloor M., Frankland, J.Thomas M. & Robson K., 2005) and of the **semi-structured interview** (Trinchero R., 2004) have been adopted in order to obtain qualitative data through the active discussion among participants on some key subjects, with particular attention to the critical issues of normally adopted educational models and the potentialities linked to different ways of implementing learning activities (FIGURE 2).

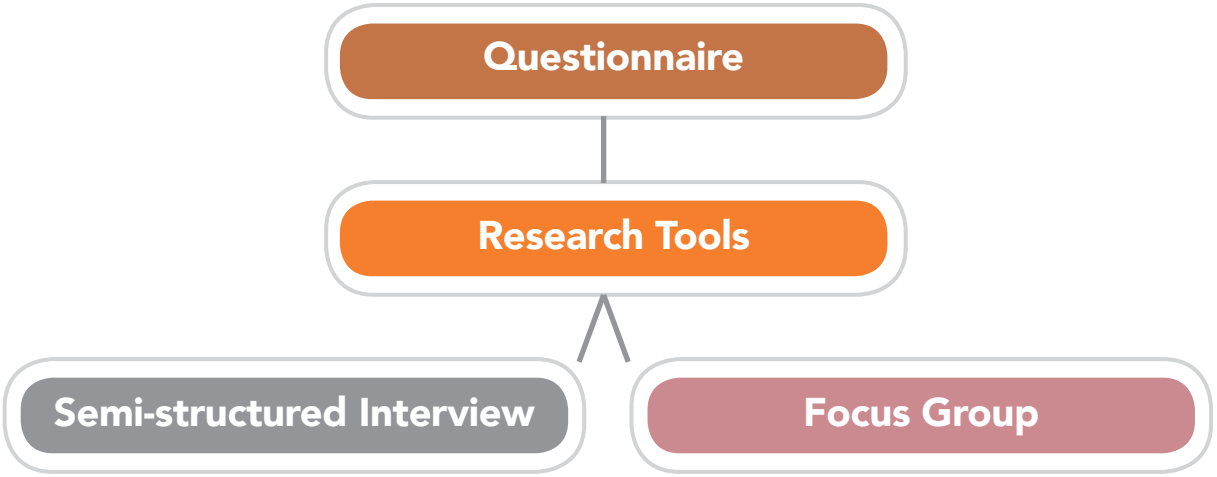


FIGURE 2. Research tools overview

## 3.3 Research Sample

The sample is composed of 68 professionals, 65 of which are teachers (95,6%) and 3 are school educators (4,4%) (FIGURE 3), working in the public kindergartens belonging to the two school complexes actively participating in the project partnership – the "G. Piola" school complex in Giussano (MB) and the "Falcone e Borsellino" school complex in Offanengo (CR).

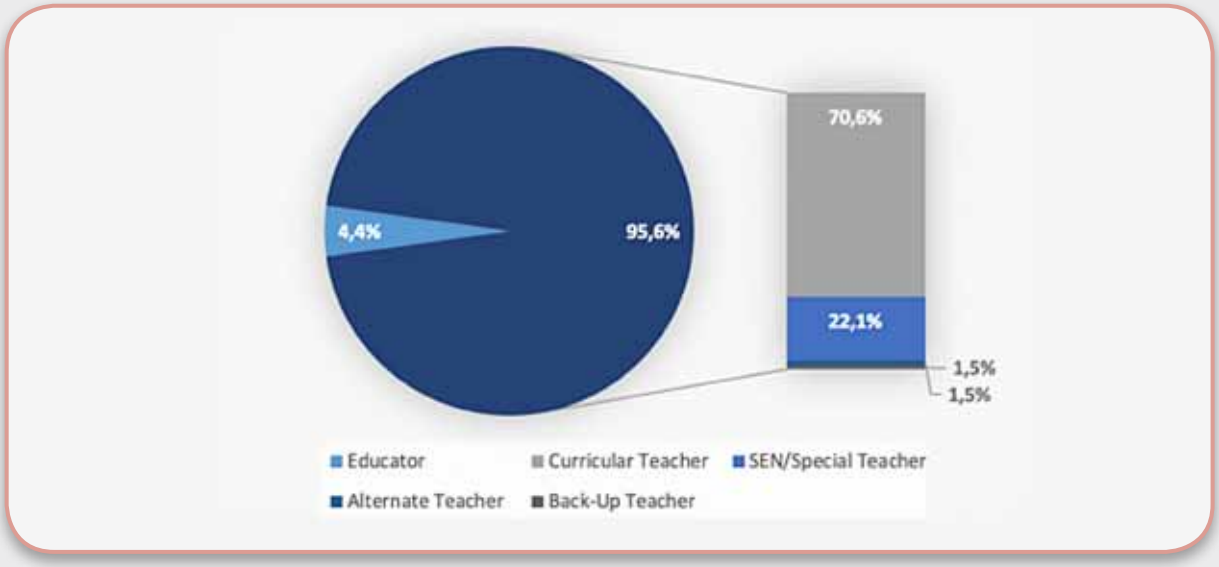


FIGURE 3. Sample Profession

All participants are female; 41% of the sample is over 50 years old (FIGURE 4) – 51-60 y-o 36,8% and >60 y-o: 4,4%); 38% has a professional career of over 25 years (32,4% - 26-35 years; 5,9% - >36 years), while only 17,6% of the sample has been working in the school for less than 5 years (FIGURE 5).

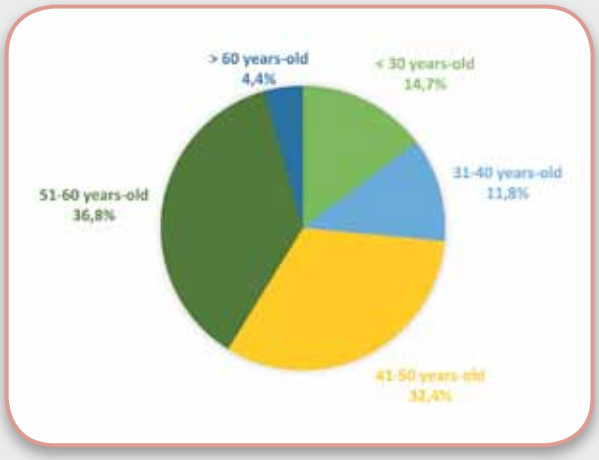


FIGURE 4. Sample Age

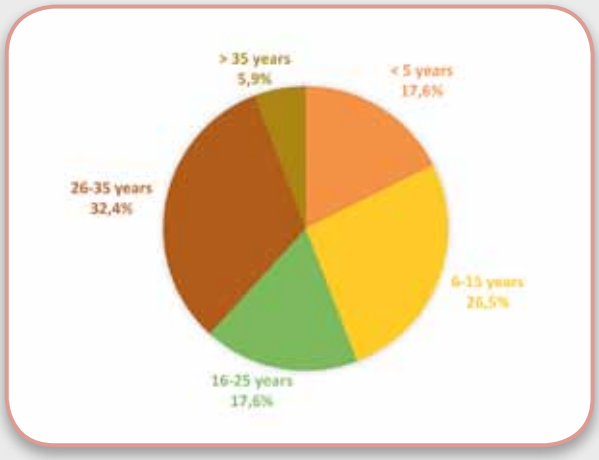


FIGURE 5. Sample school teaching experience

Curricular teachers share longer experience in terms of working years: 51% of them declare to have worked for more than 21 years.

Such data differs if we examine their working experience with students with Special Educational Needs (SEN): one third of the total sample (30,9%) has, in fact, less than 5 years of experience working with children with special educational needs in the classroom, while around 20% of them have been working with such students for more than twenty-five years (26-35 years: 19,1 - >35 years 1,5%) (FIGURE 6).

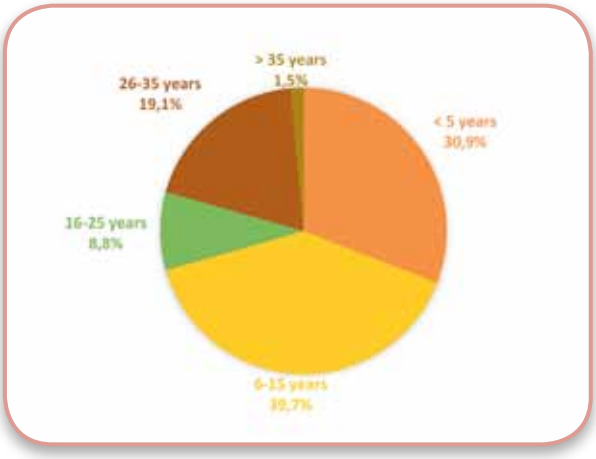


FIGURE 6. School teaching experience with students with SEN

This result, observed in the light of the research sample's profession, does not indicate any noticeable difference and therefore it would seem possible to state that, within the school context of the reference sample, there is no specific category of professionals with a longer teaching experience among children with SEN.

In terms of professional competence at school, the picture that emerges is as follows: although the majority of participants have a proven and long school experience, only a smaller number of them had the possibility to work with children with SEN for a long period of time.

To summarize, the most remarkable aspects of the survey sample are:

- all the participants are female professionals;
- most of them are curricular teachers (71%);
- curricular teachers have longer teaching experience than their support teacher colleagues and school educators.

## 3.4 Analysis of the results

The second part of the questionnaire, and a part of the questions during focus groups and interviews, aimed at investigating the educational needs perceived by teachers and educators working in the kindergartens involved in the project. The 97% of participants believe it's important to promote a timely early detection of difficulties in kindergartens (FIGURE 7).

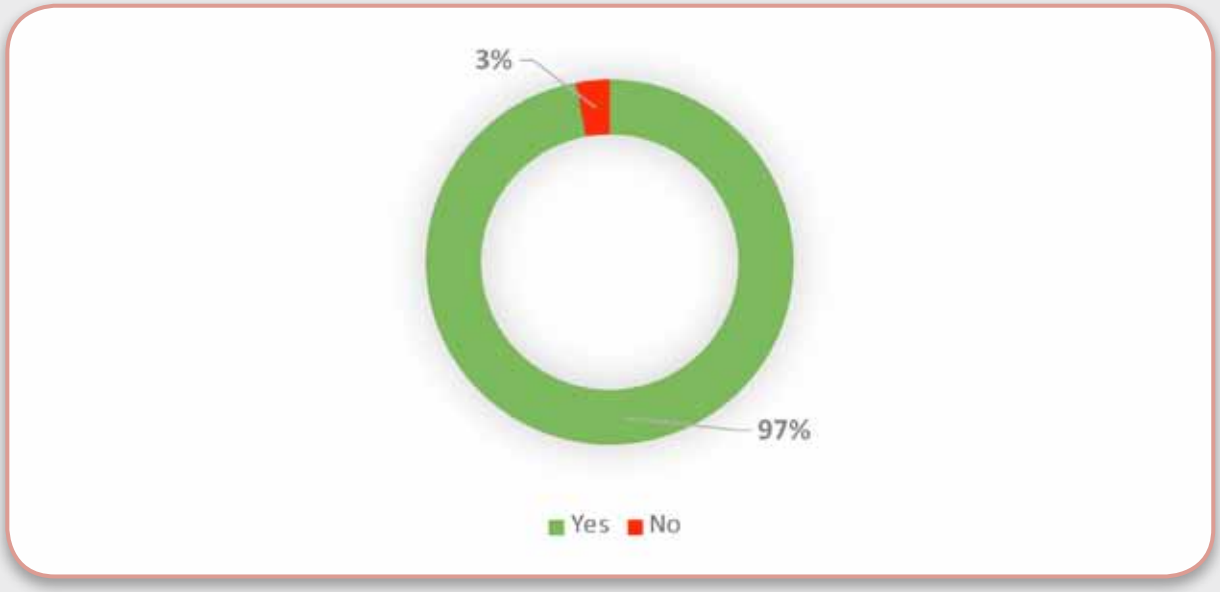


FIGURE 7. Is it important to promote timely early detection of difficulties in kindergartens?

This data is of utmost importance for the purpose of this research, since it indicates how the central theme of the project is strongly felt by the participating teachers, confirming the need to implement specific skills to support a good educational intuition through scientifically-grounded working tools.
In order to improve observation and detection abilities, the research team deemed it appropriate to investigate which educational issues teachers would like to be trained in. The requests that emerged are various and diversified, the following being the most outstanding (FIGURE 8).

- **Child observation (26%)**
- **Special Educational Needs (15%)**
- **Family relationship (13%)**
- **Colleagues relationship (12%)**
- **Learning strategies (9%)**
- **Class management (7%)**
- **Effective communication (6%)**

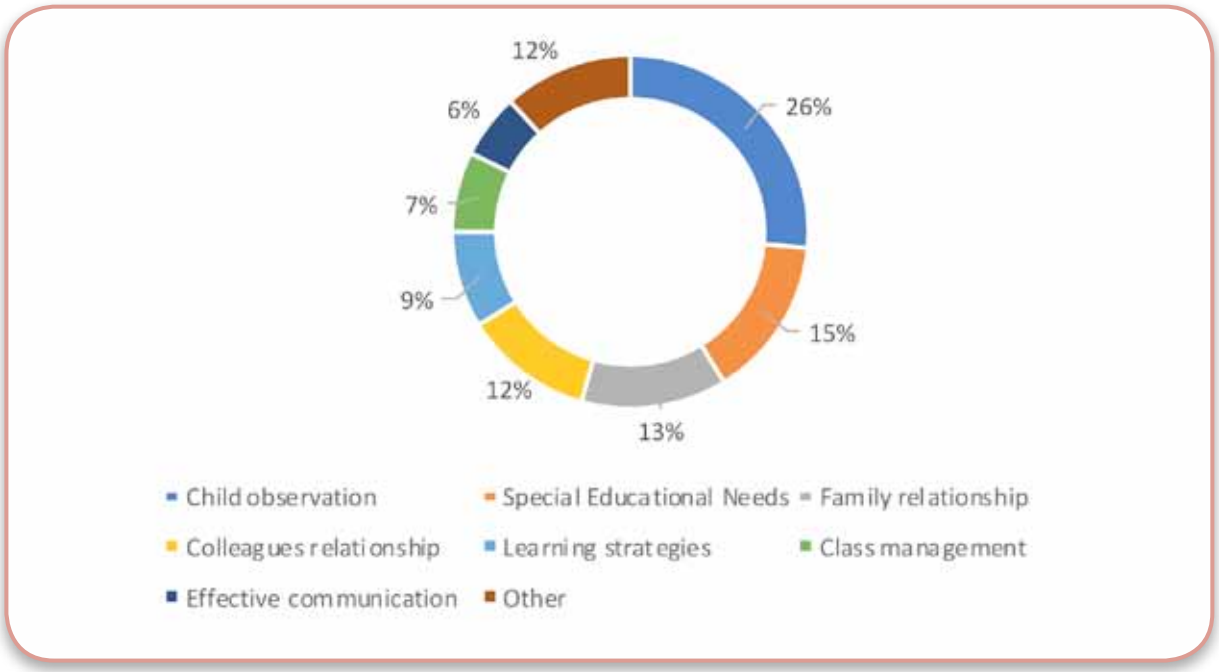


FIGURE 8. Training topic

Other training requests concern behavioral disorders (oppositional defiant disorder, conduct disorder), the management of a difficult class and the relationship with pupils in difficulty, aggressiveness and hyperactivity in children, disability, and developmental disorders.

The ability to develop a correct observational attitude is perceived as an essential competence for those who work in the educational field, like in particular the importance of developing unconditional acceptance of the other person through a willingness to listen that is free from stereotypes, beliefs and biases, in an attempt to understand the child in his or her uniqueness and genuineness.

The observation of processes and its dynamics may appear as a well-known topic, which has been widely analyzed, discussed, and investigated; however, often times there are no systematic or accurate detection protocols.

The duration of training courses is frequently variable and depends on the topic addressed. In this regard, most of the participants indicate the need to plan meetings lasting no longer than 3 hours, once a week or once every other week, with an overall average between 15 and 20 hours, in line with the majority of courses already promoted by their school or local authorities.

However, many teachers specify that the duration is not a limiting factor, because the motivation to participate is influenced by the interest in the educational subject.

Finally, according to the participants, trainers should preferably be professionals in the proposed topic (55 - 81%) or specialized school teachers (35 - 51%), a third of them indicating university teachers (24 - 35%) as an option (FIGURE 9).

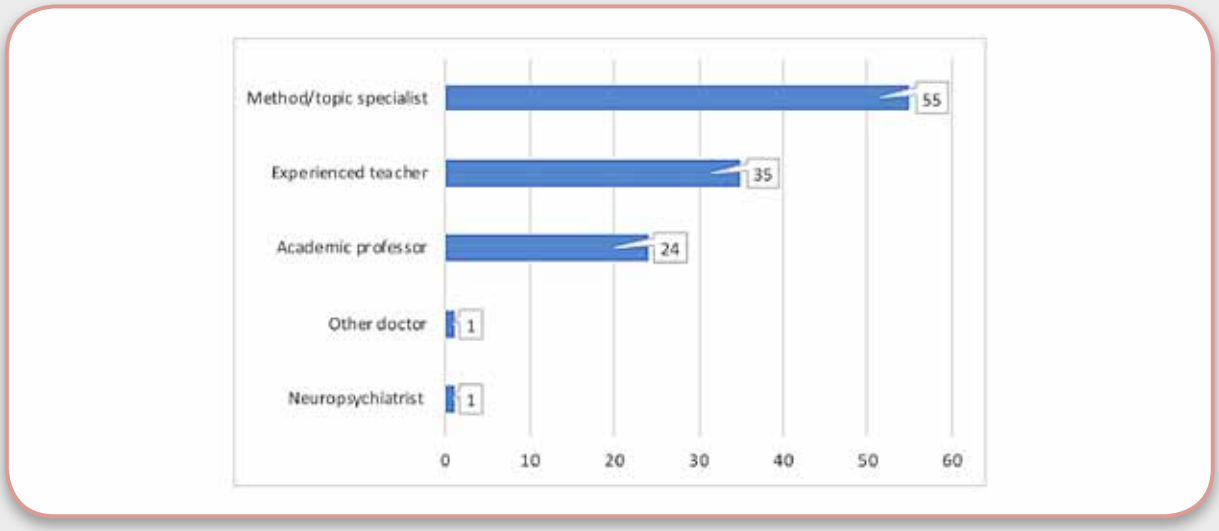


FIGURE 9. Trainer profession

Through the questionnaire, the participants were asked to reflect on the training methods they preferred and considered most effective, in order to improve their expertise at early detection of difficulties at school (FIGURE 10): 66% of the participants (n. 45) expressed their preference for active and practical workshops, and 49% of the total (n. 33) asked for presence training which would facilitate teamwork, cooperation and the sharing of good practices.
Lecture-style/theoretical education, case studies and online courses are the least requested training modes, which however account for 15% each.

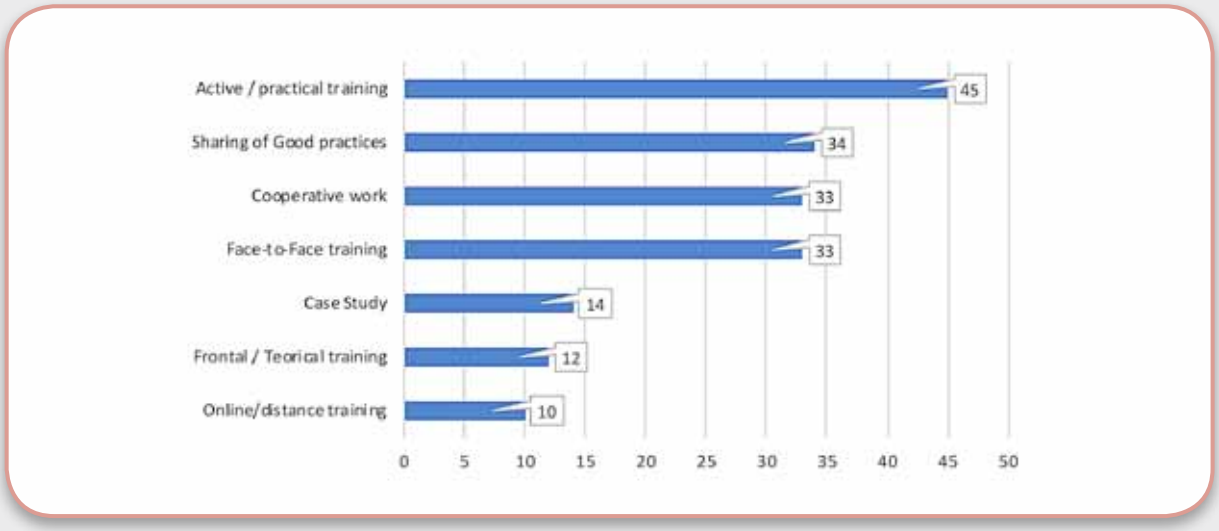


FIGURE 10. Training methodology

Qualitative survey tools (focus groups and semi-structured interviews) made it possible to collect further data on educational needs and possible models to improve training offers to teachers.
Many participants highlighted the need to keep the motivational aspect in the foreground, as it is considered the essential element to support specialization paths for teachers and their desire to detect difficulties in children at an early stage.

