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Pedagogical approaches to early childhood education

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APPROACHES TO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

1. FIRST CONSIDERATIONS: CONCEPTUAL DEFINITIONS, SCOPE, METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

1.1. What is meant by “early childhood”?

In international publications the expression “early childhood” refers to the period preceding the age of compulsory schooling, which differs from country to country: 5 years old (United Kingdom), 6 years old (United States of America, France, Italy and Germany) or 7 years old (Sweden and Netherlands). According to the authors, what “early childhood” refers to may therefore cover a variety of notions, since early schooling (5, 6 or 7 years) may be included or excluded. For the purpose of determining the nature of the approaches to early childhood education (rather than the policies of early childhood), the difference is important. In the former case, cognitive learning (reading, writing and arithmetic) lies at the heart of the discussions, whereas in the latter, earlier learning subjects, linked to social, cognitive and emotional development, as conceived in a global or “holistic” manner, are at the centre of educational concerns (note *UNESCO Early Childhood*, n°1, March 2002).

If school attendance marks the end of “early childhood”, what is the lower limit? Are new born babies, infants or sucklings “young children”? Does “early childhood” begin at birth, with weaning, or when the child moves on to mixed feeding (between 6 and 12 months old as is customary), somewhere nearing 12 to 14 months old, when children are taught cleanliness, or between 2 and 3 years (for a long time required for entry into nursery school in countries such as France and Belgium)? Should mastery of language be taken into account (3 years, for communicating with an adult outside the family, or rather earlier if it means understanding a spoken message)? The reply given by each country depends on knowledge built up through empirical practices, medical knowledge and psychological research into childhood, on one hand; and, on the other hand, on the regulations determining admission ages or the end of institutional care for early childhood before formal schooling begins. These two sets of data only partially overlap. The regulatory age limits are only indicators since children may enter elementary schooling earlier or later than the official age. In Muslim countries, the age of entry into Koranic school was set at no later than four years, the age that continues to mark entry into preschool structures in those countries. In some emerging countries, the official age, aligned to that in developed countries, does not match the real age of many children who begin schooling later for a host of reasons.

However, since crèches, day care centres, kindergartens, hospitals, schools and administrations in

OECD countries operate according to border ages (Hurtig, 1980) the relationships between parents and institutions are linked to children’s ages. The institutions set the age limits. Within “early childhood”, a distinction may be made, according to how the child is cared for outside the family, between two or three stages that partially overlap: 1. crèche or nanny age, 2. kindergarten or daycare centre or nursery school age, 3. early preschool learning age (nursery school or kindergarten) or early schooling. In some countries, the current policy aims at “integrated education”, with a view to avoiding breaks between the various care institutions for children under seven years, which traditionally used to come under a variety of “specialists”. Some focus on care for babies and their psychological awakening (model of the nursery nurse); others on emotional development and socialization as of 2 to 5 years old (model of the kindergarten teacher or educator of young children); and yet others on preschool or school-age cognitive acquisitions (model of the nursery school teacher or infant classes). The recommended or compulsory training curriculum makes it easier to determine the cultural referents and the different pedagogic practices of early childhood professionals in the different countries, according to whether it depends on vocational schools under the aegis of the employing ministry (Social Affairs, Health and Education) or comes under the authority of Universities.

1.2 In what conditions is it possible to refer to the approaches to early childhood education?

It is possible to speak of an “approach” when there is a corpus of knowledge and values, collectively assumed and transmitted, concerning the care and education of young children, as is the case in all traditional societies (B. Malinowski 1928, M. Mead, 1929). However, in an international study, carried out on the basis of publications, it will be considered possible to speak of “an approach to early childhood education”, if and only if a discursive formalization of collective and instituted practices can be ascertained. Currently, thanks to international reference bodies such as UNESCO, OECD and WHO, but also the World Bank which backs specific programmes, this formalization is somehow being imposed from the outside. The difficulty lies in grasping which practices correspond to the recommendations, claimed objectives, published programmes and the organizations that have been set up. There are laws that have been passed but whose only purpose is to satisfy formally the injunctions of the United Nations, and others that were passed too recently to have had discernible effects.

Two examples: Congo-Kinshasa and Senegal

The report on “Protection and education of early childhood” in the Republic of the Congo (Youdi, 2005, UNESCO) refers to general legislative provisions (Draft code for the protection of the child, organization of a National Council for the Child (2003), legislation on preschooling (circular on the regulation on the school model of nursery schools in 1976; national programme for nursery education 1997, compulsory inspection 1997, etc.). Official statistics show that these regulatory dispositions remain inoperative: 1.29% of children aged 3 to 5 years are enrolled at nursery school, 87% of these schools are private, profit-making and more than 60% are located in Kinshasa. They depend on private initiatives, meet the demand of privileged urban classes and are modelled on Belgian or French schools. On the other hand, of the 306 health zones created by the Ministry of Public Health, 30% are operational, with a programme to vaccinate children under 5 years (12 million children), which the recent past of wars and armed conflicts makes

even more urgent. In this case it is possible to speak of an early childhood policy targeting health protection, seeking to mobilize families, but not of an approach to early childhood education.

In Senegal, a “Ministry of the Family and Early Childhood” was set up in 2001 (Reyna, 2003, p. 64-64), and devised a new institution, “*la case des tout-petits*”, bringing together functions that previously were disjointed (health, nutrition and education). Around each “*case des tout-petits*”, of mixed ages, a team of polyvalent animators must take care of the young children, together with the community (grandmothers, assistants), thanks to a pedagogy based on games and traditional and modern resources, including religion, the use of the local language and gradual initiation to French (whereas the urban, fee-paying, “formal” nursery schools cover only 2.7% of all children). The cost of the *cases* (not funded by the World Bank although it does support the programme), the supply of teaching materials, staff salaries and training, means that this explicitly described “educational approach” has not, yet, had any visible effects. The “approach to early childhood education” in Senegal is therefore only potential.

We shall speak of an approach to early childhood education in this report when all three of the following criteria are met:

- an early childhood “policy” (legislation or regulation for this age group, budgeting, monitoring of actions and care “structures”),
- a discourse on the ends and means of this policy, together with an exposé of principles and priorities of action, the mention of reference models (be they theoretical/scientific, social, cultural, religious, or referring to founding “great educationalists”),
- described, lasting practices of childcare by professionalized adults (regardless of the level of their

professionalism) in accordance with those principles.

The summary tables used for international comparisons cover all three dimensions (P. Moss, Note on *Children of Europe*, n°5, November 2003). The discussion remains open on the degree of precision required by the written directives (main thrust or detailed exposé of programmes setting out the cognitive skills to be acquired), a subject on which UNESCO has not issued an opinion (J. Bennett, *UNESCO Early Childhood*, n° 26, 2004).