At the time this research was conducted, in-service training was not mandatory. Taking this premise into account, it is essential for each training course to be presented to teachers in an effective, engaging and challenging way, in order to motivate them to attend the course even though, and precisely because, it is not compulsory.
The members of the focus groups, who belonged to the two schools participating in the project, expressed stimulating ideas to improve the educational offers in the area. What emerged from the group discussion made it possible to outline important guidelines to plan future education. Depending on the needs of the schools, it would be appropriate to offer modular courses structured in workshops, which would allow participants to investigate the topic of early detection of difficulties and the development of educational and didactic strategies, on the basis of their needs, thus offering teachers an opportunity for monitoring, supervising and accompanying their students, exploring different observation tools and sharing a reflection on the warning signals in children aged 3-6 years.

In this regard, starting from the complexity detected inside the school environment, also due to the ever increasing presence of pupils with special educational needs, the qualitative data collected has shown the opportunity to reflect on the need to guarantee teachers the possibility of constant pedagogical supervision, guiding them through the most difficult cases and, more generally, in their daily work. The figure of a pedagogical consultant represents one of the possibilities for schools to cope with the various difficulties arising when managing pupils. This support can thus constitute a valid and impartial help for teachers, useful to define shared strategies and possible training courses, leading also to the identification of variables that, in the presence of particular educational needs, can make a difference in achieving quality of educational processes (Negri, 2014).

As the opinions shared with the researchers highlighted, **workshop mode** is certainly the one preferred by teachers. The research sample also hypothesized the possibility of involving, in the same workshops, different specialists belonging

to the school environment and to the healthcare system, in particular experts on the topics covered, on warning signals and on innovative observational and educational strategies. This would help teachers to learn about the experience of other people working and focusing on the growth of children, thus promoting a combined and integrated network approach.

Regarding the *training specific topics* express by the participants, teachers highlighted the following: **i)** metacognition in preschool children; **ii)** the key role of teamwork and communication between colleagues; **iii)** the child's developmental milestones and phases; **iv)** the key indicators of child difficulties and how to observe and detect them.

Furthermore, it has been suggested that, for it to be more effective, *training should be addressed not only to teachers*, but it should also be designed for principals and auxiliary school personnel, as well as create special modules for curricular and special needs teachers. It could be useful to issue a certificate of attendance at the end of each training level proposed, although it should be important to define in detail methods and criteria to evaluate the actual impact of the course and its functional repercussions on each teacher's method.

As one participant in the focus group explains, "*training must be promoted and funded by the Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR) in different ways: grants to self-governing schools and to school networks through participation in training courses on specific topics, allocation of training resources to CTIs (local centers for inclusion). The promotion of training actions should be the responsibility of those who fund and organize the courses, but I think a certain importance lies in conceiving training as a tool to promote and enhance the professionalism of teachers within each individual school*" (participant 3, group 1- IC Giussano, IT).

In particular, the task of the school principal should be to identify educational needs and promote the participation of teachers in the courses. It is also true that, in some instances, the annual changes in the personnel of each institution, and in particular in the appointment of principals, do not always provide for the necessary consistency and depth of the various subjects addressed during the annual training courses.

Training can also be a tool to implement new school policies; indeed, "*effective training actions and courses truly responding to previously detected training needs, do change the professional culture, allowing innovation and evolution of complex and delicate systems such as the school*" (participant 2, group 2- IC Offanengo, IT).

The effectiveness of different educational offers should also be monitored and detected through the evaluation of participants and the impact on good institute practices. Some teachers suggest evaluating skills before and after the course, reporting the results of the courses and sharing those results within the school.

According to a school Headmaster, "*the resistance that teachers often show towards training is largely due to previous unsatisfactory experiences; in most cases, training courses only focus on theoretical contents and do not fully meet their expectations. There is often a lack of examples of 'good practices', of experiences that have worked in specific but exportable cases, of solutions to particular cases. Therefore, being able to evaluate the training of teachers is especially important to direct the educational offer in a more effective way*" (Headmaster 1).

While this is undoubtedly shareable, it is also true that the initial atmosphere in certain training activities generally addressed to adults, and more specifically to teachers, is of extreme resistance and prejudice against innovative proposals. Trainees are often biased with respect to the effectiveness of the different training courses and they do not understand that, sometimes, what makes a real difference in achieving results could derive from their very attitude and their desire to be trained.

Sometimes, in fact, it is not important to diversify educational topics and analyze individual cases from which to infer good practices, but it is desirable to conceive the course as an opportunity to discuss and exchange views, inducing participants to rethink about different theoretical contents and translating them into their daily work experience.

It is thus important for the trainees to ask themselves how it is possible to make use of the good practices learned on such occasions and share them with their colleagues. The participants in the experimentation also consider as extremely important the support of the institutes to the work and test groups that form in each unit, whose function is collecting the most effective experiences and transmitting them to the other teachers of the network, thus constituting true 'libraries of good practices', to which everyone can access on the basis of their students' needs. In this way, "*discussion between teachers could be further encouraged, also through international exchange programs and educational research centers in collaboration with universities, with the task of training, supporting, counselling and evaluating the impact of training, in a perspective of continuous professional development*" (Headmaster 2).

At the basis of this idea, it is possible to recognize a concrete realization of the construct of the **community of practice** which, as Alessandrini claims, through an integrated and multifocal approach, makes it possible to consider different elements, dynamically interacting in a given professional reality such as the school (Alessandrini G. & Buccolo M., 2010):

- practices, implemented by qualified and motivated teachers;
- intentions, rules/regulations, repertoires, procedures, knowledge, (explicit/implicit) theories supporting the practices of the teachers in a given institution;
- communities of practices, as complex sets of individuals sharing cultures, life and learning histories, knowledge, traditions;
- interface communities with which one interacts in a given context, i.e. the different existing types of communities of practice (Wenger, 2006; Alessandrini G. & Buccolo M., 2010, p.100).

The lack of economic and human resources, the social complexity and the educational emergencies, and the consequent educational needs, therefore, spur a reflection on the value of potential communities of practice in each school and they call for and understanding of the potential methods to be activated in order for those communities to be fully established.

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# France

4

## 4.1 Introduction

The Catholic University of the West, created in 1897, is a reference actor for higher education and research. The UCO is deployed today on 8 campuses in the West of France and Overseas. It offers some 10000 students 100 courses of training of the baccalaureate with bac + 8, in 35 sectors. With a strong tradition of academic excellence, real and international partners, UCO offers an ideal for students, to become competent professionals, free and responsible minds.

The UCO currently defends the values of Humanity, proximity, listening and dialogue. The acquisition of training in six faculties (Theology, Humanities and Social Sciences, Sciences Humanities, Law Economics Management and Education). With more than 6 500 students on its campus, UCO Angers is a pillar of higher education in Maine and Loire. The 70 nationalities bachelor's, master's and doctorate degrees on six campuses. The Faculty of Education offers dual expertise: initial training – it prepares in particular for teaching competitions – and continuing education – it trains each year more than 4000 teachers of the preschool, primary and secondary schools. She places innovation at the heart of her training to contribute to learning. The educational practices: she has developed a teaching on neuroscience and learning. The educational team consists of teachers, researchers and teachers from schools: this diversity of profiles is a richness for students who receive a versatile training and in line with the realities of the world of education.

At the faculty we are working on a unifying theme: Educate: Mutations, Vulnerabilities, Permanence. The researchers of the research team, PESSOA, are interested in methods of education, socialization, training and knowledge appropriation by identifying the characteristics of learning and analysing them at all ages in many facets (personal, academic, professional…). The conditions of learning, didactic and pedagogy.

Living on learning together – statistical education in higher education – socialization of the adolescent, the question of gender – the relation to knowledge – neuroscience – educational ideas – disorders and disability – mental management.

This Erasmus project is a real opportunity for our faculty, through interculture exchanges, international exchanges to highlight his skills both from a scientific

point of view and from the around issues in education, vulnerabilities and ethics. This action research project is therefore a real opportunity for our Faculty to strengthen its skills in the field of inclusive pedagogy from members make up the small French team.

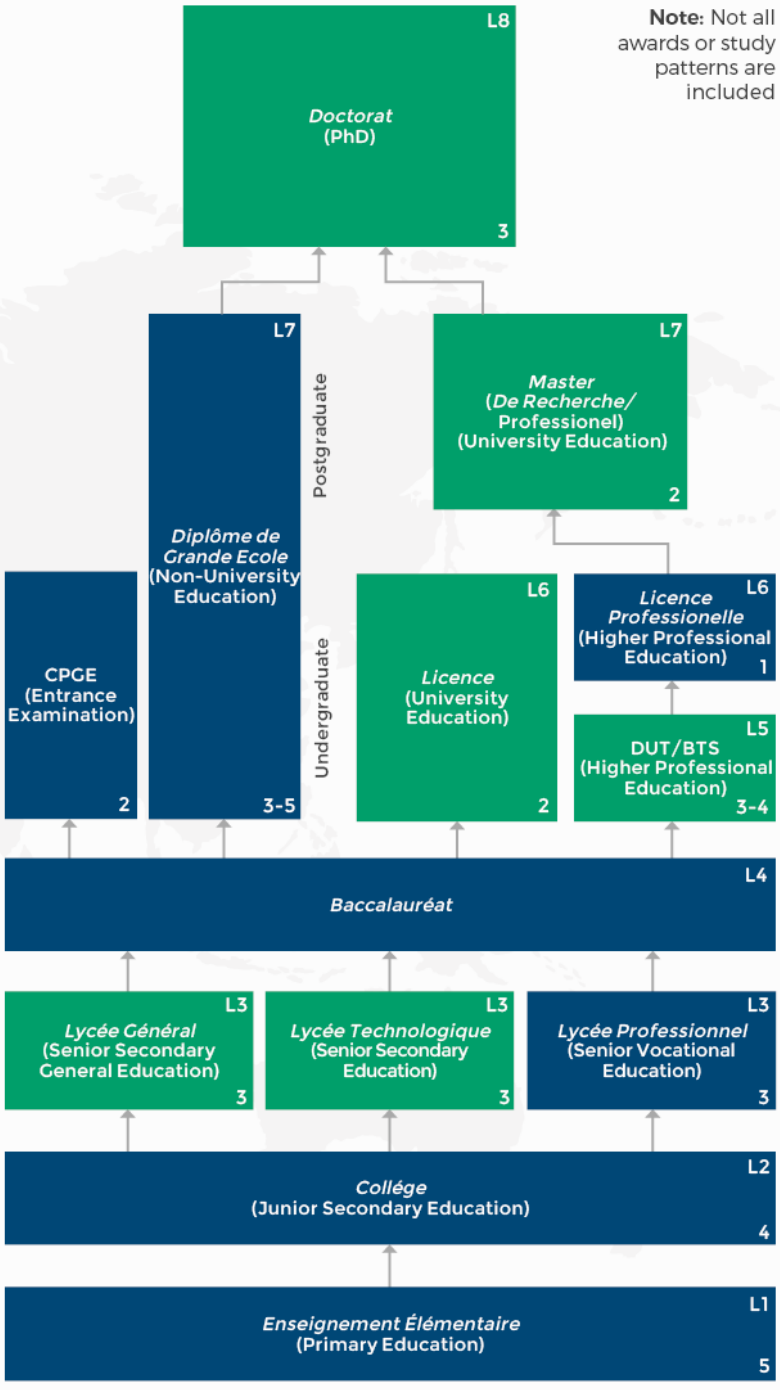
Mrs Ségolène LE MOUILLOUR, Dean of the Faculty of Education, professor of education sciences, very interested in her work in the question of living together through the history of educational pedagogies and policies. She is the manager and the teacher research for the project. Coordination with the school, with the specialist teacher. Writing reports.

Mr Jacques LEGAL, specialist teacher and trainer in the field of school inclusion, currently enrolled in a doctorate in educational sciences. He is the teacher training who organized and deliver training courses.

This Erasmus Project, MOEC, also involves a primary kindergarten, Notre Dame de La Source School, located in La Garnache, in the Department of Vendee (85). It's a school of Catholic with 14 classrooms, with 385 pupils. This school is represented by his headteacher, Cécile DUDIT.

This school places importance on welcoming difference. Children with different disorders are present in the different classes. The school has close-on to isolate them in a specialized class. 24 people work at this school. 4 teachers are in preschool (2 and ½ to 5/6 years), 9 teachers are in primary school (6 to 11 years), 6 people help teachers in the classroom in the preschool, 3 people work with teachers to help them care for students with special educational needs and there is also a specialized "RA" support network teacher is present in the institution. The school has not developed a specific policy for students with disabilities. It followed the national guidelines of the adaptation and integration school (1997), the adaptation and the schooling of the handicapped pupils (2004), the law equality of chances (2005), the law of orientation (2013), inclusive education (2017).

## EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM




Source: AEI NOOSR

## 4.2 Background: Context of the research

*"Inclusive education is concerned with all children, with a special focus on those who traditionally do not have an educational opportunity, such as children with special educational needs, disabilities, ethnic or linguistic minorities, among others"*[7].

*"Inclusive education is based on the right of all to quality education that meets the essential learning needs and enriches the lives of learners. Focused particularly on vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, it strives to fully develop the potential of each individual. The ultimate goal of Inclusive Quality Education is to end all forms of discrimination and to foster social cohesion"*[8].

From UNESCO's perspective, inclusive education is concerned primarily with specific populations, Roma children, street children, working children, people with disabilities, indigenous people and rural people[9].

**Segregation is:** Certificates and school system. Specialized establishments

> Decree of 14 August 1909: Certificate of Aptitude for the Education of Arrears (CAEA), also called special certificate.

> July 18, 1939: Certificate of Aptitude for the Teaching of Arrears and Teachers' Certificate in Teaching Outdoor Schools.

> Decree July 12, 1963: Certificate of Aptitude to Education for Children and Adolescents with Disabilities or Inadequate Children (CAEI)

> Law of April 15, 1909: The advanced classes At the request of the communes and departments, may be created for the backward children of both sexes classes of improvement annexed to the public elementary schools; Autonomous refresher schools that may include half-board and boarding school. The annexed classes and the autonomous schools are included among the public primary schools. All institutions linked to an audience of students with a specific disability: blind, deaf.

**Integrated pupils** must accept the norms of the dominant group. The posture of the specialized teacher at the time of integration is part of the activism within the institution, seeking to convince his colleagues to welcome in their class students with problems or disabilities.

> Decree of June 15, 1987. CAAPSAIS: Certificate of Aptitude for Specialized Pedagogical Actions of Adaptation and School Integration to certify the qualification of teachers to perform their duties in classes, institutions or services for children and adolescents in difficulty disabled or sick, with a view to their adaptation or integration into school. Open to public school teachers and teachers in private educational institutions.

> February 10, 2004, the Certificate of Professional Aptitude for Specialized Aids, Adapted Courses and Schooling for Students with Disabilities (CAPA-SH) or the Complementary Certificate for Adapted Education and Schooling for Students with Disabilities (2CA-SH) "Each rector, in liaison with the inspectors of the academy, directors of the departmental services of the national education (IA-DSDEN), carries out the analysis of the needs for specialized training in his academy, taking into account the schooling needs of students with special educational needs related to school adaptation and integration.

### Inclusion – School System Classes

First Degree (*kindergarten and primary school*).

> February 1987. RASED: Networks of Specialized Aids to Students in Difficulty. Thus, the reception of students with disabilities, in the conditions closest to ordinary schooling, has largely progressed. The effort must be continued so that the educational integration of children with disabilities becomes one of the characteristics of the functioning of our educational system. For kindergarten students "*it is possible to consider part-time integrations, especially for very young children*"[10].

CLAD: Adaptation class. The class of adaptation works in continuity according to the dynamics of a permanent group-class with reduced number (15 pupils maximum); students have the specialized teacher for essential referent even if a decompartmentalization for a limited time puts them in contact with another class, another master. They do not stay there for more than a year.

CLIS: Localized class for school integration is a class of the school and its integrative project is enrolled in the school project. Its mission is to accommodate, in certain elementary or exceptionally nursery schools, pupils with disabilities in order to enable them to complete a part of a regular school curriculum. "*Every pupil enrolled in CLIS must be able to benefit from integration time in ordinary classes*".

### Framework laws on disability

> Law n° 75-534 of 30 June 1975 Disability Orientation Act. The guarantee of a minimum of resources, the social integration and the access to the sports and the leisure activities of the minor. The access of minors and adults with disabilities to institutions open to the general population and their maintenance in an ordinary framework of work and life.

> Law of 11 February 2005 on equal rights and opportunities, participation and citizenship of people with disabilities.
"*A disability within the meaning of this Act is any limitation on the activity or restriction of participation in society suffered by a person in his or her environment because of a substantial, permanent or permanent impairment of one or more functions physical, sensory, mental, cognitive or psychic, of a polyhandicap or a disabling medical condition*".
> Law n ° 2005-380 of April 23, 2005 of orientation and program for the future of the school.
Establish the principle of the right to schooling for any young person with a disability at the nearest school. The personalized schooling project (PPS) is a written act that serves to define the special needs of a child with a disability during his schooling.

### Inclusive School

> The law n ° 2013-595 of 8 July 2013 of orientation and programming for the refoundation of the school of the Republic introduced in the code of education the concept of inclusive school and engages all the actors in a new conception of the schooling of students with disabilities. A personalized educational success program (PPRE). setting up a support system the council of the teachers in the first degree or the class council presided over by the head of the establishment. Appropriate accommodations are provided for intellectually precocious students. Compulsory schooling must at least guarantee each pupil the means necessary for the acquisition of a common core consisting of a body of knowledge and skills.

The posture of the specialized teacher at the time of integration is part of the activism within the institution, seeking to convince his colleagues to welcome in their class students with problems or disabilities. This integration into the classrooms could be experienced by the group of students as an intrusion, accentuating the stigmatization. This integration, because of its impermanence, could insecure both the specialized teacher, both the family and the pupil, the latter always having to prove himself to be maintained, accepted on indicators whose border is not always very between the explicit and the implicit.

Accessibility is the responsibility of those in the education system whose role is to transform teaching frameworks and modalities so that they can respond in a way that is responsive to the needs of the diversity of learners.

Inclusive Education Ambition isn't meant to meet the needs of a vulnerable minority in ordinary situations. It is concretized by the profound transformation of the

functioning of ordinary schools to make them accessible, permanently and not only temporarily, to all students.

Since the implementation of the 2005 law, the number of students with disabilities has increased from 118,000 to 340,000. The number of students accompanied has increased from 26,000 in 2005 to 166,000 in September 2018. For two years, the budget dedicated to the education of students with disabilities has increased by 25%, amounting today to 2.4 billion euros. For an inclusive school[11]. Challenges of inclusive éducation today are articulation, coherence and cohesion.

## Impact

With the situation of "Covid 19", we were forced not to be able to set up the Focus group scheduled for March. We bounced back by programming on July 6, 2020, a new focus group to identify the resources that teachers were able to implement online to support students with special educational needs. To understand and identify the tools, the skills implemented by teachers in the face of this unprecedented situation. Schools were closed from 17 March to 11 May, with a gradual return of pupils to school with extremely heavy sanitary conditions. Many families preferred to pursue distance education with their children. We wanted to go back to our original research purpose by trying to understand what they could understand about the learning context at home and with distance school.

Background: The team of professionals at Notre-Dame de la source school has had an unprecedented experience of implementing pedagogical continuity. Overnight, we had to leave the school and classroom space and provide distance learning. Then, after two months, a first (partial) return of the students took place one month before the end of the school year.