There exists a “prescriptive pedagogy”, designated by OECD reports as “a quality framework for early childhood services” implying “a statement of the values and goals that should guide early childhood centres; a summary of programme standards, that is, how programmes will be structured in terms of child/staff ratios and teacher qualifications to facilitate development and learning; third, an outline of the knowledge, skills, dispositions and values that children at different ages can be expected to master across broad developmental areas; and fourth, educational guidelines outlining the processes through which children achieve these goals, and how educators should support them.” (OECD, 2001, *Starting Strong*). “Real pedagogy” implies adding to these statements of expectations a description of the educational practices and institutional structures needed to make them effective.

1.3 Sources of information and matters of terminology

Sources of information are of three kinds: Official reports produced by governments or under their auspices. Publications by researchers, on the educational approaches declared/practised by the relevant bodies, in general for comparative purposes. Local monographs, testimonials, communications and articles giving accounts of experiments or lasting, innovative but circumscribed achievements.

The first source of information comes from official State reports. Nowadays, in developed countries, there is a whole range of national studies on ways of caring for small children. The State, elected bodies (regional or local), or paying organizations (for example, the CNAF, in France, Head Start Program in the USA since 1965, programmes supported by the World Bank), which pay for all or some of this care, must budget for the cost of the bodies set up or aid given (subsidies for private or family care). Political decision-makers, trade unions, civil associations and international bodies must be able to evaluate investment in accordance with state policies, determine any progress made, or any stagnation or regression, in time (evolution curves), in space (comparison between regions or nations) or between competing bodies (priority given to one form of care over another, the costs and effects). These assessments are accompanied by an evaluative reasoning (to legitimize or criticize) to justify or invalidate the expenditure, and propose improvements or changes in direction. This is when there are ideological “discourses” on the educational finalities and pedagogic practices concerning early childhood. They therefore offer information only about the objectives and practices prescribed for care. The way in which the data built up by State administration are controlled differs widely from country to country (census of the populations concerned, statistics of establishments and staff, in particular).

In other countries young children are cared for, in a non-marginal way, by means of non-publicly funded bodies (philanthropic foundations, religious communities, non-profit making associations, private profit-making crèches or schools), although the funding is not secret. As long as a sector remains informal (care given by extended family, neighbours or older persons who have left school) and uncontrolled, it leaves few traces in the official reports. Or it may be controlled without being accounted for (for example, control of nursery nurses at home for health reasons, private school premises for reasons of safety and hygiene). The “*Case des tout-petits*” programme in Senegal is one such State proposal offering an alternative (never openly declared as such) to the informal care offered by Koranic establishments (*daaras* in Senegal, *kouttab*, *jamaâ* or *m’sid*, in North Africa)

“which are highly attractive because there is a strong demand for religious study in this 98% Muslim country, but also because of the low cost” (Rayna, 2003, p. 64).

The question is that of the “reference pedagogies”. These may be unwritten “practical pedagogies”, coming from traditional values in which families recognize themselves (relative pre-eminence of the group and individuals, share of roles and status according to age and sex, forbidden foodstuffs, rules of obedience); or formalized pedagogies, generally arising from concepts based on western models (encouragement of self-expression, equal treatment of girls and boys, bans on corporal punishment, etc.). A whole segment of social reality therefore escapes the enquirer, as soon as, for the purposes of representing the situation, only the elements mentioned in official reports are adopted. A distinction must therefore be made between studies carried out by official services (ministerial programme services, political guidelines or statistical offices) and those that are also fed into official reports but are elaborated on the basis of calls for tender by independent researchers or think tanks, which make up the second source.

This second source concerns research by independent institutions offering field descriptions. They may or may not be commissioned by national institutional bodies (research agencies, regional councils, and family allowance bodies) or international ones (UNESCO, OECD, etc.). Their aim is to complement official information by conducting field studies. Accordingly they provide access to descriptive data, give accounts of observed practices, and evaluate the effects of the bodies in accordance with criterion-based parameters. This is the case of studies mentioned earlier (Youdi, 2004, enquiries in a dozen urban and rural schools; Rayna, 2003, comparing projects of “integrated systems” in France, Italy and Senegal). They are interested in the representations and opinions of the actors themselves (semi-directive interviews or questionnaires). Swiss research has shown that parents’ (positive or negative) representations of forms of care have more influence on (or perhaps are better correlated to) the positive or negative effects of certain forms of care than any other objective factor (Pierrehumbert, 2002).

However, examination of these studies does not always determine whether the practices described and the purposes declared are specific to these institutions or, on the other contrary, are shared by other families in the environment with young children receiving care. A good many “banal” practices are omitted, as they are considered to be universally known, which is true for readers from the same background, but not useful for the purposes of comparative studies. The standards of a “normal” family life, of “normal” food or of a “normal” educational life are not the same in urban areas and the countryside, for rich or poor, in developed or re-emerging countries, in extended or nuclear families, for agnostics or those from a Muslim, Christian or Hindu (etc.) tradition. Thus, the stumbling-block of current discussion on the evaluation of the “quality” of care given to young children is the variety of definitions of what is regarded as a criterion of quality and the implied hierarchy of the values involved. Western postulates are impregnated with the values of the individual, awareness of singularities and the psychoanalytical vulgate (taking into account the “interests of the child” and not only its “needs”, developing specific interactions bearing its personality in mind). They are not shared by other countries, for material reasons (when primary needs are too “urgent”) and for cultural reasons (when the “interests” of the young child are not distinct from those of the group). “Considering preschool education without also considering family education (even if that shows tensions and oppositions), may result in ignorance of its specificity”. [Brougère and Rayna, dir. *Traditions et innovations dans l’éducation préscolaire*, 2000, p. 22.]

A third source, “case studies”, occasionally offers precious complementary information. Monographs (numerous in Latin America) describe lasting innovations introduced by local associations, some aided by NGOs, charitable missions, and international programmes, which do not automatically fit into the State programmes or international standards. They give indications of

the environmental contexts, describing what is considered in different places to be a “pedagogic innovation” and in what conditions it won (or did not win) support from the families, local authorities or the State. We referred to this “grey literature” or other publications of this type for Brazil (Fundação Vale do Rio Doce, CECIP/Unicef; CEDAC, Fundação Bradesco, São Paulo), and for Mexico (Fundación Spencer, Oaxaca, 2003; Soberanes Bojórquez, 2003), since these are experiences of early schooling in an indigenous language. The publications of “groundbreaking” private schools (such as the Fundação Escola de Vila, in São Paulo) give an insight into educational models used as references by militant academics and intellectuals active in working class circles (who tend to write these articles), since it tends to be in these institutions that they place their own children. Issues surrounding young children and educational actions taken in their favour are addressed in classical education reviews (in the case of Brazil, *Revista Brasileira de Educação*, or *Leitura, Teoria & Prática*, UNICAMP, etc.) but also in anthropological magazines or publications on public health matters.

To judge by the documentation available in these three kinds of publication, there is undoubtedly a surfeit of written sources for addressing approaches to early childhood education in developed countries, but the coverage of other countries is patchy or non-existent. This has effects on the problems regarded as “priorities” internationally. For example, in the 1990s, considerable funds were devoted to evaluating the effects of non-parental care on the “emotional” development of young children in the USA (Howes, Phillips, Whitebook, 1990, publication of the findings of the National Child Care Staffing Study on Atlanta, Boston, Detroit, Seattle, Phoenix ; Lamb et Sternberg in Pierrehumbert 1992) and in Europe (Palmerus, Sweden, Melhuish and Moss, England, Geneviève Balleyguier, France, Ahnert, GDR, in Pierrehumbert 1992). Ultimately, the aim was to find out whether children brought up in crèches ended up with a negative feeling of insecurity. Intellectual circles were then rocked by controversies over Bowlby’s successful theses on attachment, which provided arguments for political and social movements distrustful of or hostile towards working mothers, regarding them as the cause of anxiety in children. We have found no trace of any research carried out, at the same time, on the effects of child labour on the psychological development of young children, in whom only the biological deficiencies (effects on weight, height, diseases and various disabilities) are highlighted (cf. Report of the ILO, 1996, *Child Labour, Targeting the Intolerable*, Geneva). It seems as though an “approach to early childhood education” could only emerge as a theme-based discourse of educational practices, to be created and discussed, once primary needs (food, safety and care) were regularly met, which is not the case when people are facing wars, social conflicts, poverty or economic precariousness. Current debates on approaches to early childhood education are marked by concerns expressed at the OECD, in countries where the upper classes demand a form of care that takes individuals, both children and parents, into account. It is no longer enough to ensure the quality of care and hygiene (Pierrehumbert, 1992).

One could even ask oneself whether the discursive analyses used to describe converging international evolutions are not artefacts resulting from the international trend towards comparison (Novoa 1998, Brougère, 2002), in particular by the OECD. The phenomenon of translation (into English) obliges us to express in one language (with words such as care, education, teaching, schooling) the description, and perhaps even the construction/reconstruction by their authors, of educational practices without an exact equivalent in the other language. The terminology used by the professions is particularly difficult to translate. As Peter Moss points out (UNESCO, *Early Childhood*, n°27, 10/ 2004) “‘pedagogy’ is often translated, incorrectly, as ‘education’ and the ‘pedagogue’ as ‘teacher’. The approach is relational and holistic: The pedagogue sets out to address the whole child, the child with body, mind, emotions, creativity, history and social identity”(Moss and Petrie, 2002). Thanks to its specificity the word “kindergarten” ended up being adopted in English, while the expression “Koranic school” does not convey the difference between *daaras*, *kouttab*, *jamaâ* or *m’sid*, obvious to any North

African. When reference is made in France or Belgium to “nursery school masters”, everyone “knows” that they do not take classes as elementary schoolmasters do, but the terminology clearly states that they belong to the same “body” of teaching staff and their level of qualification, which for foreign readers further blurs the distinction between the preschool and school models. The dominant US standard model is even called into question by US authors themselves (Canella 1997, Moss, 2001), culturally and politically. An artificial construct that “must be transformed into reality following the report and its prescription”, the acronym “ECCE” or Early Childhood Care and Education seems to be a false concept, a kind of erroneous shorthand, that allows us to conceive of an “object produced by the report and due to come into existence in the future” (Brougère, 2002). With regard to pedagogies, it is therefore important to rely on field enquiries describing real achievements rather than on theoretical categories. It is by comparing the various sources that we can determine the common points and specific characteristics of pedagogic traditions (including “traditions of innovation”).

2. HISTORY OF THE EMERGENCE OF APPROACHES TO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

2.1. History of the family and notion of childhood before the 20th century

Whereas the history of the primary school was studied in depth from the legislative, political, social and pedagogical viewpoints during the 20th century, giving rise to a number of international summaries, the history of early childhood education and care remains patchy (Luc, 1999). It may be hoped that this will be remedied by the research currently under way at the section of the International Standing Conference for the History of Education (ISCHE) dedicated to the subject (International Standing Working Group for the History of Early Childhood Education). On the other hand, much has been written about the question of family approaches to child-raising and early childhood, since the controversial book written by Philippe Ariès, *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime*. Published in 1960, translated into English in 1962, as *Centuries of Childhood, A Social History of Family Life* (republished in 1965 and 1973), translated into Italian in 1968, and into German in 1975, it was at the centre of a historic debate that became a “classic”. For Ariès, it was not until modern times, when institutions were created to care for children (the colleges of the 16th and 17th centuries for the privileged, charitable schools for the poor in the 17th and 18th centuries), that mention was made of a child identity separate from the world of adults, an explicit representation of that identity, and a “notion of childhood”, at the same time as the child became an object of emotional family investment. This evolution coincided with the first efforts to control births, through which the traditional family, built around inheritance, links of filiation or marriage rather than feelings, gradually makes way for to the modern nuclear family. Deliberately limiting the number of children enables parents to make a social investment in their future and an emotional investment in their personality. In the opinion of David Hunt (*Parents and Children in History, The Psychology of Family Life in Early Modern France*, 1970), Ariès speaks of the child but is silent about the period of “early childhood” (before the age of seven), and therefore offers a distorted vision of the relationship between parents and children. He also ignores psychology, according to which the first years of a person’s life are decisive, although there are rare yet significant documents for reconstituting the stages in the evolution of very young children since ancient times.

Hunt relies on the daily observations in the diary kept by Héroard (doctor to Louis XIII when he was a child), and interprets them in the light of Erikson’s psychological theories (*Childhood and Society*, 1963). Lloyd de Mause (*Foundations of Psychohistory*, 1982) thinks that children’s plight has steadily improved and that Ariès minimizes the ill treatment that used to be inflicted on children, who were always likely to be “murdered, beaten, terrorized or sexually abused”. The criticism of French historians offers more on the function of institutions (Snyders, 1965) and the discrepancy between representations and realities: there may have been a notion of childhood in the

Middle Ages, without it being expressed as a discourse or else it may have been derived from other forms of discourse (religious, rather than secular, for example). A society cannot be described only in terms of its awareness of itself or the image it wishes to give of itself (for a summary of the criticism, Julia, in Becchi and Julia, dir. 1998).

However, in a way this pioneering book opened the way for new studies on childhood and early childhood, although between 1970 and 2000 historical issues were strongly affected by contemporary changes to the temporal factors structuring the stages of life. They include: ever earlier care in the collective structures, according to the schooling model of age-based classes; later puberty and entry into adulthood; longer studies, economic dependence; juvenile cohabitation, lower marriage rates, later starting of families and the medicalization of procreation. It has become even harder not to project retrospectively what now seems obvious on to what happened in earlier eras. Just as others attempt to compare the widely different approaches to family education in the different countries of the world, historians are trying to “date” and interpret all the many cultural changes that directly or indirectly affect the status of early childhood.