As part of research on identifying early difficulties, research teachers offer training related to the analysis of practices on this experience and to open up a questioning. How have you managed in such circumstances to mobilize tools, resources, to reach your students and their families? What conclusions do you draw from this? How was the collective built on both the students' side and your team's side? Does this exceptional work experience invite you to see the class, the apprenticeships, the parents, the students from another angle, another angle? Strengths, opportunities, threats, limits of an experience lived yesterday and that to come?

During the Focus Group, organized the 6TH July 2020, we exchanged with kindergarten teachers on pedagogical continuity, the pedagogical differentiation that

each one was able to implement in such a particular situation, that linked to the national confinement put in place from March 16 to May 16, 2020. Each of them, was able to tell how in such an unprecedented situation, she was able to reach the parents of children with special educational needs. An educational proximity reinforced by the digital tools implemented. Listening, increased availability for each child. Parents and teachers were thus able to come together to share the child's academic and behavioural difficulties.
The objectives of this focus group were:

- valuing the professional gestures developed during the period of confinement and the first phase of deconfinement;
- strengthen the collective dimension of the professionals of the notre-dame de la source school;
- reflect on the teaching profession and its different facets;
- take the time to expose the feelings of this experience, situate, characterize the different geographical spaces: the school, the classroom, the places of life/work (teachers, students) and identify the relationships they maintain between them;
- identify their institutional dimension;
- identify the tools and practices that have enabled educational continuity;
- name the obstacles and how they may or may not have been overcome;
- ask what can be transferred to a practice in the present.

Photo by Gabe Pierce, Unsplash

## 4.3 Specific goals in the staff of Notre Dame de la Source

It seems important to us in the context of the research conducted within the educational team of the School Notre Dame de la source to be able to understand, the missions of the people who accompany alongside the teachers the students with special educational needs. In the school, we count 6 ASEM, 3 AESH and a specialized teacher. The following argument helps to understand the missions of these different professionals. From our point of view, we cannot undertake research on identifying students' learning difficulties without taking into account the words and missions of these different actors. We have undertaken a real collaborative research, involving researchers, trainers, teachers, head of educational staff and staff of the aid network. Some focus groups have allowed us to involve all of these actors and to have a cross-vision of inclusive education.
Accompanying students with disabilities, AESH[12] should enable the student to acquire and strengthen his autonomy in learning at school. AESH is recruited under a public law contract by the Ministry of National Education.

Main missions of the accompanying students with disabilities (AESH) and the social life assistant (AVS). **AESH and AVS** accompany one or more students with disabilities (young children, children, adolescents and young adults), in accordance with the personalized schooling project. There are three types of accompaniment. AESH having a collective function (AESH-co): helping a school or school team, integrating several young people with disabilities as part of a collective scheme such as a local school inclusion unit (ULIS). AESH-i or AVS with an individual function: assistance in the individualised reception and inclusion of students with disabilities for whom this assistance has been recognized as necessary by the Departmental Home for Persons with Disabilities. AESH having a shared support function (AESH-M): responding to the support needs of students who do not require sustained and continuous attention, helps several students with disabilities simultaneously.

Early childhood facilities, educational and training institutions (schools, colleges and special education institutions) or alternating institutions, places of cultural, sports, artistic and leisure activities, places of internships. Localized Units for School Inclusion (Ulis), Collective reception facilities for the schooling of students with disabilities in the first and second levels. Private education institutions under contract.

AESH and AVS, Accompanying young people in daily acts. Ensure safety and comfort: observe and transmit tell-tale signs of a health problem, ensure safety

and comfort conditions are met. Help with essential life's actions (helping to lift and lie down, dress up and undress, toilet and hygiene care, help with eating, ensure that the biological rhythm is respected). *Promoting mobility*: helping to install the young person in places of life, facilitating travel. *Supporting young people in accessing learning activities*. Stimulating the young person's sensory, motor and intellectual activities. Use professionally-designed and adapted materials for access to learning activities, such as structuring in space and time. Facilitate the young person's expression, help him to communicate. Recall the rules of activity in the places of life considered. Contribute to the adjustment of the learning situation in relation to the professional, the parent or the young adult major by identifying the skills, resources, difficulties of the young person. Support the young person in understanding and applying the instructions to promote the activity carried out by the professional, family or young adult. Assisting the young person in the writing activity. Apply the guidelines provided by the regulations relating to the arrangement of exam or competition test conditions and in assessment situations, where the presence of a third party is required. *Accompanying young people in social and relational activities*. Participate in the implementation of the welcome by promoting the confidence of the young person and the environment. Promoting communication and interactions between young people and their environment. Raising awareness of the youth's environment with disability and preventing situations of crisis, isolation or conflict. Encourage the youth to participate in activities planned in all places of life considered. To help define the scope of activities tailored to the young person's abilities, desires and needs. In this context, offer the young person an activity and implement it with him or her. *Participation in the implementation and follow-up of the personalised youth compensation plan*. Participate in meetings to implement or regulate the personalized compensation plan (schooling monitoring teams, etc.). Participate in meetings with family and professional teams. Contribute to liaison with other stakeholders. Contact family and relevant professionals. Write reports of his work. Organize your intervention according to the objectives set out in the personalized compensation plan. Adjust their intervention according to the young person's disability, his abilities and difficulties, his tastes and habits, and the changes observed.

AESH and AVS, *skills related to, the knowledge of the young person, the disabled, the actors and public policy*: Know how places of life work, including the school, understand the place, the role of the family, know the public policies of disability, knowing and taking into account the developmental stages of the

young person, being able to take into account the cultural identity, lifestyle, experience and history of the young person and his family; *related to gestures and postures to establish a relationship of trust with the young person that promotes their autonomy*: Consider the needs of the young person (being able to build a relationship with them, identify their needs and respect their biological rhythm (sleep, meals), take into account changes in their behaviour (inhibition, aggression, etc.).

Mobilizing the young person and his potential; *related to gestures and postures that facilitate access to learning and social participation:* To be able to encourage participation, to recall the social norms and codes that allow interactions within a group, to help the young person to face the eyes of others, to raise awareness of disability, to propose and implement activities (social and relational life) adapted. Facilitating access to learning: understanding and understanding the pedagogical intent of the teacher or professional in charge of the learning activity, understanding learning methods and materials. *Skills related to gestures and postures to carry out the acts of daily life*: Mobility and physical installation, essential acts. Comfort and safety: know how to help with the layout of the space, identifying risky situations, preventing domestic accidents, daily life, etc., being able to apply hygiene and safety protocols, knowing how to use the techniques and equipment appropriate to the young person's situation. State of health: being able to help with medication in accordance with the medical prescription, knowing how to react to emergency situations. *Skills related to professional positioning and respect for the intervention framework*: To be able to give meaning to one's activity in the service of the young person's autonomy, to recognize the other of equal human value. Know the limits of his intervention and know how to appeal to competent professionals. Know how to show professional distance (taking a step back) and professional discretion. Respect for the privacy of the young person and his family, including in professional exchanges. *Skills related to professional positioning in exchanges and communication:* To be able to establish a quality relationship with the family, knowing how to share your knowledge, skills, and experience with your professional environment, to be able to measure the contributions, the effects of activities and to account for them, to be able to adjust your practice with that of other stakeholders, depending on the situation, know how to manage your time and organize your action, know how to maintain and update your professional culture and knowledge.

**ASEM or ATSEM**[13], support the teacher in his mission and accompany the children in the acquisition of autonomy. Specialized territorial officers in kindergartens, more commonly known as ATSEM, work, as their employment framework indicates, in preschools. Placed under the functional authority of the headmaster of the school for the organization of their daily work, these officers report to the municipal staff and therefore to the territorial civil service. On a daily basis, they provide technical and educational assistance to the teacher with whom they work closely. *Ensuring the care and safety of "little ones". "True right-hand man" of the teacher, the ATSEM prepares the children's snack, takes care of their hygiene (hand washing, dressing and undressing, comings/comings to the toilets) as well as the maintenance of the equipment and premises... Part of their job is to provide logistics and care for children aged 2 to 6. "My mission is very versatile. When I arrive, I prepare the morning snack and the necessary equipment for the morning workshops. To do that, I build on the program that was developed upstream with the teacher. With experience, everything is well-established and follows very quickly. Before the students came, everything was reviewed: each ATSEM prepared its class, the toilets are cleaned and disinfected. The team is also vigilant to the good performance of the premises and reports any malfunctions that could affect the safety of children".* When the doors open, everything is operational to accommodate the children in optimal conditions of safety and hygiene. When welcoming children, the ATSEM, in conjunction with the teacher, provides, if necessary, an information relay with parents or extracurricular facilities. *"My role is to help children undress, put on their slippers... I invite them to settle in the classroom and take ownership of the various games. For some, separation with parents is sometimes more complicated..., I'm also there to help them "get through this" course, despite the tears. As I deal with small sections, this is always the case in the early days".* Support the teacher in the pedagogical activities.

ATSEM's business has changed a lot in recent years. Increasingly involved in the school's educational program, this early childhood professional is actively involved in the activities alongside the teachers. «*The morning is dedicated to educational and motor activities. My role as ATSEM is to intervene on the logistics of everyday life while participating and supporting children in their activities. Bobos at recess, paint accident on clothes, runny nose, small household, installation of the motor room, supervision of children and accompaniment in their activities of painting, cutting and playdough, setting up cooking workshops for birthday cakes, accompaniment for the realization of the educational garden ... my mission is very heterogeneous!*».

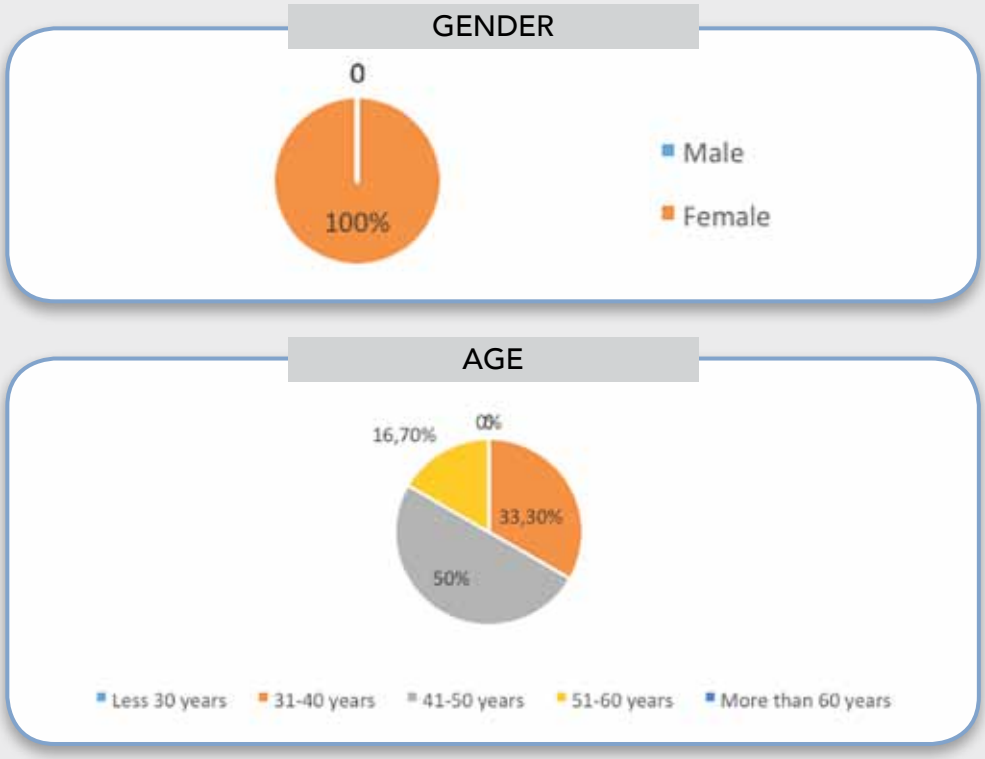
ATSEM skills are, know the needs of children from the age of 2, to accompany the child in his schooling and self-reliance, enforce the rules of hygiene and safety in the community, to ensure the safety of children throughout their care, prepare the teaching materials in connection with the teacher, participate/facilitate activities with children, manage educational materials and stock of cleaning products, carry out the maintenance of the premises and the teaching materials, work in addition to extracurricular times (canteen, school transport, day-care, etc.), enjoying the children's contact, be patient and versatile, know how to adapt and work as a team.

**Specialist Teachers**[14], have two distinct missions: Preventing learning and comprehension difficulties, preventing difficulties in adapting to school requirements. They practice in Razed and schools of the district. The unique body of psychologists of the National Education was created for the beginning of 2017. Offering two specialties, it brings together the professions of school psychologist in the first degree and guidance counsellor-psychologist and director of information and orientation centre in the second degree. Teach students first and fundamental learning (reading, writing, etc.) or general education subjects (French, mathematics, history, geography, etc.) according to national education programs. Can administer a first-degree facility.

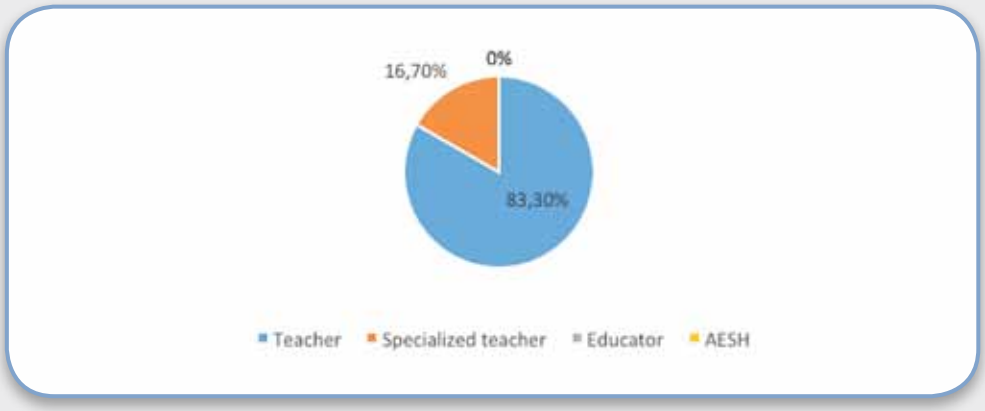
*Their Basic Skills – Knowledge are*: Set a learning goal and set the schedule of educational activities Sc Pedagogical Techniques – Monitor punctuality, student attendance at classes, check vouchers and inform parents – Office tools – Collect information and prepare the lesson in session (preparation sheet, learning method) – National Education Program – Check a class – Steps in child development – Organize the classroom space – Conflict prevention and management techniques – Monitor students during interclasses, extracurricular activities, boarding school and meals – Child Psychology – Greeting students when they arrive in class – Group animation techniques – Develop the pedagogical approach and teach basic knowledge (French, mathematics, science) – Adapting the course of learning according to students' difficulties – Measuring progress in student learning – Inform families, teaching teams about how the child is assessed, outcomes, difficulties or behaviours – Processing information (collecting, classifying and updating). They also develop specific Skills. They know-how to intervening with audiences with serious academic difficulties – Psychiatric pathologies – Intervening with people with disabilities – Braille – Intervening with children with disabilities – Sign language – Teaching a discipline to a group of people.

## 4.4 Quantitative and qualitative results of the research at the end of the first year

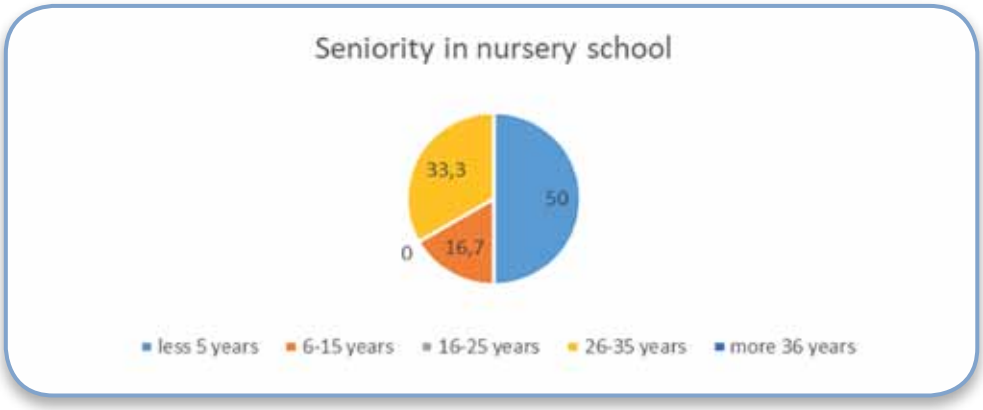
POPULATION SURVEYED



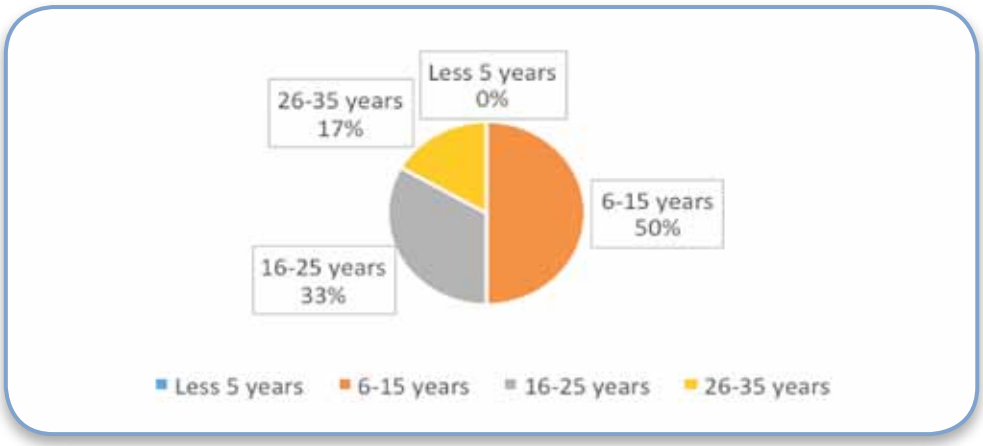

Teachers Qualification in our kindergarten.



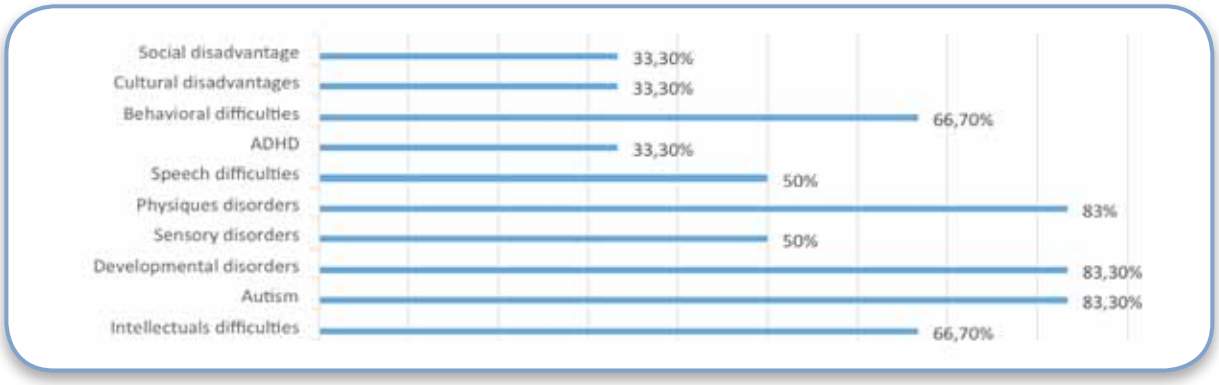
50% of our sample has been teaching in kindergarten for less than 5 years.




The entire population surveyed in the questionnaire has been working with children with disabilities or special educational needs for at least 6 years.




They have all worked with children with the various disorders.




The average number of students per class is around 30.
In kindergarten classes, children are between 3 and 5 years old.
All have special educational needs students in their classrooms, from 1 to 3/class.
75% of them have AESH in class for 5 to 8 hours/week (27 hours/week/Time school).

## Survey to stakeholders (Teachers, Headmasters, other stakeholders)

Two tools of research methodology were implemented by UCO research teachers in this research on the identification of learning difficulties in pre-school, survey and focus group.
The main interest of the survey is to gather a large amount of information, both factual and subjective, from a significant number of individuals – the representativeness of this sample allowing inference to infer the study population as a whole, the results obtained from the respondents. The aim of such surveys may be to measure the frequency of characteristics (situations, behaviours, opinions or attitudes, etc.) in a given population, but in the humanities and social sciences they are mainly aimed at analysing the relationships between these characteristics. Two open, closed, multiple choice surveys were completed by UCO Research teachers during this first phase of research scheduled for September 2019 to July 2020.