2.2. Birth of early childhood care institutions in Europe

On the other hand, if we leave the history of the family and turn to the history of pedagogy, publications focus on the discourse of innovators without making much distinction between childhood and early childhood. Rousseau’s diatribe against vests that choke children and the carriages and parks that imprison them (*Émile*, 1762) and Pestalozzi’s treatise (*How Gertrude Teaches her Children*, 1801) are inevitable transitions, calling for an upbringing that allows the child to “live childhood” spontaneously. There are also pleas for maternal breastfeeding, and criticisms of unnatural mothers resorting to mercenary nurses, showing the new approach by the privileged to the baby’s “needs” (Badinter, 1980, Garnier, 1994).

Founding pedagogic experiences are also well-known references, since no country fails to claim that its national initiatives predate foreign influences. In some cases, an author’s approach to education is characterized as much by mention of the model institute he or she founded as by reference to his or her own posterity: Pestalozzi and the Yverdon Institute (1805-1815), the experiences of Bell and Lancaster with the monitorial system (1798-1810), the infant school founded by Owen in Scotland in 1816, Fröbel’s Kindergarten at Blankenburg in 1837, the *scuole infantili* of Father Ferrante Aporti at Cremona in 1828, not forgetting, in the 20th century, the “mythical” places, attracting educators from around the world, that became the *Casa dei ambini* of Maria Montessori in Rome in 1909, the *École de l’Ermitage de Decroly* in Brussels, the *Maison des Petits* linked to the Jean-Jacques Rousseau Institute in Geneva around Cousinet and Piaget, or more recently, Neil’s famous school at Summerhill. These “exemplary” institutions concern children aged over three years, in other words clean, weaned children who can walk, talk and feed themselves, and can move around. They therefore tend to be compared with the later primary schools to emphasize the differences (rejection of formal learning, early teaching of the three “R”s as in kindergartens) or continuities between them (initiation into the use of letters, learning rhymes and songs, sensorial and movement exercises to facilitate school lessons, as in the *salles d’asile* in France and Italy, then in *écoles maternelles* in France and Belgium).

We find no establishments catering for the whole of early childhood until artificial bottle-feeding made wet nurses unnecessary (rubber teats became widespread in the mid-19th century, substitute milk improved with pasteurization). Day nurseries welcomed abandoned or sick children, whereas the *crèche* (*nido* in Italy, *Krippe* in Germany and “nursery” in England), which appeared at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, developing further between the wars, offered day care to healthy, unweaned children. In this way the whole “approach to early childhood education”, for a long time the remit of the Churches which condemned infanticide and set up charitable orders to take in,

baptize and bring up as Christians any abandoned children or orphans, who usually died before they reached one year old, gradually came under the auspices of medicine. The marked improvement in their life expectancy led the State to organize care for this large population (nearly 20% of the whole population around 1900) through public welfare, which placed them in rural families until the age of thirteen (Jablonka, 2006).

19th century doctors also sought to educate mothers when monitoring sucklings, by means of a number of medical treatises on food and hygiene (for a summary of this literature, Luc, 1998). Just before the First World War, certain educational movements in Germany and Austria were already taking into account the theses of Freud on the emotional life of babies. In crèches, before the days of vaccination campaigns, there was for a long time an obsession with the risks of epidemics. The relational dimension of attachment that accompanies primary care (feeding, washing and sleeping rituals) would not be emphasized by psychoanalysts until after the second World War, in particular by Winnicott, who noted depression among sucklings who otherwise were perfectly well “looked after” in hospital (symptom of hospitalism). This movement had major political repercussions in the 1960s (WHO, 1961, *Deprivation of maternal care: A reassessment of its effects*), at a time when the cold war led to the criticism of anything that smacked of the collectivist model. The “criticism of the criticism” took place in the 1960s and 70s. Among exemplary institutions invented in a socialist regime we could mention the Budapest crèche run by Emi Pickler, who devised original approaches to childcare, with the vigilant but hands-off presence of nursery nurses, by no means based on the maternal model but manifestly beneficial to the children. The book written by Myriam David and Geneviève Appel, *Loczy ou le maternage insolite* (1973), which presented this pilot experiment, led to reactions within the profession, but remained relatively unknown among the public at large, unlike other establishments that were treated as “mythical” by the media, such as the Orthogenic School of Chicago where Bruno Bettelheim worked, for example (Neyrand, 2000, 2003).

2.3. The three main types of care in the 19th century and their dissemination

Historical studies enable us to compare legislation on early childhood in different European countries, in turn making it possible to establish that it evolved over time in three main stages. The emergence of approaches to early childhood education and care seems to have been an almost inevitable result of the first industrialization requiring a female labour force (in textile mills, especially, but also in heavy industry), as of the late 18th century in England, in the 1820s in Germany and France, later in other European countries, which may explain the discrepancies between the legislations in various countries.

At the pre-pedagogic stage, young children were looked after by unqualified staff: *garderies* in France, *écoles gardiennes* in Belgium, *Spielschule* in Germany, *speelscholen* in Holland, “Dame Schools” in the United Kingdom, and *scuole delle maestre* in Italy. Then came the second stage: infant schools, the fruit of new ideas, the desire to assist and educate, through organized institutions supervised by their founders (“infant schools” in the United Kingdom, *salles d’asile* in France, *Kleinkinder-Bewahranstalten* in Germany, *bewaarscholen* in the Netherlands, *écoles gardiennes* in Belgium, *escuelas de párvulos* in Spain, and *scuole infantili* in Italy). These initiatives were taken by charitable, religious or philanthropic institutions, before being taken over by political authorities, be they municipal (Belgium and Italy), regional (England and Germany) or State (France). The third stage began in the 1840s in Germany, reaching Spain in the 1870s: the non-religious “kindergarten”, supported by liberal or progressive movements and marked by the visionary and romantic genius of Fröbel, which dispensed with early lessons (the three “R”s), to the benefit of free play, and, thanks to teaching materials centred on specific needs, addressed children from all social backgrounds.

The different European countries where the first approaches to early childhood education emerged seem to have remained attached to these two models throughout the 20th century, developing free institutions for working class children (the social welfare model, in England, or in post-war Federal Germany), or kindergartens open to all (Sweden, Denmark and Netherlands) or *salles d'asile* or nursery schools (Italy, France and Belgium), free and open to all. The dominant family models in each country (working mothers or housewives) and variable economic conjunctures (high or low demand for labour) may explain the uneven rates of early attendance and, consequently, the different levels of investment in such care. However, at the end of 20th century, the model of the state nursery school, a place offering global education, calling for highly qualified professionals, won the day everywhere, albeit allowing for national specificities (timetables, levels of State intervention, and the organization of activities). In other words, emphasis on basic learning was stronger when they come under the Ministry of Education, as in France and Belgium, whereas play and games were the order of the day when such institutions were historically seen as something separate from school, as is the case in Nordic countries and Germany.

2.4. The questionings of current historical research

This vulgate depends on an implicit notion of progress, linked to modernization and new ideas. In this view, pioneers (such as Rousseau and Pestalozzi, who inspired Fröbel) devised avant-garde projects that were sadly held back by ideological conservatism (religious, political or social) or because the States invested such a small part of their budgets on them, or because they were put into practice without the necessary means (oversized classes, inadequate materials, unqualified staff). It does not refer sufficiently to empirical studies as researchers paid more attention to characterizing pedagogic projects that led to achievements than to describing their day-to-day functioning on the ground. The history of the “great educators” and ideas on early childhood education still mobilizes researchers, judging by the works published on the religious sources of Comenius (Chalmel, 1995), the philosophy of the Enlightenment (Dajez 1994), or the thoughts of Pestalozzi and Fröbel (Soëtard, 1990, 1998). But research is increasingly calling the “vulgate” into question, as less attention is paid to the history of ideas and more on practices or the underestimated aspects of social demand (Luc, 1997). A whole series of new empirical studies now strays from the very well trodden path of praising pioneers who fell victim to social prejudice or political resistance.

The so-called Dame schools, which set out to teach children to read and write, were unanimously stigmatized by the creators of infant schools or kindergartens, but for a long time continued to be favoured by the lower or working classes when they could choose. The highly negative descriptions by the founders of infant schools denouncing the lack of space, the absence of hygiene, ill treatment and the incompetence of the staff may well have been biased (Luc, 1999). The French nursery school, open to all children by statute, remained lower- or even working-class schools until the 1950s (Plaisance, 1986). The link between industrialization, female labour and pre-schooling is not as clear as was it was believed to be for a long time: many schools were created in non-industrial locations, working-class women were often housewives (Thivend 1999), and there was a demand for preschooling from the higher and middle classes from the outset. The rejection of early learning in kindergartens (reading, writing and arithmetic) was not always seen as progress, in particular among the lower classes, who were against professional staff being paid to “make children play”. But it became less important to begin the teaching of literacy very early on when legislation was passed, banning child labour before twelve years old in various European countries between 1860 and 1880 (Garnier, 1994) and guaranteeing all children longer schooling. The social aims of kindergartens were barely compatible with half-day schooling when women worked; some of the choices made (to exclude men from their staff, even though many had worked there until the mid-19th century) were interpreted either as a disqualification (linked to feminization), or as an important step towards female emancipation from male domination.

In short, research is currently at the stage of challenging the vulgates (Luc, 1999, Depaepe and Simon, 1999), with more precise empirical worksites being opened up (studies of municipal studies, monographs on establishments, analysis of debates and taking into account national, demographic and cultural conjunctures). Historians are currently interested in countries where different forms of “integrated” care are being introduced, from the age of a few months to the end of basic education (Denmark and Sweden, in particular), and are researching the “traditions” that may account for these Nordic specificities.

3. APPROACHES TO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION THROUGHOUT THE 20TH CENTURY

3.1. The new reference theories: psychoanalysis, differential psychology and genetic psychology

Over a few generations three schools of scientific study were to alter completely the representations of early childhood. Experimental psychology and psychoanalysis came into existence before 1914, but their effects on the culture of educators would not be felt on a large scale until after the second World War. On the other hand, developmental psychology, which came into being between the wars, had immediate repercussions on the approaches to early childhood education. The names of Binet and Freud represent the first two schools, that of Piaget, the third.

The main lesson learned from Binet’s experimental approach concerns his inquiries into children’s school performances (1904), lying behind the method applied to intelligence tests and the invention of special classes for the intellectually retarded (1909), children unable to follow the normal curriculum imposed on all children by compulsory schooling. Where traditional psychiatry opposed normality and pathology, Binet introduced a continuum, by means of school tests. Deeply retarded children cannot speak, the moderately retarded will never learn to read, and the slightly retarded may be taught by means of a teaching method adapted to their slowness. Mastery of the written language became a criterion for normality and learning speed a clue for detecting precocious or superior levels of intelligence. The ability to read became a constitutive criterion of human intelligence in addition to the ability to speak. All approaches to preschool education would be marked by this continuous notion, according to which mastery of the written language is a stage that demonstrates the normality of children’s intelligence. Whereas only the oral language was seen as an attribute of human nature, writing, the cultural technology that took humanity from prehistory to history was “naturalized” at the dawning of the 20th century, as if belonging to societies of writing had become a universal phenomenon. Modern-day illiterates would be seen as “abnormal”, since the norm of intelligence was now seen as part of the scholarly forms of thought and reasoning, in other words the written language.

The widespread acceptance of psychoanalysis dispatched to oblivion the theoretical scandal of its theses, which also looked at the question of the normal and the pathological. Whereas Binet’s psychology is interested in the intelligence of the child measured by comparison with the schooling performances of his or her peers, by accepting the social demands of the time Freud took the instinctual life of the suckling and small child, and reconstructed the psychological genesis of the individual. The small child we all start out as remains buried in our individual histories, along with amoral desires, rejections, amnesias and prohibitions. The events of early childhood (birth, breastfeeding, weaning, learning cleanliness, and our relationship with mother and father and other relations) may be dramatic experiences (traumatism, complexes, guilt, self-punishment) unconsciously transmitted from generation to generation. The usages of psychoanalysis in education (following Anna Freud) would give rise to endless controversies, but its relationship to

babies and small children would for a long time be conditioned by a principle of precaution, never seen before in the history of care for the very young. This principle of precaution, commonly regarded as obvious in developed countries and disseminated by numerous communication media (popular reviews, radio and television), is by no means universally recognized. In countries where the educational culture has not yet been influenced by psychoanalysis, as popularized among the middle classes by Dr Spock (1946), it is difficult to admit that the function of educator for early childhood is a speciality calling for high-level qualifications, when it is merely seen as caring for children and meeting their primary needs (eating, sleeping, being washed, dressed and supervised).

Finally, genetic psychology, or developmental psychology, is “a kind of third way between psychoanalysis and metrological psychology” (Becchi, 1996). Piaget seeks to discover how certain kinds of knowledge are acquired that are not learned in any way at school (permanence of the object, the reversibility of propositions and the reciprocity of thought) but condition all learning. He sees the child as an egocentric being, who socializes by decentering, verbally (*Le langage et la pensée chez l'enfant*, 1923), morally (*Le jugement moral chez l'enfant*, 1932), and even more so cognitively (*La représentation du monde chez l'enfant*, 1926, *La construction du réel chez l'enfant*, 1937, *La genèse du nombre chez l'enfant (The child's conception of number)*, 1941). According to Vygotski, the child is also studied as the builder of his or her own maturation, gradually interiorizing his or her dialogue with the outside world, the source of his or her internal thoughts. Interactions with the human world are therefore decisive for a child's evolution, which explains the interest shown by linguistic psychologists, like Bruner, in a theory conceived in the USSR in the 1930s, but disseminated much later in western countries. According to Wallon, occupied like Vygotski with turning psychology into a science that can theorize the interactions of the biological and the social, emotions are what form the basis of human communication. Mothers see those bodily reactions of the suckling, manifesting pleasure, anger or fear, as a form of exchange that they interpret as a kind of language (“he/she is trying to tell me that”).