**The first survey** was carried out and initiated by the French team in order to organize and structure the first focus groups launched from the launch of the research project at the end of September 2019. The questions were addressed in paper format to all teachers in the school in three cycles 1, 2 and 3. Our first goal was to be able to identify the context in which the teachers of Notre Dame de la Source School work on a daily basis. Understand what makes their profession real in terms of inclusive education: the number of pupils with special educational needs (BEP) in their respective classrooms, identify what they call behind the BEP, identify what they put to be able to meet these needs, to understand their own training needs on inclusive pedagogy, whether or not they have the presence of a AESH or ASEM resources solutions to meet the needs of pupils, and finally, to identify through keywords what defines inclusive education according to these professionals whose seniority is between 3 and more than 20 years.

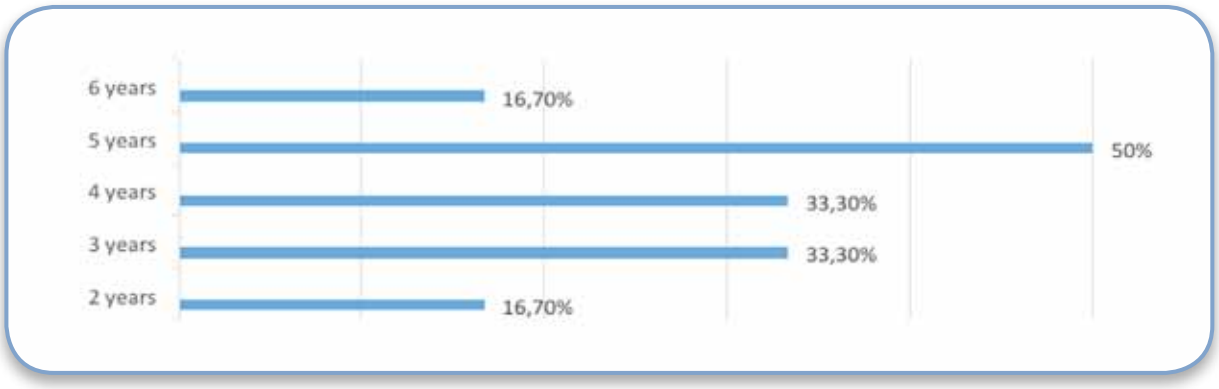
When asked about the words that they think define inclusive education, they were able to suggest: Law – Differentiation – Needs – Diversity – Specials needs – Reception – Support – Pace – Integration – Difference – Individualized project – Partnership – Adaptation – School – Recognition. At what age should the detection of learning difficulties be done? The detection of learning difficulties is made at the age of 4, at the end of the first year of kindergarten. Note that for 33.33% of them, the latter should be done when entering kindergarten, at 3 years old to: Allow needs to be taken into account before difficulties set in, give families time to move forward, sometimes to mourn the "ideal" child. Allow families to react as quickly as possible, given the lists waiting with professionals, speech

therapists, child psychiatrist. Allow time to observe a student at different times, give him time to evolve but without blocking him in his development. Allow the acceptance of difficulties and their early management in the child's development. Be able to work with specialists, dialogue with parents will be easier. Help meet the needs of children as early as possible.

Without prior work, teachers were able to provide a very accurate definition of inclusive education through the first survey. The goals of inclusive education are well-targeted, identified. The stakes in terms of changing structures and evaluating practices are raised. What is part of the educational relationship is supported by the value that refers to their own conception of teaching. We can even say that we find the orientations of Catholic Education. The complementarity found in the definition of inclusive education is part of a major concern raised by the head of the school. The ideal is made but the resources both didactic and pedagogical are lacking to structure practices related to accessibility, which leads to a certain destabilization and which can lead them to question the validity of their actions professionals. Professionals need benchmarks to: acquire an observation methodology, identify the specific needs of children, analyse them, implement concrete adaptations in the classroom. This first survey confirms us in the interest of collaborative research on the issues, the modalities that can take an inclusive pedagogy today in French Kindergarten.

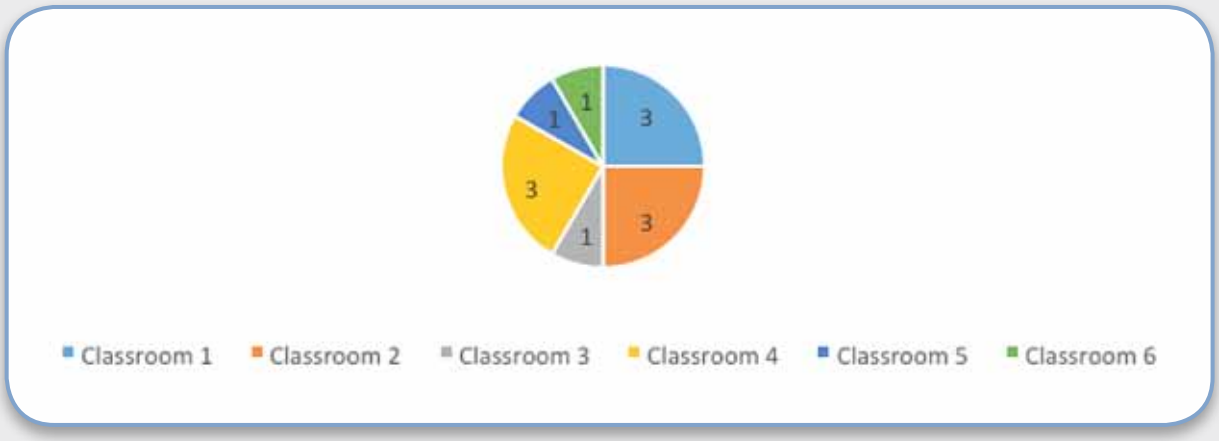
**A second survey** was produced with all research partners during the 1st international meeting in Madrid in October 2019. This survey was then translated into French and send by email to all teachers of cycle 1, of school Notre Dame de la Source, who were invited to inform him by December 4th 2019. In France, pupils are obliged to come in a kindergarten at 3 years old but some of them could arrived at two and half.

Age of pupils in the classroom at the Notre Dame de la Source kindergarten



In France, the number of children in kindergarten classes can reach the figure of 28 to 32 students, which is precisely the case for the classes of our Notre Dame de la Source school. In view of this large number of students, we wanted to question our teachers on the number of students with special educational needs that they could identify in 2019/2020, and on the human frameworks on which they could or not rely in their class.

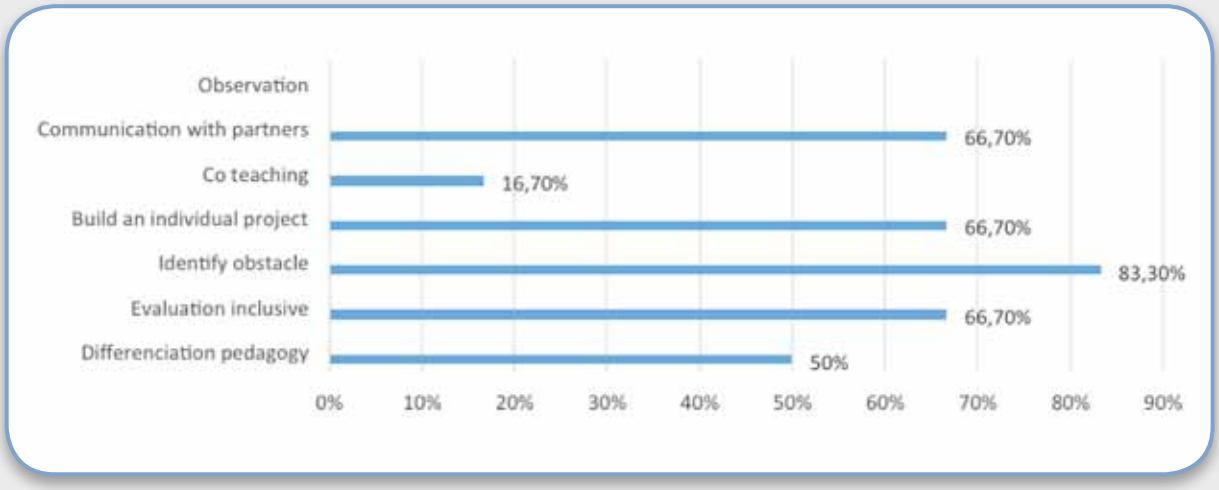
Numbers of pupils with disabilities




66.7% of teachers have someone to help them in their classroom, with an average of 11 hours of presence in the class per week (26 hours).

**The second part of the survey**, we ask them about their training, that this research programm could propose to them.

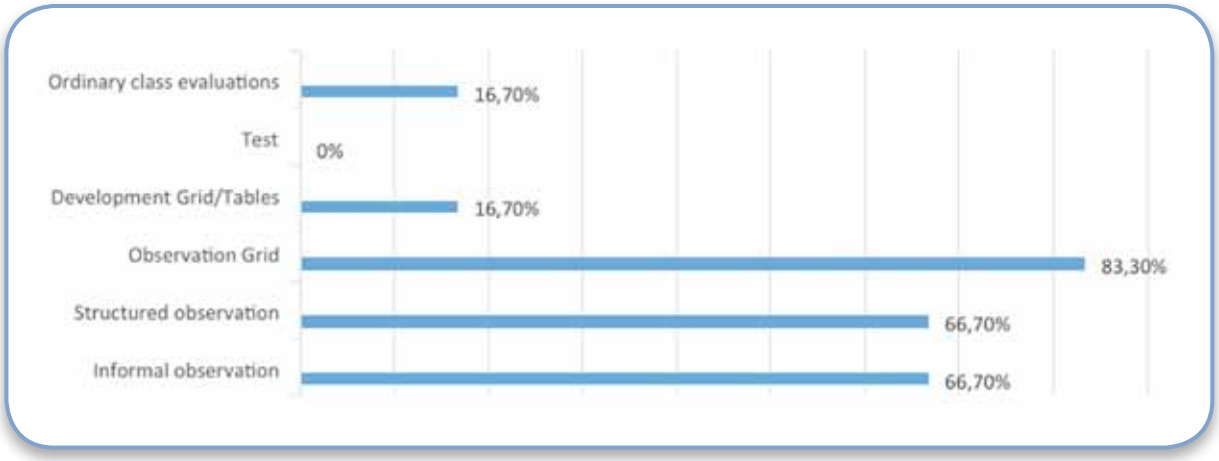
Subjects that you would like to be trained



100% of our teachers would like these training times to be offered by specialized trainers, and 66,7% by specialized teachers.

**The third part of the survey** asks teachers about the tools that they used. Actually, 100 % of their teachers used different tools to observe the difficulties of pupils.

Tools




For teachers, these tools are 100% partially effective. At 83.3%, structured observation remains the ideal tool for these professionals. Structured observation would be more reliable than informal observation. It would take into account the overall development of the child.

## Focus Groups and Interviews

5 Focus groups were scheduled and performed from September 2019 to April 2020.

The sound and video recordings were made and transcribed for each focus group. We discussed about the status of inclusive education practices in cycles 1,2 and 3 and we identifyed the difficulties faced by the teachers.

> **During the 1st focus group**, through the words of the teachers of cycle 1, of the kindergarten, we identify the need to provide specific answers to students with special educational needs while maintaining the collective of the class. There is a need to optimize professional gestures in the field of observation, identification and communication towards families. There are also ethical, ethical, ethical and ethical questions about the teacher's missions in communicating to parents, to the student (Avoiding stigma - Prudence in the diagnosis made or to be asked).The issue of the cycle 2 program is more prominent. It manifests itself in the words by the concern of the teachers to adapt, to individualize the learnings. However, respect for the rhythm (moving from a kindergarten class to a specific environment) remains a concern for some of them. Teachers who have taught in kindergarten are less disadvantageous (space planning, variation in forms of learning according to student needs (movement, class flexibility). They list practices that could be differentiating, but do they allow themselves to go down that road. There is a greater emphasis on primary school codes that are in line with standards. Are these standards questioned by teachers? It seems so, when they raise the question of adaptations to be implemented. They indicate that their postures must change, as if flashbacks are not possible, and yet they name the students' lacks in relation to a standard, class profile. In practical terms, the large number of students in a classroom is a barrier to being able to optimize the adaptations implemented for students with special educational needs. In cycle 3, teachers have students who are a little more mature, on whom one looks at evaluators, with a tendency to discriminate categorization. This applies not only to students but also to families. Faced with these attempts at categorization, they defend the right to difference. There is the need to equip students before entering college, which leads them to be more interventionist with the various partners (family, care). The gap with the standard is widening. Teachers then ask themselves the question of the definition of academic success and the meaning of the school (Being well, flourishing there). The issue of the rupture between primary school and college is anxiety-inducing for teachers, it is feared.

> **The second focus group** was organized with the teachers from Cycle 1 and the specialized teacher. They will be partly devoted to the case study, that of a certain T for which the entire teaching team will take stock of its academic and personal background. T is a child, very premature, who has had a medical follow-up, to which the parents made the choice at 5 years old, to put an end. He had lung problems when he entered school. A lag compared to other children is spotted as soon as he arrives at school on fine motor skills. He has not entered his profession as a student, he is not mobilized by school life. At 5 years old (GS), he has the behavior of a child of late PS (3 years). He was referred by the school to a psychomotrician from ps and MS. T does not feel concerned when the teacher passes the instructions. This raises several questions on the part of The Teachers of Cycle 1. When do we become alert to parents? What is their place in this identification of difficulties? How can we free the floor with the parents, who are afraid? How can we help them spot the lag? How can we have a accuracy in our identification to help us communicate with them? How do we get parents to be in demand for the school, the teacher? The principal will then specify that they have graduated the care, a first appointment with the teacher, then a second with the teacher and the teacher, and finally an appointment with the teacher and the headteacher. How do I define the aid network project as a team? Do we have benchmarks to identify what is normal or pathological? To whom to direct the observations made? How do you enter through the skill grids to be the most factual about the family? Identify the framework: the world of the school, the school standard, the school form, the common base, the stages.

> **The third focus group** was organized with teachers, specialized teacher, AESH, ASEM. The questions were: What is specific to your job? What do you want to know and learn how to do better practice your profession? How would you like your job to evolve? ASEM, AESH participated well in the focus group. They define their job around the keywords: for ASEM: accompanying, learning, disability; for AESH: Adaptation, preparation, accompaniment; for teachers: adapt, accompany, evaluate. All these missions are complementary and are at the service of helping the child. What professional gestures are put forward here? What values? Expectations on the side of maternal helpers: they express the desire to learn to better identify, better react, locate, understand the needs of children. Have more interactions with team members about children's particular situations. For the AESH, they express the desire to learn to build tools, to better know the troubles in order to better respond to them. For teachers: being accompanied, having a follow-up, taking the time to train (the role of different actors in the care

of children with special educational needs) identify needs, be able to observe and analyse accurately, work communication with families. Families need to be equipped to accompany children. Working with family communication tools. How can the child's strengths be highlighted with families and partners? The various interlocutors have difficulty situating their role. The teachers were able to express the existence of observation grids that could be used by ASEM. They believe that they should be rehabilitated if necessary. Adapting tools in particular contexts in the classroom is not easy, especially when the diagnosis is not always made when the child is being received. Finally, it is mentioned, the pooling of skills, the complementarity of missions, cooperation, collaboration in the construction of tools.

> **The fourth focus group** is based on a case study proposed by teachers in Cycles 2 and 3. The aim is to identify the professional actions mobilized through a particular situation. A, is a child who in the first year of cycle 2 (6 years) is not concentrated, disturbs his/her neighbours, always in the movement, without wanting to work. A very difficult passage to writing. An entry into reading in January. Left in the 2nd year of cycle 2 with difficulties. His parents were satisfied because "things" had been proposed by the school. In the second year, the transition to writing is becoming more and more difficult. The teacher makes adjustments to enable her to better manage her affairs. He compils apprenticeships, he is helped in parallel by his parents. During an appointment with the parents, they take stock of the facts, they then become aware of the difficulties of their son, this situation will be very difficult for them. A first appointment with a psychomotrician had been proposed the previous year. A time in the pedagogical team is organized within the school with the participation of the parents. He does not enter the school framework, the rules are difficult for him. Lack of attention more and more marked. A passage to the written word that is not done or so really any way. Parents have a neuropsychiatrist perform a check-up, which sends them to other professionals. In the fifth grade (9 years), he is in his age class, but he disturbs the whole group, the teacher proposes the activities, he follows or not. She can no longer wait for it all the time, it slows down the group that is detaching more and more. It reacts with disobedience towards the adult. Presure on the family is growing. The child is suffering from the adult. The child expresses frustration with anger and violence against the group. Parents go home to school to try to make up for it. A check-up in a psychomotrician indicates attentional disorders. The teaching team is very concerned about its adaptation to the college. A resort question from this focus group, how can we work with the tools to better communicate with the family? How do you include the child's support

points? How can I listen to the student without his parents in the construction of this tool? Could the tool provide a timeline? Should we think of two tools, one for the team, one for families? A reflection on nature, form, objectives, the tools they use. What the parents look at is the school, its requirements, its expectations (// school standards).

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# Spain

5

## 5.1 Introduction

### Kindergarten education in Spain

At present, the compulsory education system in Spain is structured in three stages: Primary Education (6-12 years), Secondary Education (12-16 years) and Baccalaureate (16-18 years).

Infant Education is non-compulsory and is structured in two educational cycles: from 0 to 3 years of age (first cycle, taught in nursery schools or children's homes) and from 3 to 6 years of age (second cycle, taught in educational centres).

Families can choose between three types of Children's Schools or Educational Centres: public, subsidised and private. The second cycle of nursery education, which is the object of our study, is free for public and subsidised centres (LOE 2/2006, of 3 May). Although there may be variations in the different Autonomous Communities of Spain, in the Comunidad de Madrid the ratios that are usually established are: students under 1 year old: 8 children per classroom; between 1 and 2 years old: 10-14 children per classroom; between 2 and 3 years old: 16-20 children per classroom; second cycle: maximum 25 students per classroom in public centres.

With respect to the methodology in the two cycles, work is done through experiences, activities and games that allow the development of different abilities; in addition to self-esteem and socialization. For this purpose, Infant Education considers the child as a being with special and proper characteristics in a particular stage of development following two stages: the sensorimotor stage from 0 to 2 years old and the preoperational stage (2-6/7 years old) (Gutiérrez y Vila, 2015). To be a teacher at this stage, one must have the qualification of Infant Education Teacher or -in the first cycle- Higher Technician in Infant Education -only in the first cycle-.

According to current regulations, the purpose of this stage is to promote the physical, intellectual, social, affective and personal development of children and to compensate for any inequalities that may exist. The organization, contents, evaluation and other normative data collected at national level can be consulted in Order ECI/3960/2007, of 19 December, which establishes the curriculum and regulates the organization of Early Childhood Education. In this way, the knowledge, reasoning and being, organize the proposal of conceptual, procedural and attitudinal content for the development of personal and social skills.

In this regard, Real Decreto 1630/06 establishes as its main objective "to achieve the comprehensive and harmonious development of the person at the various levels: physical, motor, emotional, affective, social and cognitive" and to seek the learning that contributes to and makes such development possible, with a significant improvement over the usual conditions of development within the family (Zabalza, 1987).

On the other hand, the various modalities of schooling seek to respond to the different circumstances of each student, in such a way that in all cases the objectives, skills, and goals set for each student can be covered. Thus, we find[15]:

a) ***Ordinary Schools:*** They serve the majority of the school population, all public and subsidized schools being inclusive. In these centers there may be support from Hearing and Language Teachers and Therapeutic Pedagogy, if considered necessary due to the characteristics of the population they serve.

b) ***Preferential schooling centers:*** These are ordinary centers specialised in one of these four diagnoses: Hearing, visual or motor disability and Autism Spectrum Disorder. For this purpose, they have specific resources and generalised support. In addition, the faculty of these Centers receive training in the specific field in which they are preferred.

c) ***Special education units:*** These are classrooms offered in ordinary centers and are aimed at students whose needs cannot be covered by ordinary classrooms. These students live together with the rest of the children of the ordinary center in some activities and school moments, carrying out another part of their curriculum in special classrooms; in which the organisational aspects are personalised to adapt to the competences and needs of each one of them.

d) ***Special education centers:*** These are attended by students who, due to the severity of their condition and the fact that they remain in the school, cannot be adequately attended in any of the aforementioned schooling modalities. These students need widespread support and significant adaptations because of their severe permanent disability

e) ***Combined schooling:*** In this modality, students attend a Special Education Center during the week and a regular Center during the rest of the week, and their stay is organised according to their timetable and individual needs.