The “stages of development” defined by western genetic psychology (Wallon, Piaget and Gesell) are established in developed countries, where, for nearly half a century, compulsory schooling has begun at the age of six years (France, Switzerland and United States). Accordingly psychological theories treat institutional realities as facts of “nature” (Hurtig, in Hurtig and Rondal, 1980, t.1, p. 22). Piaget notes as much as a two-year difference when he gives cognitive development “tests” in countries where compulsory schooling begins later, such as Iran, but that delay does not call into question the order of development whose stages he has described. Research carried out in the United States takes for granted the fact that all children in that country begin learning to read between five and six years at kindergarten, and the famous Gesell handbooks adopt a three-stage division following the US curriculum, according to which the young child is aged under five (1940), the child between five and ten (1946), and the adolescent ten to sixteen (1956). These chronological milestones, historically constructed, become scientifically legitimized referents and, by extension, institutional standards for other countries around the world. In France, where nursery schooling is possible at the age of two and compulsory schooling begins at six years, there are three stages (less than two years: baby or suckling; two to six years: early childhood; and six to eleven years: childhood). The borders defined by the institutions, however, show that these stages overlap (two months to three or four years: crèche; two or three to six years: initial learning; five to eight years: fundamental learning).

Binet's psychology produced an ideology of precociousness and retardedness linked to a “metric scale of intelligence”, followed by a general comparability of individual intelligences through the intellectual quotient, an ideology particularly in sync with a society where the class a child is placed in at school becomes a means of prognosis and guidance for individuals. The culture of psychoanalysis threw up all manner of interpretative discourses, lending meaning and value to types

of conduct previously regarded as “insignificant”, and produced a pedagogy of “precaution” (everything is forgotten, but nothing is erased), entertaining a generalized feeling of maternal responsibility/guilt when children face problems. It is a question of avoiding not only traumatizations, emotional shocks, brutal separations and lacks of communication, but also contradictory orders or “double knot” situations. As for the genetic schools of psychology, they supported educational approaches based on free activity, creative play, interactions between peers, or between adults and children, by showing educators the limited effectiveness of directive inculcation, based on forced learning or learning by rote. They provided the educational theories referring to “active methods”, widely experimented before them, with a theory legitimizing approaches that break away from traditional means of transmission. Regardless of how many times they were later called into question, the current approaches to early childhood education remain to an enormous extent impregnated with them, in terms of playful educational material, the taking into account of learning rhythms, and the “holistic” conception of a development where emotions, socialization and intellectual acquisitions are inseparable.

3.2. The model of the kindergarten in Germany and its evolution (FRG and GDR)

Germany is where the kindergarten was invented, a model that swarmed throughout the world. Originally this institution had a very political flavour: Fröbel adhered to the republican programme of the 1848-49 revolution, calling for a separation of Church and State. Considered as originating in a subversive institution, emancipated from religious controls, in the continuity of the ideas of Rousseau and Pestalozzi, kindergartens were banned as “elements of Fröbel’s socialist system, whose aim was to convert to atheism”. After the failure of the 1848 revolution, many political militants emigrated and invested in educational establishments, contributing to the celebrity of Fröbel, in particular in Great Britain, the United States and Latin America, where they created private schools that were to win over a privileged clientele.

In Germany, after the ban was lifted by Wilhelm I, three main groups coexisted: Protestant preschool establishments, Catholic institutions, and the Fröbelian network, each of which published its own review. The Fröbelians saw kindergartens as public institutions that should be funded by the communes and open to all children from three to six years. They would set out to give education for public life, whereas education for private life would remain the remit of the family. Religious institutions, on the contrary, saw day care centres as a temporary last resort for working mothers. They were staffed by young women from the lower classes, with no qualification, but in whom mothers had trust; hours took working schedules into account. The high cost and restricted hours of kindergartens meant that increasingly they were reserved for children from bourgeois families and contributed to class differences, whereas day care centres were free under the Empire. Fröbel’s demands for the “high level of qualification” of educators meant that in his establishments only middle-class girls looked after the children. We therefore owe a lot to Fröbel: for example, kindergartens were seen as places for education that must adapt to their public. Toys, games and rituals cannot be the same for children of the bourgeoisie and the working classes. The *Volkskindergarten* of Baroness von Marenholtz-Bulow renounced social mixing in order to take better account of the constraints of working life (opening hours, social referents and educational objectives). More attached to social mixing, Henriette Schrader-Breyman, Fröbel’s great-niece, who began working in a working class district of Berlin, sought above all to recreate a family education atmosphere. In 1880 she opened the Pestalozzi-Fröbel House – with an adjoining school for teachers – that was to become a model establishment. From 1914 onwards, women were mobilized en masse at places of production, and it was in Berlin that the first “war kindergarten” was set up, run by teachers from the Pestalozzi-Fröbel House, whose approach to education had by then become a byword. During the war, 7500 establishments took in very large groups in precarious conditions (up to 200 children).

The Weimar Republic was a period during which innovations in the field of education flourished, as new proposals were made by the Fröbelians (such as those of Maria Montessori and Rudolf Steiner). From 1928 onwards, the training of all teachers, for day care centres or kindergartens, lasted two years following secondary education (provisions that were resumed in 1945 and prevailed until 1967). While the corporative links between institutions were strengthened and supply grew, draft legislation for all educational establishments (the 1924 Law on Youth, or *Reichs Jugendgesetz*) was dealt a fatal blow by the economic crisis. The Youth Offices (*Jugendämter*) intended to run the establishments were not funded. In 1930, there were 7290 kindergartens in Germany, offering 420,000 places.

The Third Reich imposed on the various institutions a clear-cut separation of boys and girls' roles (games and toys) and educators were given the task of inculcating in children the love of the Führer. Institutions deemed not to conform were closed (the Montessori schools, Steiner's Waldorf kindergartens). The Fröbel Association was scuttled in 1938 and its review *Kindergarten* became the *Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt* (NSV), the mouthpiece of Nazi state welfare. In 1939, kindergartens took in 700,000 children in 13,400 establishments. The aim was to nationalize them all, but that aim was only partially achieved (the Catholics lost control of 1200 of their 5200 kindergartens, the Protestants 400 out of 2855, etc.). During the war, the number of makeshift care centres, staffed by unqualified girls, increased.