In order to decide on the type of center and the modality of schooling for students with Special Educational Needs (SEN), it is necessary to carry out an individual assessment that ends with the schooling report, which includes the entire process and the measures to be adopted.
The parents must sign the report as proof of their agreement. This document is re-evaluated every year to update the evolution and support needs. At present, it is intended that the majority of early childhood education pupils with special educational needs should attend an inclusive mainstream school.

## The "normotypical" development from 3 to 6 years old

Human beings are social animals (Aronson, 2000), we need a social context where we can grow and develop. In addition, baby hominids are altricial, so they need a long period of development (Rizo, Santoyo & Guevara, 2019).
In this sense, current studies point out the evolutionary feedback between a baby's dependence and the development of human intelligence (Piantadosia and Kidd, 2016, p. 6877). This evidence leads us to reflect on evolutionary interdependence during attachment and on the importance of developmental stimulation through meaningful social contexts.

On the other hand, it is important to remember that new learning and behavior follow an order of dependence, overlapping previous ones (Piaget, 1990, p.316). Therefore, in this stage of development from 3 to 6 years of age, early detection is essential; through the observation of atypical indicators (see section 1.3) that help us to offer the necessary support as soon as possible and thus minimize the expected evolutionary gap.

Below, we present the most relevant typical indicators that we must take into account in the preventive follow-up observation, taking into account four significant areas of development (TABLE 1, TABLE 2, TABLE 3, TABLE 4).

| YEARS | TYPICAL SIGNIFICANT INDICATORS: BASIC PSYCHOLOGICAL PROCESSES AND COGNITIVE SKILLS |
|---|---|
| 3 - 4 | Use of emotional vocabulary<br>They begin to understand the rules<br>Intuitive and egocentric thinking<br>Unable to recognize other points of view<br>Symbolic play skills |
| 4 - 5 | Express emotions and thoughts<br>Trial-error discovery<br>Greater behavioral regulation due to the acquisition of verbal language<br>Acquisition of the theory of mind (intersubjectivity)<br>Sustained care and increasingly focused and selective |
| 5 - 6 | Magic thought<br>Ability to follow group game rules<br>Start of self-regulation<br>Beginning of metacognition<br>Denial acknowledgment |

Source: Own elaboration

TABLE 1. Typical indicators expected in the development of basic psychological processes and cognitive skills

| YEARS | TYPICAL SIGNIFICANT INDICATORS: FINE AND GROSS MOTOR SKILLS |
|---|---|
| 3 - 4 | Learning through body experience<br>Motor game for adaptation to the environment<br>Interpretation of proprioceptive sensations |
| 4 - 5 | Eye-manual coordination: Use of the pencil (spelling / drawing)<br>Movement coordination patterns<br>Basic motor skills (balance) |
| 5 - 6 | Perception of one's own body (body scheme)<br>Physical expression<br>Space-Temporal orientation |

Source: Own elaboration

TABLE 2. Typical indicators expected in the development of fine and gross motor skills

| YEARS | TYPICAL SIGNIFICANT INDICATORS: COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE |
|---|---|
| 3 - 4 | Syntax limited to words<br>Acquisition of manual dominance<br>Understanding of simple instructions |
| 4 - 5 | Complete phonetic acquisition<br>Good phonological awareness<br>Understanding complex instructions |
| 5 - 6 | Pre-reading<br>Issuing 6 to 8 word sentences<br>Control in the drawing of simple lines |

Source: Own elaboration

TABLE 3. Typical indicators expected in communication and language development

| YEARS | TYPICAL SIGNIFICANT INDICATORS: SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL |
|---|---|
| 3 - 4 | Initiation of social interaction with peers (spontaneous play and peer selection)<br>Sense of self (self-esteem with a tendency to be positive)<br>Imitation of adults<br>Little cooperation between equals<br>Emotional instability |
| 4 - 5 | Understanding of social rules and norms<br>Desire to please and collaborate<br>Initiation of responsible behaviour<br>Less self-centered social behavior: are able to ask for forgiveness<br>They look for safety in adults |
| 5 - 6 | Cooperative working skills<br>Competitiveness<br>Start of empathy<br>Search for social recognition<br>Positive self-esteem |

Source: Own elaboration

TABLE 4. Typical indicators expected in social-emotional development

The typical indicators set out above are one of the benchmarks to be used for the pilot study of the development of the European scale of screening, to which this article subscribes.

In section 1.4 of this document, the proposal of the Comunidad de Madrid in Spain is set out, in order to respond to the early attention required by the diversity of the student body in early childhood education.

## Neurodevelopmental disorders and other causes of functional diversity: atypical indicators

We start from the premise of considering as diversity students those with specific educational support needs; that is, those with the following diagnoses or suspected of having them: global developmental delay, communication disorders, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, specific learning disorders, autism spectrum disorder, hearing, visual and/or motor disabilities and high intellectual capacity.

The neurodevelopmental disorders that we can detect or prevent in childhood education are (TABLE 5): intellectual disability, communication disorders, specific learning disorders, autism spectrum disorder and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder. For children under 6 years of age, the DSM-5 classification (APA, 2013) proposes the category of Global Developmental Delay, since intellectual functioning cannot be reliably assessed during the early years of childhood. Therefore, we can only suspect a possible intellectual disability after the age of 6; but we can promote development in early childhood education if we observe atypical indicators. Below, we present possible atypical indicators that can help us to suspect and detect early educational support needs:

| NEURODEVELOPMENTAL DISORDERS | POSSIBLE ATYPICAL INDICATORS 3 TO 5 YEARS |
|---|---|
| Global Developmental Delay (Intellectual Disability) | Limited emotional and behavioral self-regulation<br>Understanding with a need for visual aids<br>Need for support for daily routines and psychomotor skills |
| Communication Disorders | Improper pronunciation of phonemes<br>Incomprehension of simple instructions<br>Limited verbal expression |
| Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder | Self-concept strongly influenced by the social environment<br>External control of your impulsivity<br>Limited capacity to respond to social norms |
| Specific learning disorders | Limitations in fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination<br>Confusion in series and symbolization of simple quantities<br>Confusing decoding |
| Autism Spectrum Disorder | Poor communicative intent and motivation for social interaction<br>Doesn't answer to his name<br>Repetitive and non-functional play<br>Insistence on invariance<br>Difficulty recognizing basic emotions in oneself and others |

TABLE 5. Atypical indicators expected in children with neurodevelopmental disorders

Other causes of functional diversity that we can also observe preventively in children from 3 to 6 years old are (TABLE 6): sensory and motor disabilities, and high intellectual capacities.

| OTHER CAUSES OF FUNCTIONAL DIVERSITY | POSSIBLE ATYPICAL INDICATORS 3 TO 5 YEARS |
|---|---|
| Hearing Disability | Difficulty in locating the sound source<br>Poor sustained attention due to hearing fatigue<br>Appearance of dyslalia |
| Visual Disability | Limitations for calculating the distance between objects<br>Difficulty in discriminating the fundamental colours<br>Shows problem in sorting objects by shape and color |
| Motor Disability | Non-acquisition of laterality<br>Poor visual-motor coordination<br>Poor quality fine motor skills |
| High intellectual capacity | Highly creative<br>Need for intrinsic motivation to respond to tasks<br>Difficulty of social adaptation with peers |

TABLE 6. Expected atypical indicators in children with functional diversity

## Attention to diversity and early attention for students from 0 to 6 years old in the comunidad de Madrid

The presence in the ordinary classroom of children with functional diversity has been an essential challenge to address from the perspective of educational inclusion. However, the term continues to be confusing and for some countries inclusion represents a form of treatment for children with disabilities within the education system; however, international organizations define the term from a much broader perspective (UNESCO, 2005).

> *Inclusive education can be conceived as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increased participation in learning, cultural and community activities and reducing exclusion within and outside the education system. This implies changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies based on a common vision that embraces all school-age children and the belief that it is the responsibility of the regular education system to educate all children. The goal of inclusion is to provide appropriate responses to the broad spectrum of learning needs in both formal and non-formal education settings. More than a marginal issue of how to integrate certain learners into mainstream education, inclusive education represents a perspective that should be used to analyse how to transform education systems and other learning environments in order to respond to the diversity of learners. The purpose of inclusive education is to enable teachers and students to feel comfortable with diversity and to perceive it not as a problem, but as a challenge and an opportunity to enrich the ways of teaching and learning'.*
>
> (UNESCO, 2005, p. 14)

In view of this more globalized and complex perspective, attention to diversity in the classroom must be characterized by seeking ways to respond precisely and personally to all the needs that arise in the process of personal growth of a student; trying innovative methodologies, managing space and time, organizing personal support to optimize performance, experimenting with new forms of evaluation and seeking more effective ways of coordination.

Thus, educational inclusion is one of the principles of Madrid's educational system (Boletín Oficial de la Comunidad de Madrid, 2015).
Therefore, such inclusion is an organizational and curricular characteristic, and one that pays attention to the diversity of capacities, interests, motivations, individual circumstances and socio-cultural contexts.

Accordingly, the Madrid education system contemplates and provides a series of resources and measures in response to its widespread implementation. (Comunidad de Madrid, 2020 ). Attention to diversity is deployed at each educational

stage according to the specifics established in the different curricular objectives of Infant and Primary Education. In these stages, special emphasis will be placed on attention to student diversity, individualized attention, prevention of learning difficulties and the implementation of reinforcement mechanisms as soon as these difficulties are detected.
From this perspective, early care is a service within diversity care; it is aimed at children between the ages of 0 and 6 who have special needs, whether temporary or permanent, arising from deficiencies, developmental disorders or risk of suffering from them (Comunidad de Madrid, 2017). This service is free of charge and consists of a set of interventions designed to promote the optimal development and maximum personal autonomy of minors. Its objective is to minimize and, if necessary, eliminate the effects of an alteration or disability, as well as the appearance of added disabilities, facilitating full family, school and social inclusion and the quality of life of the minor and his/her family.

Children's development is a constructive process in which the role of the child is active. It cannot be forgotten that physical and social stimulation of adults and peers will promote this development.
In the White Paper on Early Care (Early Care Group, 2000), Early Care is defined as the set of interventions, aimed at the child population aged 0-6 years, the family and the environment, which aim to respond as soon as possible to the temporary or permanent needs presented by children with developmental disorders or who are at risk of suffering from them. These interventions, which must consider the whole child, must be planned by a team of interdisciplinary professionals.

The multidisciplinary nature of early care requires that the child's needs be addressed, from a health, educational and social point of view, to help facilitate their integration and improve their quality of life.

The assessment of the need for early care will be carried out by one or more members of the interdisciplinary child assessment teams, made up of a doctor, psychologist and social worker, depending on the needs of the child that are determined by the professionals themselves after the previous analysis of the reports submitted. There are two types of care: treatment or support and follow-up.

Regarding the methodology of the Centers, one of the fundamental pillars is the work with the family as the main environment where the child develops and learns. Another essential resource is the work in coordination with other agents (professionals from the health, social and educational fields) involved in their evolution and that of their families.  To do this, it is necessary to draw up the Indi-

vidual Care Programme (PAI), which is the document that sets out the child's situation, the diagnosis, the objectives to be achieved, the treatments and all the information that the center considers necessary.

The treatments that the Comunidad de Madrid can provide to the child are: stimulation, speech therapy, psychotherapy, psychomotor and physiotherapy. The methodology of the treatments will include individual sessions (in which the family can participate according to technical criteria) and when considered appropriate, group sessions.

Generally speaking, when the end date of the intervention is approaching, the early care center or base center will call the family to inform them of the child's current situation and to advise them, if necessary, of any resources they may need in the future. It will also inform the Early Care Coordination Area of this situation.

## 5.2 Design and methodology

At present, Comillas University and the Salesian Professional Institution (Carabanchel Salesian School) are immersed in the implementation of the European Project ERASMUS+ called MOEC (More Opportunities for Every Child: Early Detection of Child Difficulties in Kindergarten). This project has a group of 20 researchers from Poland, France, Italy and Spain, among whom are teachers from Faculties of Education and Teachers of Early Childhood Education. The main objective of this team is to design an international tool for the early detection of support needs of children from 3 to 6 years old. For this purpose, a qualitative and quantitative study has been carried out to investigate the reality and the reflections of a group of professionals of direct attention of the infantile education stage.

### Initial contextualization questionnaire

An anonymous online questionnaire of 35 closed and open questions has been implemented to collect the opinions and beliefs of different early childhood education professionals; in order to collect data on the possible use of observation tools, on the concept of inclusion and on their training needs.
The sample obtained is 46 participants, mostly women (89%) in an age range of 31-50 years (FIGURE 1).

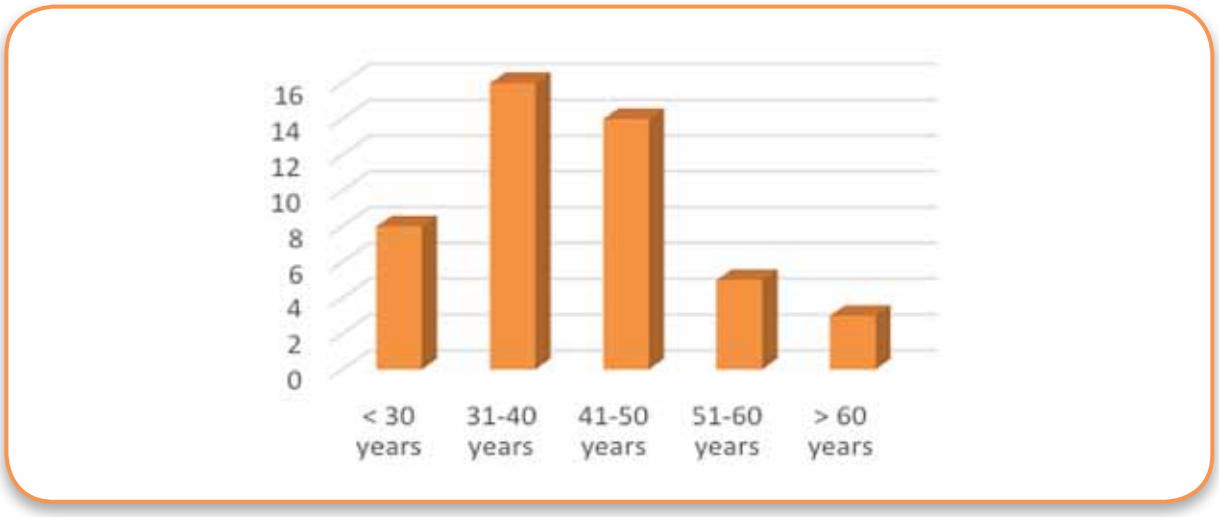



FIGURE 1. Age of participants

The professional team is made up of 7 different professional profiles (FIGURE 2), the most frequent option being an infant education teacher or classroom tutor.

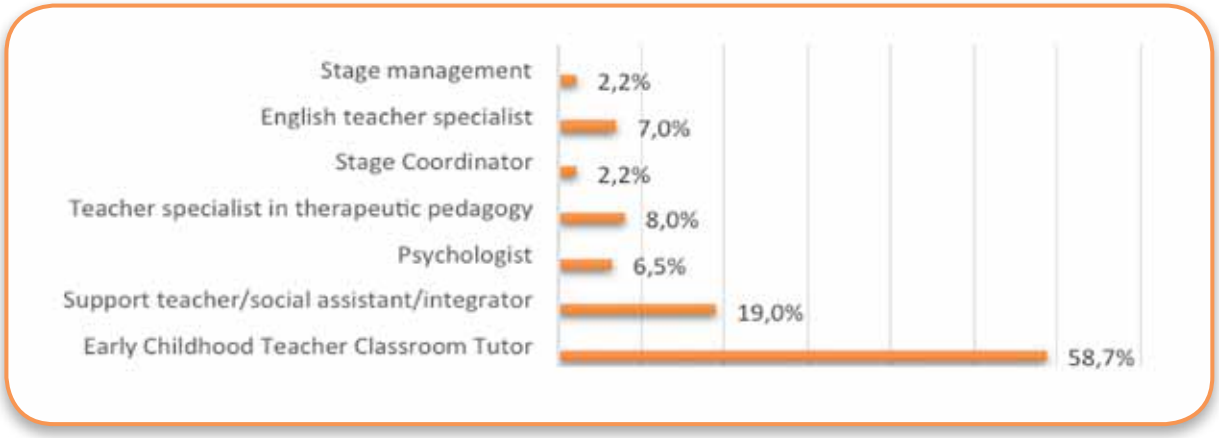



FIGURE 2. Professional profiles of the participants

Participants have an average of more than 10 years of experience in early childhood education (FIGURE 3) and extensive experience accompanying students with specific and special educational support needs (FIGURE 4).


FIGURE 3. Years of experience as a professional in early childhood education


FIGURE 4. Years of experience as a professional accompanying students with specific and special educational support needs

Finally, we present the various academic studies carried of educational support staff for classroom teachers (FIGURE 5).

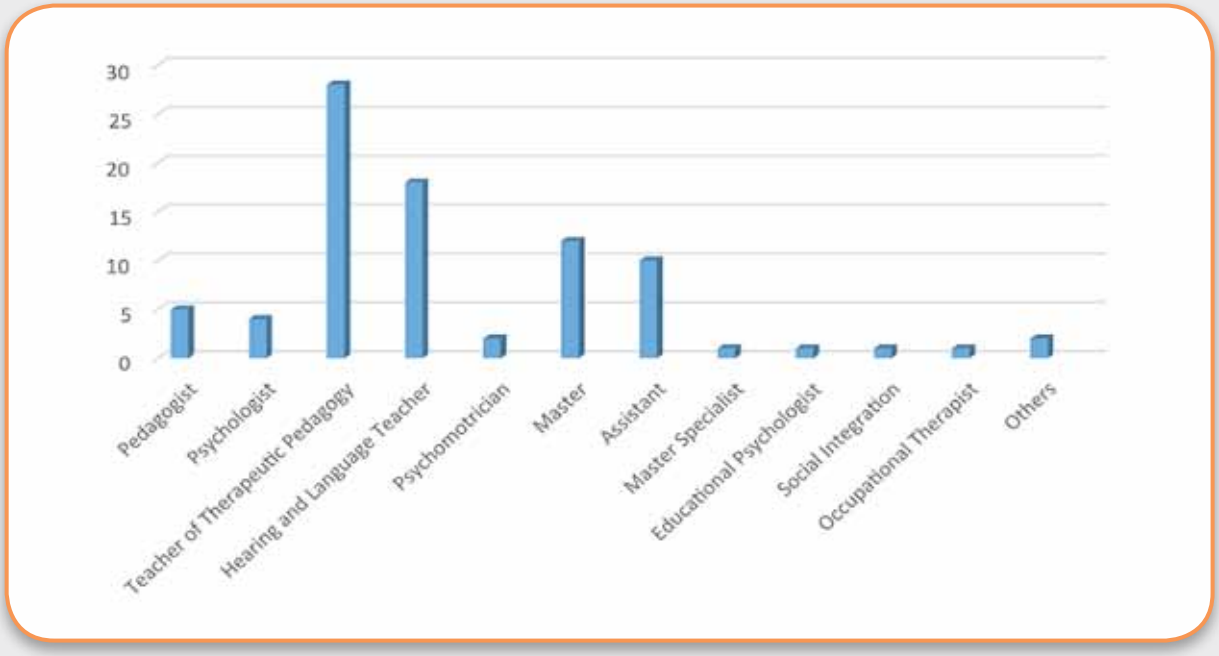



FIGURE 5. Academic studies of educational support staff

## Discussion group

A 1-hour discussion group has been held, carried out telematically (multiple video call). The participants were Early Childhood Education teachers with extensive experience in teaching, in which all are classroom tutors in the different courses that make up the Early Childhood Education Cycle, except for one participant who was a teacher of therapeutic pedagogy (PT).