After the war, the same emergency (opening of orphanages for abandoned children and the denazification of staff) affected both East and West, but the policies introduced in the GDR and the FRG would evolve in very different ways. In the GDR, the 1950 law on "the protection of mothers and children and the right of mothers" included a commitment to increasing the number of crèches and kindergartens, enhancing sexual equality through work. The need for women in production legitimized State investment in free collective care. Kindergartens were part of the education system (Law of 2 December 1959), then of the unified socialist schooling system (Law of 25 February 1965), but owing to a lack of sufficient means, they were not compulsory and they remained under the supervision of Ministry of Health. There was a permanent gap between the ambition of stated aims and what was in fact achieved. Staffing was insufficient and the public repeatedly criticized the conditions of care. In 1960, out of 12,000 educators, 35% had full training, 15% were given fast-track training and 50% had no training at all. The socialist system promoted no noteworthy pedagogic "innovation" for childcare purposes (unlike in Hungary), but took over the inheritance of the pre-war institutions, with the main emphasis being laid on monitoring the medical condition and health of children. According to the regulations there should be groups of 20 children of the same age, each with 5m², and a ratio of one adult to six. However, in the 1970s and 80s changes took place as awareness grew of the psychological needs of children and the importance of stable relationships (the authorities recommended that children be cared for by the same teachers throughout their time at the establishment). In 1989, 84 % of all children aged between one and three years in GDR (compared with 3% in FRG) were in crèches; that was the usual age for collective care, since mothers who looked after their children after that age lost their allowances. A study of 400 children showed that the experience of separation at that age was difficult, and that children took a backward step for a month or two; care should therefore take that fact into account (Ahnert, 1992). After the reunification of the two Germanies, the collapse of this public care system, which could be criticized but at least existed, was widespread and free, was seen as a major social setback.

In FRG, the post-war evolution was the opposite. Denazification meant condemning collective care, a theme that would later be pursued against the socialist system of the GDR (rejection of indoctrination at an early age, trauma of separation from the mother) by the churches but also the trade unions. The "economic miracle" enabled women to stay at home and everything was done to encourage them. Federal directives therefore recommended that the Länder maintain kindergarten

capacities at a low level (in 1950, 25% of needs were met, 30% in 1955 and 33% in 1969). Compulsory two-year training (introduced in 1928 under the Weimar Republic) was reformed in 1967. Training courses for different types of educators (day care centres, homes and kindergartens) were unified under the label of “State-recognized educators”, who were trained in sociopedagogical establishments.

The general image held by public opinion remains that of an institution, exemplified by the model of charities or social services, for children whose mothers have to go out to work to feed their families. It is also interesting to note that the anti-authoritarian movements that thrived in the 1970s, and invented alternative solutions for primary and secondary education, left the notion of preschool care intact. They never called into question Fröbel’s claim that half a day was the maximum that a child under six years could endure in collective life. Two recent facts have been instrumental in changing mentalities towards early child care: one is the dramatic drop in the birth rate, which has shown the need to reconcile working and family life, as young women no longer agree to undertaking lengthy studies only to be forced into the “3 Ks” (Kirche, Küche, Kinder). The second element is the disappointing result achieved by Germany in the international PISA assessment, which led to a public debate calling the current approach into question: perhaps consideration should be given to longer preschool care that is more concerned with equipping children with the skills they will need for schooling itself. The imperative of free play, inherited from the clear distinction Fröbel wanted to make between kindergarten and school, no longer seems to be widely accepted.

3.3. The nursery school model and its variants: Italy, France and Belgium

Belgium, Italy and France are three countries where children attend nursery school in very large numbers and where such schools come under the same ministry as compulsory schools. The teaching practices in each school must comply with guidelines set by official texts. Parents decide whether their children attend and do not pay. In all three countries, elementary school begins at the age of six, and nursery schools, often located alongside elementary schools, are open in the mornings and afternoons, (almost) like compulsory schools. Both parents and children consider that teaching is carried out by “mistresses”. The groups of children, on the basis of age, are large: a class may number 25 pupils, or even more. These three aspects show differences with the kindergarten model, where small groups (between seven and twelve children according to their age), are looked after for half a day, by specialized educators. On the other hand, at the beginning of the 21st century, the stated aims and teaching practices recommended in all three countries are very similar to those of nursery schools. In both cases a variety of activities take place, in an environment rich in educational and play materials, in order to help children develop socially, emotionally and cognitively, in a “global” manner. “Nursery schools are not schools,” according to official Italian texts. In all three countries children play freely, alone or in small groups, and speak, sing, recite, paint, draw, cut, or listen to stories, look at albums, and start learning to count, read and write. Since nursery school is not compulsory, even though (nearly) all children attend, the teaching “programme” does not have to provide results. On the other hand it is often seen to perform the function of early detection and prevention of children’s difficulties (mental and physical health, sensorial and motor disabilities, late language skills, difficulties with relationships or cognitive problems). However, since teachers have the same level of training, working hours and timetable as their colleagues in elementary schools, their teaching practices are more strongly impregnated with a school culture than in the Fröbelian kindergarten tradition. Nonetheless, behind these similarities, the history of the institution still affects how children are cared for in each country.

Italy

In Italy, large-scale attendance at nursery schooling is a recent phenomenon: in 1968, less than one child in two went to nursery school (47%), but the rate rose to 90% in 1996, and 97% in 2001 (90%

in southern Italy). Owing to the rural nature of Italy, the presence under the same roof of large, extended families and the pro-family policy of the Catholic Church, until the 1970s there was a marked preference for bringing up young children at home. The pioneers of the Italian nursery school, such as the *scuole infantili* for boys of Father Ferrante Aporti (1828), the *asili infantili*, reformed by the Agazzi sisters (1895) on the principles of Pasquali, and the *Casa dei Bambini* of Maria Montessori (1907), were part of a charitable, philanthropic or social movement that assisted the underprivileged. Their institutions were religious or secular, privately or publicly funded, but not under State control (Ruggero, 1999). These experiences led to a parallel sector of private schools, for children from the better-off families. The “infant schools” became part of the Catholic primary schooling institutions run by teaching orders, while the Montessori schools, initially devised for the working classes, soon developed into an international network of highly-regarded private schools, offering a whole course of training. In Italy, the radical choices made by Maria Montessori, who banned prizes and punishments, abc-handbooks and collective classes, programmes and examinations, toys and sweets (*Il segreto dell’infanzia*, Milan, Garzanti, 1950), meant that she was not included in the State network, which tended to follow the *asili* model. Physical exercises, learning about things, manual work and guided games were the basic elements of the educational approach, founded not on mental exercise or memory (as in the “old” *asili* where children learned to read in a chorus), but on the acquisition of skills through action. “Things for actions and actions for habits and life”, as Pasquali wrote in *Il nuovo asilo* (1901). It is a pedagogical approach that is easily ritualized, linking education and a healthy lifestyle, enabling large groups to live peacefully together, and may be mastered by teachers with little theoretical training. Giving children “good habits” was also the 17 credo of French nursery schools until the 1970s.