The participants are of both sexes, aged between 35 and 40. With regard to segmentation, it has not been possible to carry out as they all belong to the same educational center; however, it has been ensured that the participants in the group do not have much prior contact.

Due to the health crisis situation caused by the Covid-19, the discussion group was carried out by video call, using a platform that guaranteed the correct participation of all the participants. The group developed without incidents, with a high level of collaboration and a quality speech that was recorded for later analysis.

The strategic information objectives were four (FIGURE 6), in reference to the early detection of support needs in early childhood education:

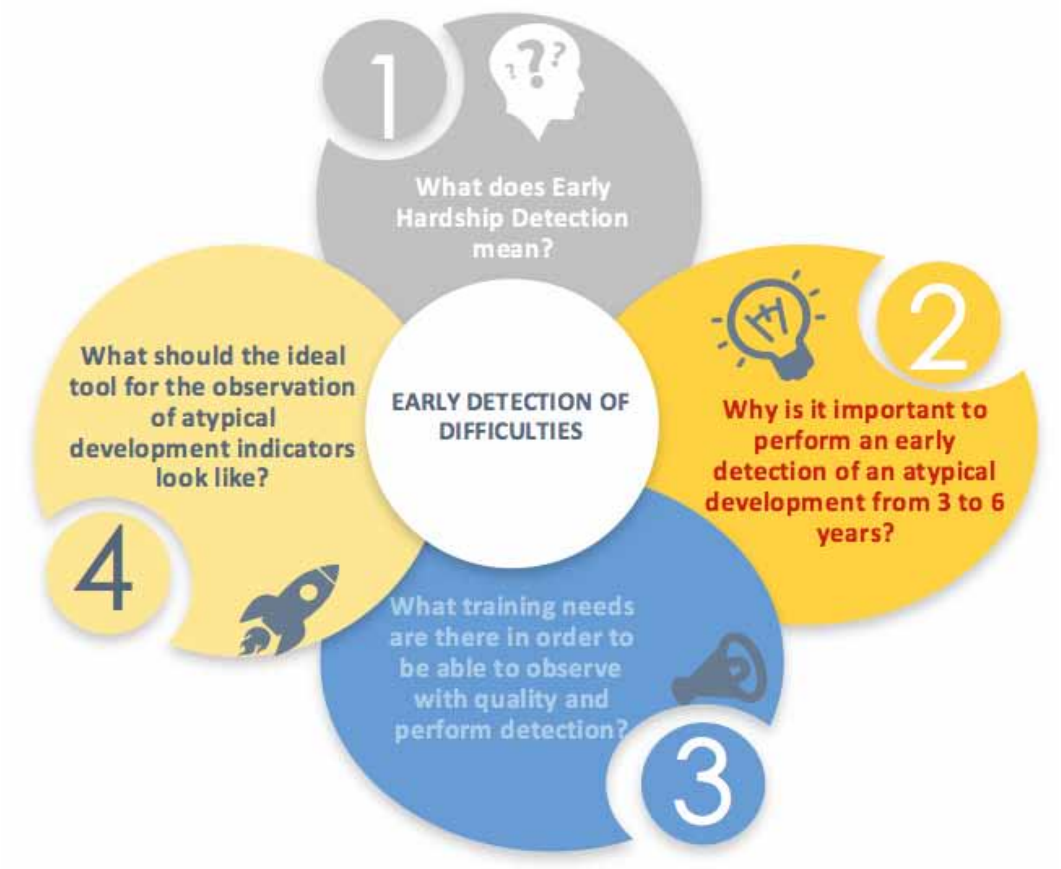



FIGURE 6. Strategic information objectives of the discussion group

## 5.3 Results

The following is a presentation of the data resulting from the two information collection instruments: the initial contextualization questionnaire and the discussion group.

The questions posed in this **questionnaire** refer to four themes of interest for the research: the individual experience of attention to diversity, the possible use of observation tools, the personal meaning given to the concept of inclusion and the particular training needs to improve the early detection of support needs.

### Attention to diversity

87% of the participating professionals currently have students with specific educational support needs (ACNEAE). The causes of these support needs they have identified are:

- Behavioral difficulties
- High intellectual capacities
- Social and cultural disadvantage
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
- Communication and language disorders
- Motor disability
- Hearing and visual impairment
- Intellectual Disability
- Autism spectrum disorder
- Global developmental delay

Regarding the number of hours per week that each classroom has the support of another professional (FIGURE 7), most have a maximum of 5 hours.

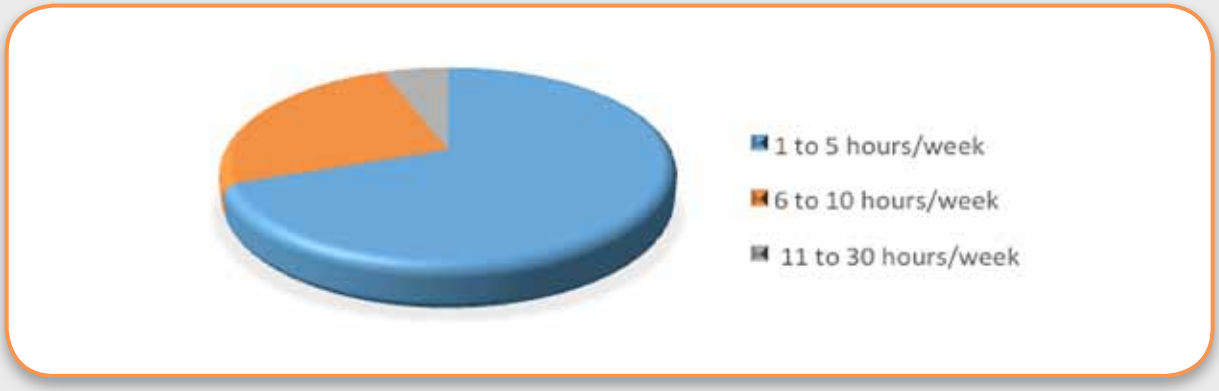



FIGURE 7. Number of hours per week of support from another professional in the classroom

## Use of observation tools

Informal observation is the most used tool (88.4%) by the study participants, followed by structured observation (65.1%) and the recording of evaluation items (51.2%). The frequency of responses can be seen in FIGURE 8.

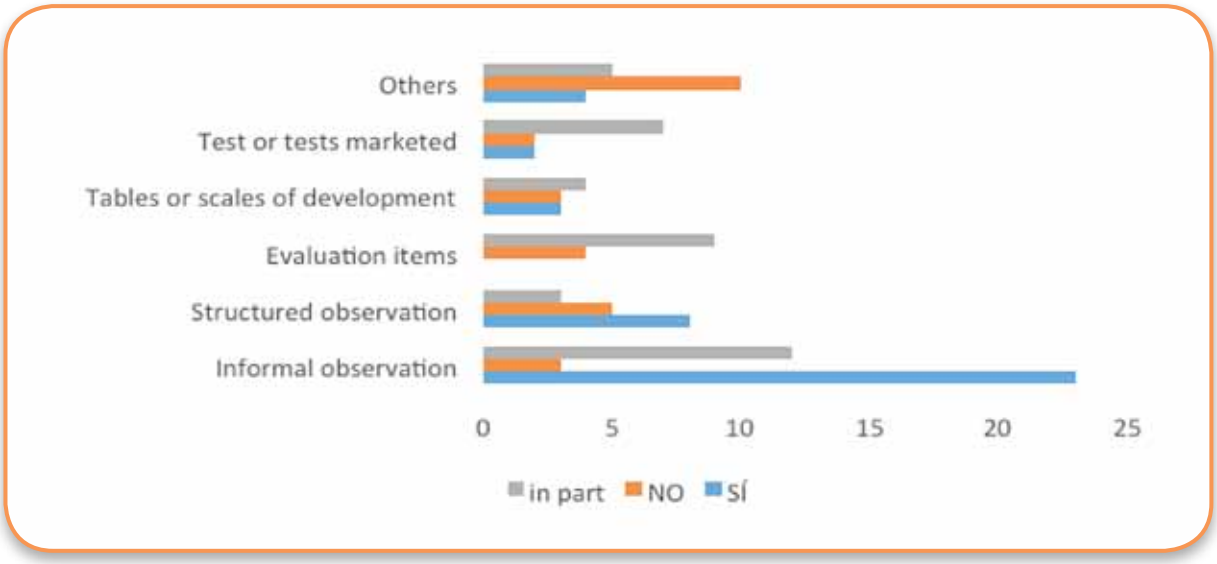



FIGURE 8. Observation tools used by participants

Informal observation has proven to be the tool that most generates confidence in professionals, although they value structured observation as the most comprehensive.

## Concept of Inclusion

In the questionnaire, participants were asked to define the structure of inclusion in three words and the results have been grouped into the following categories with their respective concepts:

- *Respect for plurality*: variety of abilities, acceptance, recognition of difference and coexistence.
- *Shared environment:* respect for individual characteristics, normalization, participation, union of different children and empathy.
- *Support for diversity:* adaptation to the diversity of all, changes, possibilities and adapting the means to the difficulties.
- *Opportunities*: self-esteem, enrichment, effort, cooperation and future.
- *Equity*: equality, law and justice.

On the other hand, they were also asked to associate words to their daily inclusive practice in the classroom and the answers were the following: change of structures and flexibility, observation, active methodologies, affection, empathy, dedication and love, values, work, common vision, challenge, constancy, respect, coexistence and being able to help everyone.

### Training needs

Participants responded that the training opportunities they wanted should be active and refer to good practices with case studies.
Regarding the format they prefer, we find almost the same frequency of choice of the online format with respect to the face-to-face format.
Finally, they believe that the training should be carried out at the beginning of the course or during the first term, with the professional profile of the trainer being an expert in inclusive education or an experienced classroom tutor.
Four open questions have been raised in the **discussion group** held, consistent with the following topics: meaning of early detection, training needs, planning of training opportunities and characteristics of the ideal tool for the observation of atypical development indicators.

### What does early detection of difficulties mean?

In the teachers' discourse there is not a concrete definition of what Early Detection of Difficulties is, although a series of common concepts and ideas emerge that show what it implies or what it is based on, from the participants' point of view.
In this sense, taking into account all the contributions and integrating the main messages given by the teachers, the following descriptive approach could be constructed:
The early detection of difficulties implies a process of direct and continuous observation, carried out by the teaching staff and supported by a tool with common and evolutionary measurement parameters, in order to detect as soon as possible differences with respect to the normotypical development and thus be able to adjust the human and material resources available in the classroom, prior to entering the next academic stage.

By investigating the different concepts and messages mentioned, it is possible to see how some of the benefits of Early Detection of Difficulties lie behind it and, therefore, also some of the barriers to carrying it out in the most suitable way (FIGURE 9).

**BENEFITS OF EARLY DIFFICULTY DETECTION**

- It helps to prevent and correct developmental disorders, which are then more difficult to dismantle in Primary Education.
- Modulation or adaptation of the teaching contents according to the child's difficulty.
- Multi-professional and transversal approach: teachers, counsellors, psycho-pedagogues...
- Direct and continuous observation by teachers (or other profile) is a good ally in the detection of difficulties.
- It favours the emotional well-being of the student, which is closely linked to behaviour.

**BARRIERS FOR EARLY DETECTION OF DIFFICULTIES**

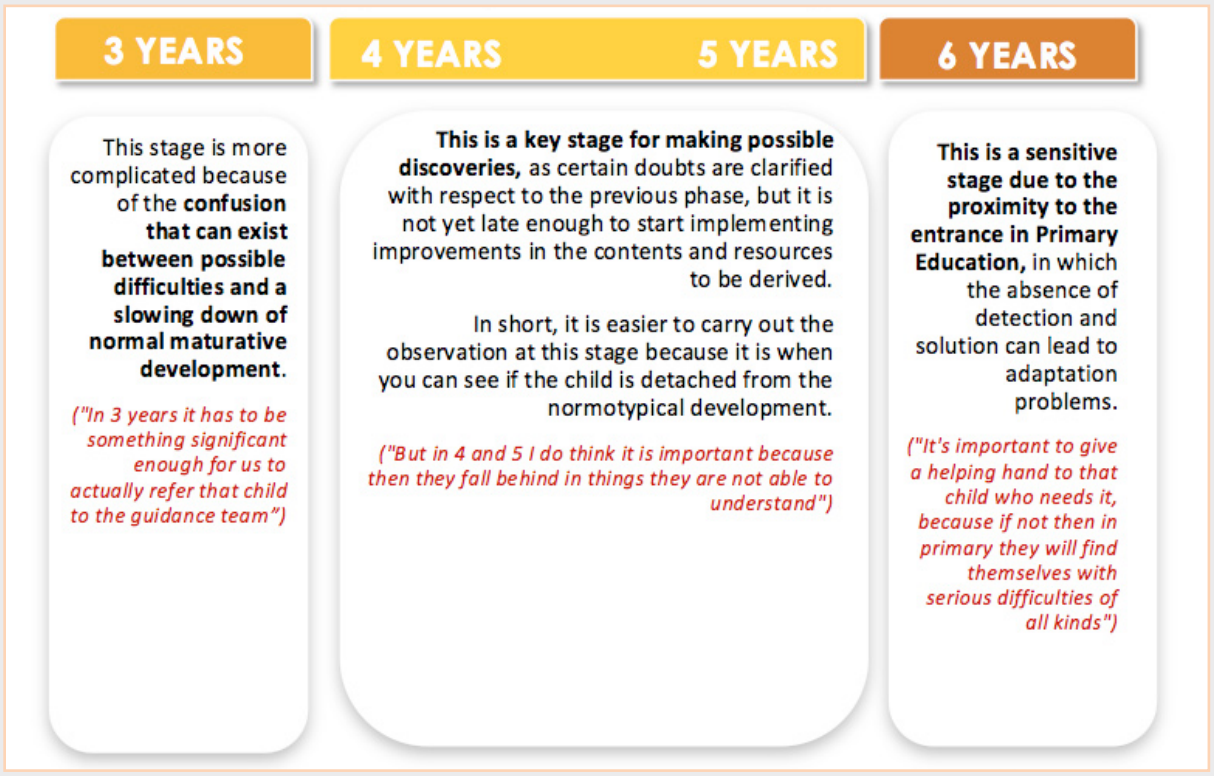
It occurs at a time when the lack of maturation (normotypic development) can be confused with the appearance of difficulties.
The lack of detection generates an accumulation or aggravation of needs.
It requires an involvement during the whole Infant Cycle, to be alert.
The need for common, concrete and evolutionary parameters to guide the detection of difficulties.

FIGURE 9. Benefits and Barriers of Early Detection of Difficulties in Children from 3 to 6 years old

In relation to the above, it is noted that the time in which the Detection is carried out is fundamental in order to rule out any need and, in the event that a mismatch is identified, to be able to carry out an intervention that minimizes the grievances as much as possible.

In addition, there is a general opinion regarding the different moments of the life cycle that make up the Infant Education Cycle (FIGURE 10) when making the diagnosis.

YEARS OF DEVELOPMENT IN THE KINDERGARTEN




WHY DO WE HAVE TO DETECT BEFORE WE GET TO PRIMARY?


FIGURE 10. Characteristics of the different ages in reference to the early detection of atypical indicators

## What training needs are there in order to be able to observe with quality and detect early?

With respect to the shortcomings that teachers highlight in order to be able to carry out early detection of quality difficulties, the participants in the group make a series of training suggestions (FIGURE 11) that are very focused on practicality, that is, far from the academic literature already known to everyone and adjusted to the reality of the class/center.

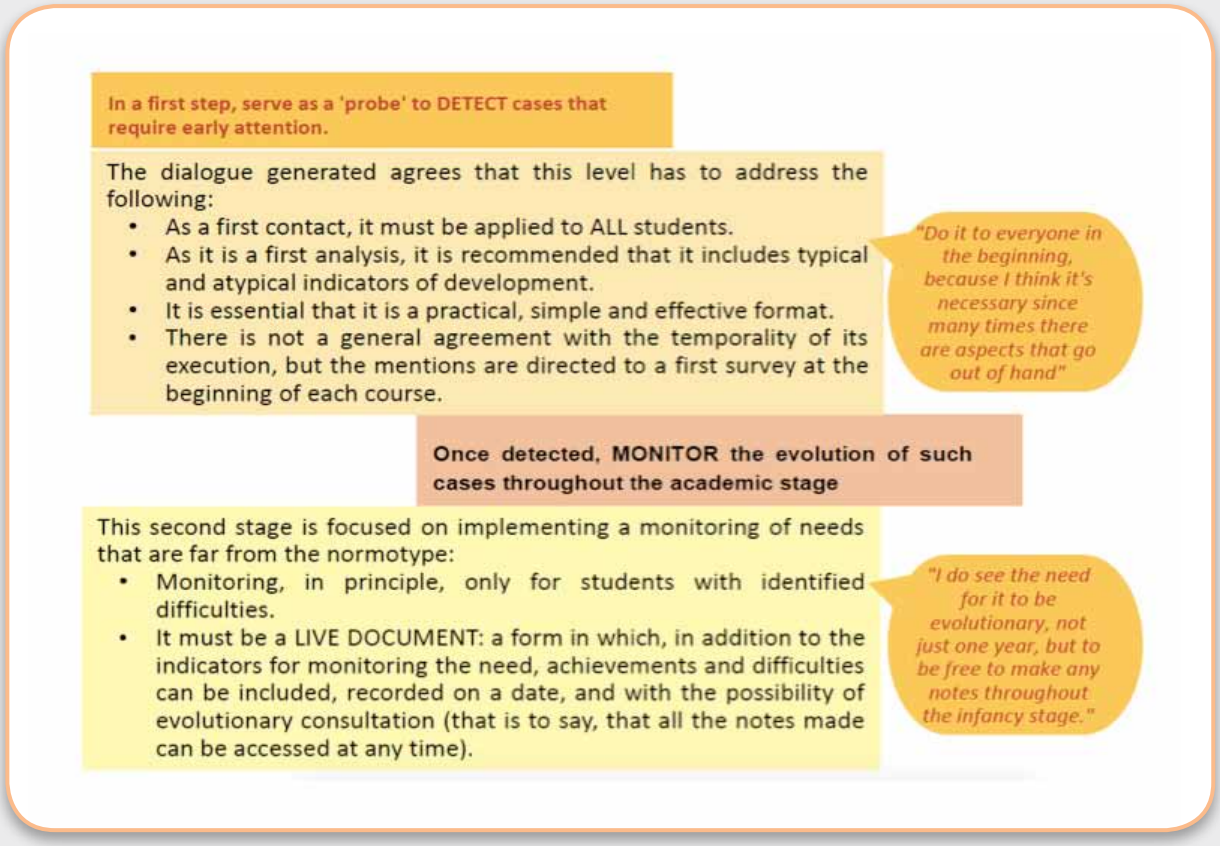

FIGURE 11. Training needs identified in the discussion group

## What should the training be like?

There is no consensus on what the training should be like in terms of format, duration and methodology, as it mainly refers to the personal situation of each teacher and their ability to reconcile. However, they comment on the need to avoid planning training courses during the course due to the existing workload. The month of June is proposed as the best time. Regarding the format, they prefer it to be face-to-face and practical. Finally, they propose that the trainer should not be an academic since they prefer teachers of the same professional profile with extensive experience in dealing with diversity.

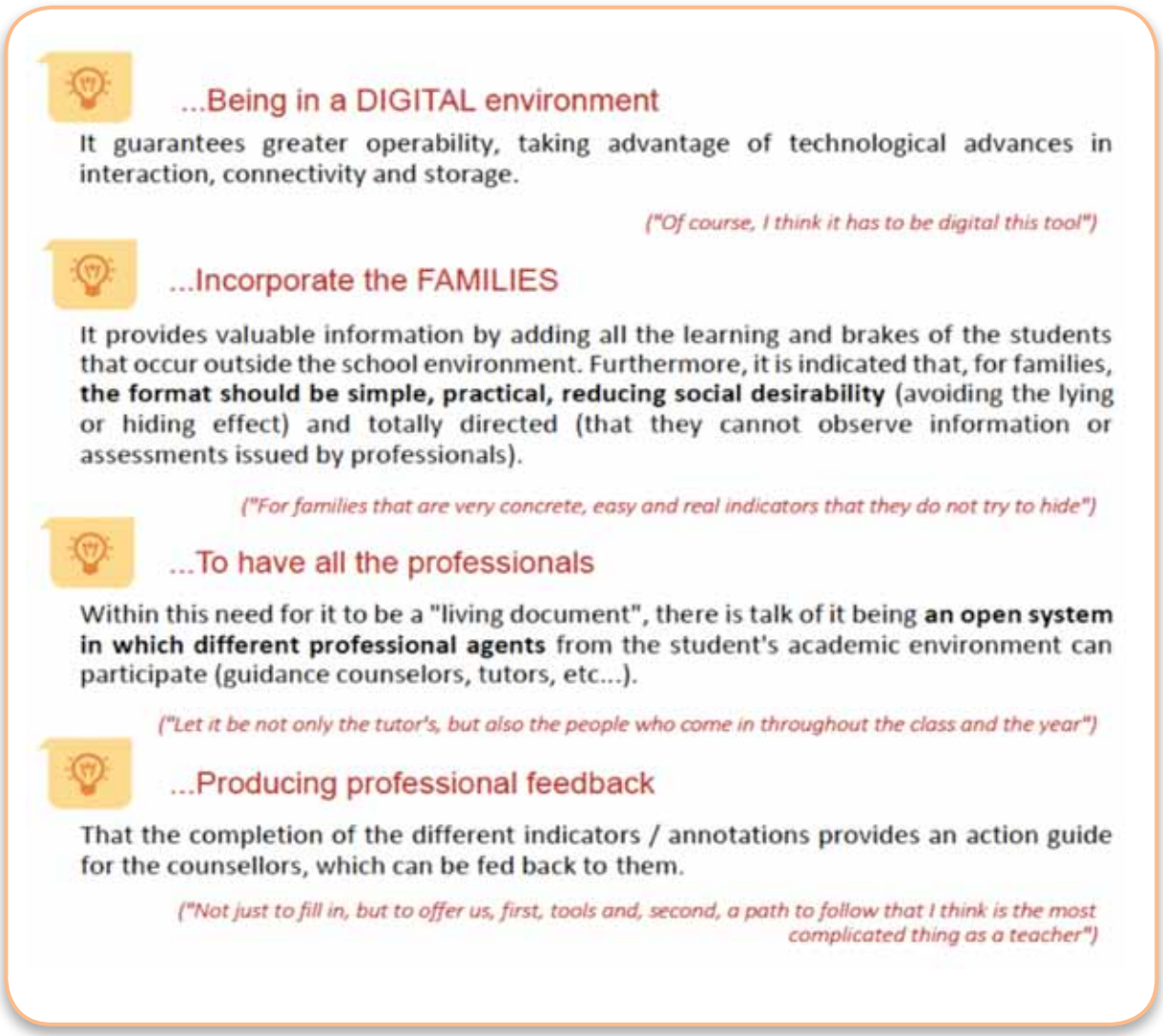
## What should the ideal tool for the observation of atypical development indicators be like?

In the final phase of the discussion group, a projective exercise was carried out in which teachers could design or configure the ideal observation tool. After understanding the purpose, it was agreed that this tool should serve two very specific purposes:



Finally, in this process of evocation, a series of operational and strategic characteristics were revealed which, on the one hand, would enrich the tool and, on the other, would facilitate the work of the teachers.

In particular, it is mentioned that the ideal instrument should:



After reflecting on the results obtained, we present below the significant conclusions of each tool separately and twelve final assertions; taking into account the convergences in the results of the questionnaire and the discussion group.
Conclusions of the initial contextualization questionnaire:

1. ATTENTION TO DIVERSITY. One of the fundamental pillars of the participants is that they have extensive experience in accompanying students with specific and special educational support needs. The causes of the support needs they attend to are diverse and one of the most important drawbacks to providing a quality response is the hours of support from another professional, which in most cases does not exceed 5 hours per week.


2. USE OF OBSERVATION TOOLS. Despite their extensive experience in dealing with diversity, direct care professionals indicate that the most widely used instrument is informal observation, since it is the tool that generates the most confidence, although they value structured observation as the most comprehensive.


3. CONCEPT OF INCLUSION. The concept of inclusion is defined according to the following categories: respect for plurality, shared environment, support for diversity, opportunities and equity

4. TRAINING NEEDS. Participants responded that training opportunities should be active and refer to good practices with case studies. In relation to the format, there is almost the same frequency of choice of the online format with respect to the face-to-face format. Finally, they are of the opinion that the training should be carried out at the beginning of the course or during the first quarter, the professional profile of the trainer being an expert in inclusive education or a classroom tutor.

To conclude, and bringing back everything that has been said, the following is a summary of the main lines of the qualitative dialogue that has taken place in the group:

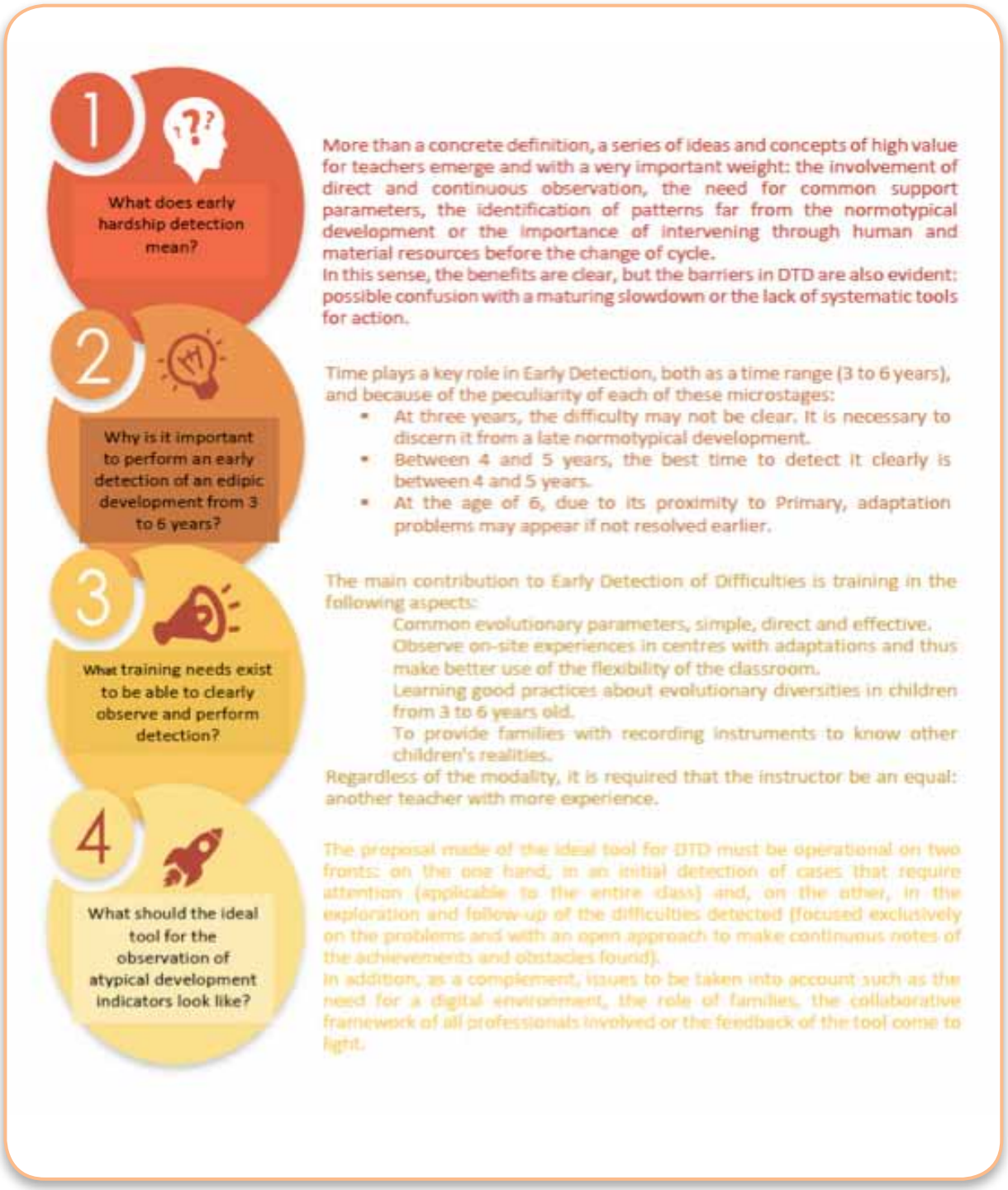


Photo by Yue Su, Unsplash

# Poland

6

## 6.1 Introduction

Kindergartens in Poland operate throughout the entire school year, with the exception of breaks established by the authority in charge at the request of the headmaster and the kindergarten council. This form of educational placement operates through winter and summer holidays which means that the school year at the kindergarten ends on 31 August. There are some formal obligations related to general functioning of both public and non-public kindergartens stated below.

Public kindergartens:

- implement pre-school education programmes taking into account the core curriculum of pre-school education;
- provide free teaching, upbringing and care within a time limit set by the authority in charge, which may not be less than 5 hours a day;
- recruit children on the basis of the principle of universal accessibility;
- employ teachers with qualifications specified in separate legislation.

Non-public nursery schools:

- implement pre-school education programmes taking into account the core curriculum of pre-school education;
- employ teachers with qualifications specified for public kindergarten teachers.
- the number of branches, are determined by the authorities running those kindergartens.

Public kindergartens may be single- and multi-departmental. The number of children in a kindergarten branch shall not exceed 25. A kindergarten branch includes children of similar age, taking into account their needs, interests and type of disability. The number of children in a branch of an integrated kindergarten and an integrated branch of a public kindergarten shall not exceed 20, including not more than 5 disabled children or pupils.

The most common criterion for dividing children into groups is their age. Most kindergartens are divided into 4 wards (wards of 3-year-olds, 4-year-olds, 5-year-olds, 6-year-olds). A different division into groups is also acceptable and applied

in some kindergartens: taking into account children's needs, interests and abilities, and in special kindergartens, taking into account the degree and type of disability.

## Assessment of children's special needs

Children in the age 3-6 years old tend to develop in their own pace and rhythm, but it is necessary to compare their achievements and challenges to the well-established developmental profiles and norms for particular stages of life. It is a well-known fact that even small developmental difficulties in this early stage of life may result in much greater educational and developmental problems later in life (e.g. low level of psychomotoric skills at the age of 4 may predict dylexia/dysgraphy at the age of 9 and later).

Kindergarten pupils' talents and needs have been assessed (screened) in Poland regularly by their teachers (according to the Ministry of Education Regulation from 9.08.2017. When there is a need for a complex assessment (diagnosis) the child is referred to the Psychopedagogical Counselling Centre (Poradnia psychologiczno-pedagogiczna). The diagnostic team include usually a psychologist, pedagogue, speech therapist and other professionals, according to the child's needs.

There are several tools that are used in the assessment procedures for kindergarten children in Poland:

1. Short Scale of Child Development (KSRD, Krótka Skala Rozwoju Dziecka, M. Chrzan-Dętkoś 2018).
2. Emotional Development Scale for children aged 3-6 (SRE, Skala Rozwioju Emocjonalnego dla dzieci w wieku 3-6, U. Sajewicz-Radtke, B.M. Radtke 2016).
3. Assessment of a preschool child (DDWP, Diagnoza Dziecka w wieku przedszkolnym, M. Walkowiak, A. Wrzesiak, D. Szwugier 2011).
4. Skala Prognoz Edukacyjnych – (SPE, Educational Prognosis Scale 2015, *Grażyna Krasowicz-Kupis, Katarzyna Bogdanowicz, Katarzyna Wiejak*).
5. Dyslexia Risk Scale for Children Entering School (Skala Ryzyka Dysleksji dla dzieci wstępujących do szkoły (SRD, Bogdanowicz, Kalka 2016).
6. Battery of methods for diagnosing psychomotor development of five and six-year-old children, 5/6 S (M. Bogdanowicz, D. Kalka, U. Sajewicz-Kalka, B.M. Radtke 2011).
7. System Oceny Zachowan ABAS-3 Polish version, Adaptive Behavior Assessment System Third Edition (ABAS-3, P. Harrison, T. Oakland. Polish adpatation: W. Otrębski, E. Domagala-Zyśk,, A. Sudoł 2020).

They can be divided into two groups:

a. Screening tools for teachers and parents;
b. Clinical tools used in psycho-pedagogical diagnosis in psychopedagogical counselling centres – they are available for trained psychologists or medical practitioners.

In Poland every child since his birth up to the age of 7 is entitled to Early Development Support services. It was introduced in 2013 (Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 11 października 2013 r. w sprawie organizowania wczesnego wspomagania rozwoju dzieci, Dz.U. z 2013 r., poz. 1257), The need for Early intervention system was underlined in the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education Recomendations (2019):

*Recommendation 6*

*Policy must develop funding mechanisms that support the development of early intervention and prevention, rather than reliance on compensatory strategies/approaches in mainstream schools.*

*This means:*

- *Introducing a model of funding that ensures the provision of high-quality learning support opportunities for all learners who require it. This model should ensure a move away from the use of formal needs identification procedures that involve labelling of learners as the main means of accessing support. It should ensure that appropriate funding and resourcing is provided to support all learners to overcome barriers to learning and participation.*
- *Providing funding that can be used flexibly at school leaders' discretion to implement strategies that prevent problems occurring and allow teachers to intervene as soon as issues are recognised/identified.*
- *Setting out funding mechanisms for learners with more complex and long-term support needs.*

Child's social-emotional development in the first years of life determines his or her later ability to participate in relations with other people and regulate his or her emotional states, as well as his or her ability to learn and fulfill his or her intellectual potential (Appelt, 2015a, 2015b, Czub, 2014), including literacy and numerical skills.

In Poland, there are programmes which aim at fostering social and emotional learning of children at the age of 3-6.


FIGURE 1. The Academy of an Intelligent Child. EQ. Emotional Intelligence of 3 and 4 year old's. New games.

This set of games is a part of a series of development programs offered to preschool teachers and parents with a detailed descriptions of creative tasks and fun games which stimulate self-esteem, social competences, dependence on others, empathy and resilience.

The programme Zippy's Friends is an international program implemented worldwide by the Partnership for Children Foundation. It was developed to facilitate children's coping skills in the face of difficult situations and risky behaviors. Zippy's Friends is a school based social emotional learning programme for 5-7 year olds. Classes are conducted by a teacher - tutor in kindergartens and primary schools, based on very detailed scenarios. During the school year the teacher conducts 24 meetings with children (usually one lesson per week). The programme consists of 6 thematic parts (4 meetings in each part):

- feelings,
- communication,
- friendship,
- conflict resolution,
- experiencing change and loss,
- coping strategies.

Each part is based on a story of a group of friends who experience different adventures that may happen to any child. On the example of these situations, the teacher talks to children, discusses different behaviours, reactions and consequences. During the meetings, children do exercises, draw, play roles and come up with different ways of dealing with the difficulties they encounter.

Zippy's Friends has been extensively evaluated in a number of studies which have shown that the effects of problems encountered by children are related to their ability to cope and, importantly, that Zippy's Friends can increase those abilities (e.g. Clarke, Bunting & Barry, 2014).
More importantly, this programme contains the Inclusion Supplement which is used to work with children with special education needs.


FIGURE 2. Zippy's Friends

The "Guardians of the Smile" part I is a preventive and educational program addressed to children from the age of 5. It is a series of psychoeducational classes based on 32 scripts
The "Guardians of the Smile" program (in Serbian: "Smile Keepers") was developed by Nada Ignjatović-Savić, professor of psychology at the University of Belgrade in Serbia, after the difficult experiences of war in the countries of former Yugoslavia. The program was adapted in Polish schools by the Methodological Centre for Psychological and Pedagogical Assistance (a national in-service teacher training institution established and run by the Minister of National Education in 1977-2009).

The aim of the "Guardians of the Smile" program is to develop children's self-awareness, to shape their life and social and emotional skills, including coping with difficult and unpleasant feelings, and to strengthen confidence in themselves and in others.

The theoretical basis of the program is a combination of an interactive and constructivist approach to the child development by Leo Wygotsky and the model of Nonviolent Communication by Marshall B. Rosenberg.


FIGURE 3. The Guardians of the Smile (Strażnicy Uśmiechu)

Through activities conducted in a playful atmosphere, children have an opportunity:

- to become aware of their uniqueness, differences and similarities,
- to enrich their experience and coping skills,
- develop optimal strategies for overcoming unpleasant mental states,
- developing the art of self-expression and communication with others,
- to strengthen confidence in themselves and others.

a) STRONGER CHILDREN – LESS VIOLENCE 2

The Stronger Children Collection of Activities for younger children in kindergartens, pre-schools and primary schools is the result of a European collaboration, supported by the EU-Commission within the Erasmus+ Programme in the period 2014-2016. The Stronger Children project is carried out by a transnational partnership of 6 organisations from Germany, the Czech Republic, Poland (Społeczna Akademia Nauk), Spain, Denmark and UK.

The Emotional Intelligence package consists of STRONGER CHILDREN ACTIVITIES which are directed towards children's awareness of other people's feelings and needs as well as awareness of their own feelings and emotional reactions.

The general objectives of Emotional Intelligence package include:

- developing an ability to recognize and define emotional reactions
- identifying own emotions
- identifying  the emotions of others
- creating the ability to feel and express empathy
- developing and ability to associate situations with emotions and feelings

The EI package involve suggested activities for 4-5 year olds: My Golden Shoe, Game of Sharing, Rabbit's Rights, Common Drawing, Good Behaviour. For instance: MOTION PICTURES. The children are sitting in a circle and they get papers and crayons. The teacher describes different situations and the children paint how they feel in these situations. Then the teacher explains different situations, e.g.: • "I have received a new toy.", "Tomorrow I am going to the dentist.", "My brother/sister disturbs me when I play.", "I am alone in a dark room.", "I am going to the cinema with my parents.", "My favourite toy has broken." After painting the emotions the children show their emotions and have a possibility to explain the emotions with words (or with smaller children to learn the right words).

## 6.2 Research Design and Methodology

As a part of the project activities conducted within the Strategic Partnership involved in the MOEC project, we conducted the assessment of training needs of kindergarten teachers of the partner institution. Bearing in mind the small sample (10 teachers) we applied a mixed-method design of our study to get a deep insight in to the needs presented by the participants. First part included conducting focus groups (qualitative step) and the second part of the research related to the online survey (quantitative step).

Focus group methodology is one of several tools that educators can use to generate valid information important to the advancement of programs. Focus groups therefore are considered to be naturalistic (Krueger and Casey, 2000). The researcher listens not only for the content of focus group discussions, but for emotions, ironies, contradictions, and tensions. This enables the researcher to learn or confirm not just the facts (as in survey method), but the meaning behind the facts. This is simplistic, but conveys a major advantage of focus group method: the production

of insight The goal is to fill the room with a minimum of 10-12 participants that are similar (Krueger and Casey, 2000). The focus on language earns focus group methodology the label, qualitative (Creswell, 1998). A report based on focus groups will feature patterns formed by words, called themes or perspectives related to the training needs.

Focus groups were conducted on the basis of open questions related to the difficulties that teachers encounter in their daily work with children. The general themes pertained to social, emotional and linguistic development of children,

The survey was conducted on the sample of 10 kindergarten teachers of the partner institution. The participants voluntary answered 30 questions related to work experience in the field of inclusion, early detection of difficulties in early education. The questions also involved teachers' needs in terms of the training and observation tool.

## Sample description

The sample included females (100%), with an age range of 30 to 60 years. 1 person reported the age below 30, 3 persons: 31-40 years old, 3 persons 31-50 years old and 3 persons 51-60 years old. In terms of the position held at the kindergarten, 9 persons are teachers while the remaining 1 is a support teacher. The figure below presents the level of pedagogical qualifications obtained by the participants.

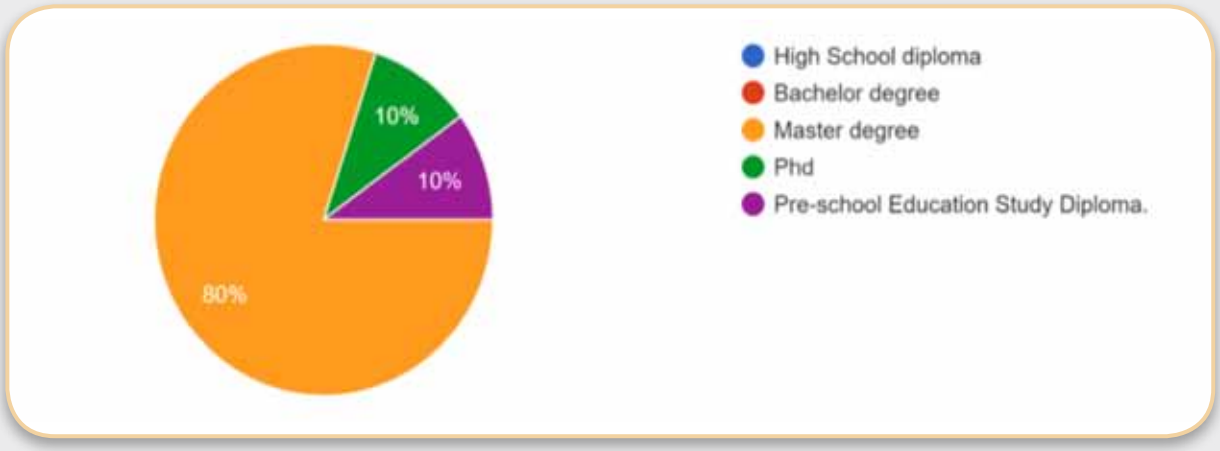



FIGURE 4. The participants' level of pedagogical qualifications.

As far as the advanced qualifications are concerned, 5 participants hold Diploma of Glottodidactics and Glottotherapy In Work with A Child, 1 - TUS - Social Skilss Training for students with Autism spectrum disorder and 1 person obtained training on the methods of working with a child with Asperger and Autism Syndrome.

The majority of participant has worked in a kindergarten between 6-15 years (60% - 6 participants) while 20% that is 2 participants have been a teacher for over 36 years. 1 teacher has less than 5 years work experience in the field of early education and 1 is an expert teacher with over 36 years of experience. When it comes to the work experience with students with disabilities and difficulties, it ranges between 5 to 25 years. 5 participants have a work experience between 6-15 years. The figure below shows the type of disabilities those participants faced while working with students with special educational needs.

The most frequent special educational needs that the participants encountered relate to behavioural difficulties which may be rooted in affective disfunctions. The least frequent type involved social, cultural disadvantage as well as ADHD. This result shows that the issue of diverse/mixed cultures is not the case in Poland in comparison to other European countries.

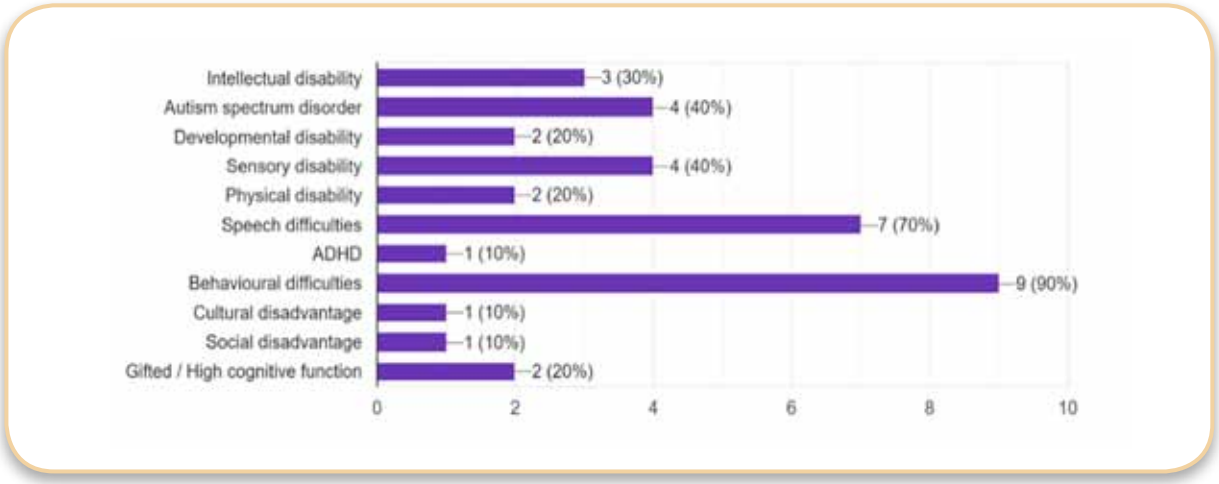



FIGURE 5. The types of students' disabilities.

The most frequent special educational needs that the participants encountered relate to behavioural difficulties which may be rooted in affective disfunctions. The least frequent type involved social, cultural disadvantage as well as ADHD. This result shows that the issue of diverse/mixed cultures is not the case in Poland in comparison to other European countries.

## 6.3 Results

The teachers usually work in a classroom of 25 children, at the age range of 3-6. 50% of participants reported that their classroom did not involve children with special educational needs while 6 teachers reported having at least 1 pupil with such diagnosis. The majority of teachers responded that they do not have a supporting teacher in the classroom and if so, the supporting teacher works from 1 to 20 hours per week.

When it comes to **conceptualization of 'inclusion'** in the context of children with special educational needs, the participants mostly referred to three conceptual blocks, namely:

- integration, communication, cooperation;
- acceptance, tolerance, equality;
- relation, understanding, connecting

These associations were explored during open interviews and focus groups. Teachers noted that group activities stimulate creating a bond among children with special educational needs which in turn creates a sense of unity. As far as daily work is concerned, teachers noted inclusion in terms of patience, support and cooperation. They especially stressed the importance of applying active methods based on active support.

In Poland, **early detection of child difficulties** is carried out at the age of three, while 30% of participants claim it should be conducted since the birth. Additionally, teachers associated early detection with activities such as observation, analyzing, monitoring. More importantly, teachers underlined the need of individual contact with parents to make the detection a holistic process including all the parties involved. Early detection has three major functions, according to the participants:

1) it focuses on providing parents with a reliable, constructive feedback on child's functioning;
2) it improves child's functioning in the peer group;
3) it serves as the starting point in terms of specialized support, help, therapy.

The participants were asked about the most effective **observation tool** they apply in their everyday work with children. The figure below shows informal observation and check list evaluation proved to be the most useful. On the other hand, structured observation was rated as nearly the least effective.

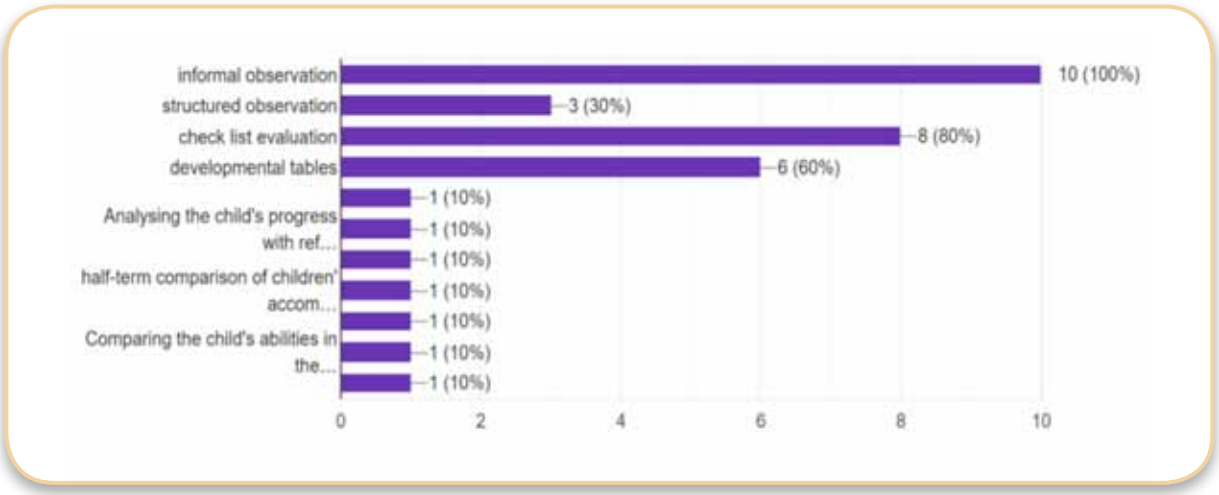



FIGURE 6. The most preferred observation tools.

Among the arguments standing for the effectiveness of observation tools, the participants mentioned that early detection allows recognizing strengths and weaknesses of a child and estimating the developmental level in the physical, social and emotional aspects. They also noted that observation tools enables 'neutralizing existing disabilities and side effects of a child's disorder which improves his or her functioning in a peer group'.

Taking into account the above mentioned aspects in the area of inclusion and early detection, the participants expresses a need to develop their skills in the following areas:

- Diagnosis of child's upbringing difficulties;
- difficult behaviours in a peer group;
- workshops on speech therapy;
- building up the child's emotional integrity including stimulating social and emotional growth of a child;
- diagnosis of a left - handed child;
- methods of work with a child with special educational needs;
- English language as tool of communication with children with disorders.

# Discussion and emerging dimensions

7

From what has been previously mentioned, it seems evident that teachers consider training as the foundation of a positive path towards the early detection of difficulties in children in kindergartens and, as such, they believe training should be promoted and created to meet the true educational needs of teachers and their network.

In an attempt to summarize the different stimuli from this research, it might be important to highlight some emerging dimensions which are a useful starting point for a reflection on a possible renewal of the training activities addressed to teachers working in kindergartens:

**1 -** The role of the teacher is shifting "from a merely executive role to professional role"[17]; therefore, *teachers need continuous training* in order to be able to respond effectively to the increasingly diverse needs of their pupils.

**2 -** The analysis of needs cannot clearly be a phase unrelated to the whole process and sole responsibility of the research institutions in charge of its implementation. An ecologically grounded analysis of needs cannot in any way disregard the *involvement of trainees* and a shared mode in which teachers take on the role of co-readers of their own educational needs. Within this context, characterized by positive interdependence, the research institution shares its expertise on the methodology (design of a survey plan, development and validation of specific survey tools, elaboration of analysis systems and interpretation of collected data), while schools give appropriate indications pertaining to the needs of the context in which the training must take place. Methodological precision and ecological soundness, in terms of context sensitivity, are two necessary elements along the path of knowledge of educational requirements.

**3 -** It seems fairly established that a training model providing for an aseptic articulation of meetings, based on the alternation of theoretical inputs and application activities, has now come to an end. Such models, even though often stimulating and skillfully coordinated, are not able to work on the real needs of teachers and convey an idea of technicality, often far from the expectations of individuals and organizations. The current orientation, often desired by the very participants in focus groups, has been the creation of a modular training system based on the interests and knowledge levels of participants, relying on the *learning by doing*

principle, flexible in its strategies and, above all, significant at a systemic level, i.e. able to give pedagogically sustainable and realistically transferable indications on methods within the individual school realities, in order to detect the difficulties of students at an early stage.

**4 -** It is now of utmost importance the need, expressed by participants in focus groups, to *monitor the influence and the impact of teachers' training on the processes of children observation*. It is interesting to note how the awareness of the gap between what is learned in training and what is put into practice in a real context reveals possible issues in the training processes: on the one hand, being too distant from reality; on the other hand, being unable to become authentic promoters of a change. A unifying force should be established between the training classroom and the school classroom, in order to give birth to a mutual enrichment between theory and practice, research and field action, acquired skills and new educational needs.

**5 -** At the present time of the publication of this article, the MOEC partners (as the rest of the world) have faced the very dramatic situation regarding the Covid-19 lockdown and restrictive measures. As a consequence of the massive infection of the population by the coronavirus, in Italy, Spain, France and Poland the Government decreed the suspension of the classes at all educational levels, and this included also every kind of teachers' training.

Before the confinement, the teacher training that is part of the Project was designed and partially delivered in presence. In order to carry on the project and its outcome, the Core team decided, through the national lockdowns, to deliver the training online, thanks to webinars and sharing of digital materials.

This action was an important example of how it's possible to reach teachers also thanks to distance learning, in order to keep the participants engaged and underline their professionality and dedication to school, even in a struggle situation as it was and still is.

## POLAND

In the light of the research results it can be assumed that teachers expressed a need to employ an observational tool which is less formal than a wide range of already applied screening tools related to child's development. The review of the existing assessment and diagnostic measures proves that kindergarten teachers may adopt standardised and validated tools which refer to the stable norm of a given behavioural outcome.

However, the participants clearly reported that they would like to use more of their own personal judgment in terms of child's behaviour on the basis of observation. This form of a screening tool includes a very crucial aspect of the whole process of assessment – that is personal reflection of the teacher who is in a direct contact with the child and may conduct observation in a long-term perspective. According to the participants, such an observational tool would benefit from being structured on the basis of check-list with a concise and clear indication of the behavioural indicators in every area of child's development (social, emotional, linguistic, motoric skills). The most frequent special educational needs that the participants encountered relate to behavioural difficulties which may be rooted in affective disfunctions. Such observational tool could also support/facilitate clear communication with parents which is a crucial aspect in the general assessment of child's development.

Another key findings pertains to the fact that the formal diagnosis of child's development is carried out from the age of three (this is regulated by given provisions). Kindergarten teachers clearly indicated that their work would be more effective in terms of child's' development stimulation if they could conduct the assessment of the child since the birth. This could also ensure smooth process of early detection of any child's upbringing difficulties.

Taking into account the aspect of special educational needs, the participants reported a need to raise their competences through specialised trainings in relation to building up the child's emotional integrity including stimulating social and emotional growth of a child. Bearing in mind that there is a wide range of specialised screening tools available, it may be assumed that teachers need a holistic approach and integrated tools to the child's development. In order to address this need, it would be beneficial to obtain general overview from the experts in the area of social, emotional, cognitive and speech development. Therefore, they reported training of speech therapy and English language as tool of communication with children with disorders.

In Poland, cultural diversity is not the major issue faced by the educational institutions. The participants of our study did not report any challenges related to culturally diversified classroom. Instead, diversity of the classroom primarily pertains to special educational needs or addressing difficult/demanding behaviour of children in a peer group. Therefore, it may be assessment that any intervention should be based on interactive/dynamic activities with a special focus placed on the elements of change, tolerance, communication and deep understanding. Observational tool should also assess (more in an informal way) the competence of adaptability/flexibility and cooperation among children.

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# Conclusions

# 8

In view of the growing complexity in current society, the considerations of this essay aim at analyzing a current issue of great ethical responsibility, such as the training of teachers. Its objective, therefore, is to promote in an increasingly structured way an articulated reflection on possible training practices, to meet the professionalism of teachers working in all levels of schools.

In this regard, quoting Morin (2000), it is possible to state that the developments of different disciplines have indeed contributed to a focus on the advantages of the division of labor, but at the same time they have generated potential drifts linked to "super specialization, compartmentation and distribution of knowledge". Not only have they "produced knowledge and elucidation, but they have also generated ignorance and blindness, instead of correcting such developments, our teaching system obeys them. It teaches us, from primary school, to isolate objects (from their environment), to isolate disciplines (rather than acknowledging their solidarity), to separate problems, rather than connecting and integrating".

The ongoing debate on the training of teachers, particularly of special needs teachers, also prompted by the publication of recent decrees on inclusion[18], strongly underlines the need to empower the main actors who, in different ways, work in schools, to outline the specific elements that must characterize the skills of special needs teachers.

This is necessary in order to avoid both a logic based on hyperspecialism and excessive medicalization against the promotion of a real inclusive approach (Caldin, 2012; Goussot, 2014), and a defeatist attitude of the school personnel, sometimes taking the form of alibis and rhetorical demands. Asking for the opinion of those who work in the field, at the same time allowing them to continuously rethink their personal and professional experience, becomes thus a priority in order to define the profile of authentic, qualified and thoughtful special needs teachers, who fully comply to the demands of their context.

## 4.3 Closing remarks (Spain)

**1 -** In Spain, the early childhood education stage is currently inclusive and priority is given to regular schooling with support resources.

**2 -** All professionals have extensive experience in caring for students with various specific educational support needs.

**3 -** The fundamental detection tool used by the participants is informal observation, although they value structured observation as more comprehensive.

**4 -** The majority of teachers at this stage of education are still women.

**5 -** Weekly support hours in the classroom are still insufficient as most have a maximum of 5 hours per week.

**6 -** The new professional profile of Social Integrators is being consolidated in direct care in educational centers.

**7 -** The construct of inclusion has been defined by five converging concepts: respect for plurality, shared environment, support for diversity, opportunities and equity.

**8 -** The early detection of difficulties has been defined as a process of direct and continuous observation, to detect as soon as possible differences with respect to normotypical development; and thus be able to adjust the human and material resources available in the classroom.

**9 -** The 3 to 4 year-old stage is the most complicated for early detection, because of the confusion that can exist between possible difficulties and a slowing down of normal maturative development.

**10 -** The training topics indicated as priorities for the participants have been

- Significant parameters of typical and atypical development (agree on a guide to evolutionary development from 3 to 6 years).
- Good practices to design inclusive educational spaces (visit reference educational centers).
- Inclusive educational practices for students from 3 to 6 years old, based on scientific evidence.
- Preparation of records for families.

**11 -** The requested training format is face-to-face (preferably in the month of June), practical and with experts in direct attention, discarding inexperienced academic teachers.

**12 -** The tool for observing development indicators and their application must have the following characteristics:

- Include typical and atypical indicators
- For everyone at the beginning of the course

- Quarterly follow-up for cases of suspected atypical development
- Digital tool with the possibility of continuous access to add achievements and difficulties.
- Participation of all the professionals of direct attention, registering their identity and the date.
- Incorporate an initial and follow-up questionnaire (if necessary) so that families can report, without access to the rest of the information recorded.
- Include the option of receiving didactic guidance for students with atypical development who need follow-up.

# Footnotes

[1] silvia.maggiolini@unicatt.it, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milano (IT)

[2] Refer to Grange Sergi T., Nidi e infanzia: ricerca pedagogica, educabilità e qualità , in Dozza L., Ulivieri S. (edited by) L'educazione permanente a partire dalle prime età della vita, Franco Angeli Milano 2016, p.95 "*The image of the flower, the most beautiful part of a plant […] seems fit to convey the generativity and the precious dignity and intangible delicacy of the principle of educability, which demands a certain care: a pedagogical care, first of all, through constant and attentive commitment to preserve its universality, expression of the utopian direction and of the logic of what is possible, which govern every strictly educational act*".

[3] Maggiolini S. Zanfroni E., *Innovare al nido. La proposta pedagogica di Pulcini &Co.*, Morcelliana Brescia 2019, p. 20.

[4] This expression was created, at the end of the 1980s, by the then U.S. President George H. W. Bush to indicate the expected development in neuroscience during the following decade (1990 – 2000). Later, the British neurobiologist Steven Rose used the definition "The Century of the Brain" referring to the 21st Century.

[5] See Barnes, A. J., Childhood Stress and Resilience , in Health Promotion for Children and Adolescents , Springer US, pp. 85-98, 2016; Obradović J., Physiological responsivity and executive functioning: Implications for adaptation and resilience in early childhood, in Child Development Perspectives , 10(1), 65-70, 2016; Ernst, J., Johnson, M., & Burcak, F. (2019). The Nature and Nurture of Resilience: Exploring the Impact of Nature Preschools on Young Children's Protective Factors. *International Journal of Early Childhood Environmental Education*, 6(2), 7-18.

[6] MIUR I principali dati relativi agli alunni con disabilità, Maggio 2019.

[7] UNESCO, 2001.

[8] UNESCO, 2017.

[9] http//www.unesco.org/new/fr/inclusive-education

[10] Circular of 30 April 2002.

[11] Circular n° 2019-088 of June 5th, 2019.

[12] School Life Auxiliary/Accompanying Students with Disabilities (AESH or AVS).

[13] ASEM or ATSEM: Specialized Territorial Officer of Kindergarten (ATSEM).

[14] BO February 2017.

[15] The modalities of schooling in the Community of Madrid can be consulted at http://www.madrid.org/dat_este/supe/atencion-diversidad/acnees.html

[16] All the following information on early care corresponds to the plan of action carried out by the Community of Madrid; context in which this research is circumscribed.

[17] Altet M., Charlier E., Paquay L. & Perrenoud P., *Formare gli insegnanti professionisti. Quali strategie? Quali competenze?*, Armando, Roma, 2006, p.17.

[18] See D. Lgs. n. 66/2017 *Norme per la promozione scolastica degli alunni con disabilità.*

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More Opportunities for Every Child

Early detection of child difficulties in kindergarten

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