With Gentile’s major reform in 1923 and the rise of fascism, the nursery school was recognized as a preparatory step towards primary school, albeit with a recreational and educational but not instructive function. It was left to the initiative of private individuals, associations or public bodies other than the State, which had the right to monitor them. The teaching staff needed a legal certificate of aptitude, testifying to their level of training (issued by the political authorities, it thereby consolidated ideological clientelism). In 1925, the Fascist government created the Organizzazione Nazionale per la Protezione della Maternità e dell’Infanzia (ONMI), responsible for crèches and the natalist policy; the organization was abolished only in 1975. The recommendations contained in the *Carta della scuola* of 1939 (manly education for boys, love of the fatherland and its leader) did not modify its organization into several networks. In 1945, the official texts reaffirmed that the mother was the child’s natural educator and that the first school attended therefore had a “maternal” vocation: to teach the child to play, speak (Italian, not dialect) and act, without pre-empting later learning.

Following the strong demand for day care in the years of the economic miracle, new official instructions appeared in 1969. They perpetuated local structures, but underlined the growing need for education in an Italy where urbanization was in full swing. Against the background of the 1970s, attention for working-class children switched from health-oriented demands to psychopedagogical requirements (new “liberal” education standards, the quest for free expression and a culture based on imagination).

Indeed it was the cities of northern Italy that saw the pioneering experiments, the flagship being Reggio Emilia where, in 1981, Loris Malaguzzi founded the National Group for Early Childhood. Such achievements were the result of coalitions between municipal policy (usually left-wing) and district networks involving parents, with the support of innovations undertaken by practitioners on the ground, in partnership with academics in the form of research-action (Bonica, in Rayna-Brugère, 2000). It is also notable as an opening into politics for women. Whereas on average only 5% of Italian children aged under three years attend crèches, in Emilia Romagna the rate is 20%

(compared with 1% in Campagna), thanks to municipal crèches (without State subsidies since 1978) or private ones (Ghedini, 1992). The municipal post of “coordinator of early childhood” (Baudelot Musatti, in Rayna, 2002) quite naturally leads to the conception of an integrated training system from crèche to primary school, or “infancy school”, in the language of the *Nuovi orientamenti della scuola materna* issued in 1991 (requiring a university education for teachers).

In the meantime the demographic situation had switched around. 50% of all children aged under three live exclusively in an adult world, looked after by their mothers or grandmothers (40% of mothers work), without contact with other children, playing alone or watching television (Musatti, in Rayna Brougère, 2000). It is therefore at the frontiers of nursery school that questions are currently being asked: should the age of compulsory schooling be lowered to 5 years? How should crèches be developed and linked to nursery schools? How should child care structures be devised and funded for the under-threes? Demand for crèches is not only a demand for childcare, it has also become the demand for socializing only children.

Belgium

In Belgium, the *écoles gardiennes* (*bewaarscholen* in Flemish) that appeared, as in other European countries, in the mid-19th century, were created mostly in cities (Hainaut, Brussels and Liège), under three regimes that have survived until the present day: establishments could be public (created and funded by the commune or province), free and subsidized (official regime) or free but not subsidized (foundations and religious congregations). A good many of these establishments, free for working-class children, also accepted children who paid as of 1850 (de Vroede, 1982). The foundation of the first Fröbelian Kindergarten in Ixelles in 1857 made the interest of the élites for the “Fröbel method” even keener and encouraged the idea of genuine schools with qualified staff and better care conditions, such that many philanthropic societies handed them over to the authorities. Municipalities took charge of the finances and educational supervision of these new institutions. Two approaches existed side by side for some time, though not without tensions: one set out to align women’s careers on those of their primary school colleagues, according to the French model (until 1914, salaries were not matched, however) while the other preferred to keep the different professions clearly separate, with normal Fröbelian schools, dedicated to training schoolmistresses for early childhood following the German model. The issue of training therefore becomes a major key to understanding the educational approach in Belgium’s *écoles gardiennes*.

Until the first World War, Brussels played an avant-garde role: the city recruited young female graduates to fill vacancies, appointed inspectors and held examinations to recruit headmistresses (who were well paid), demanding a training diploma of teaching staff and holding educational lectures, which it continued to do even when the government made its own arrangements. Wages, higher than in the rest of the country, rose on average by 50% between 1880 and 1914 (Muriel Leblon, 1994). Remuneration and training levels among “gardiennes” varied according to location and the current demographic situation, and the number of nuns remained very high for a long time (still a quarter of the staff at the end of the 1960s). Nevertheless, the image of schools open to all children, within their own cultural and linguistic community (French, Flemish or German), soon replaced that of schools “for the poor”, as shown by the growth in school attendance rates, one of the youngest in the whole of Europe. More than one child in two went to nursery school before 1914, three in four at the Liberation (1890: 28%; 1900: 49%, 1910: 60%, 1920-30: 63%, 1947: 74%, 1961: 91%, and 1970: 97%). The number of pupils almost doubled during the baby boom (rising from 293 000 in 1940 to 467 000 in 1969), only to fall off owing to the drop in the birth rate (1980: 393 000, and 1989: 371 000). Class sizes at one point reached 60 pupils but had dropped to around 20 by 1990 (Depaepe and Simon, 1999).

Between the wars, Belgium was to become a pioneer of new educational approaches (together with Geneva and the Institut Jean-Jacques Rousseau, where both Claparède and Piaget worked). The international fame of Decroly and his institution at the Ermitage drew pedagogues from around the

world to see how his approach of “*centres d'intérêts de l'enfant*” and his “*méthode globale*” for learning to read actually worked. In 1936 this was imposed throughout the primary school system and remained until the 1980s. Growth in the 1950s and 60s triggered the “descholarization” of nursery schools, which became more like play-rooms, where play materials (dolls, kitchens, shops, garages, etc.) stimulated children’s inventive creativity thanks to building games, linguistic play or social mimickry. Montessori’s furniture was also adopted everywhere. Mistresses were encouraged to have warmer, more emotive and informal relationships with the children than in the past, reflecting the change taking place in the way children were brought up at home.

In the 1970s, Belgium became a federal State entrusting education to the Communities (French, Flemish and German-speaking). But there was a further division into three Regions (Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels-Capital), which control and fund the communes (for example, to launch pilot experiments in the care of young children, OECD, 2000). The federal State intervenes in social aid programmes (family benefits or tax breaks). In this new political context, the three networks still exist. In the French-speaking part of Belgium, there are the French Community schools (under the direct control of the Ministry of Childhood), the official network (communal and secular) and the free network (which tends to be Catholic). The latter two networks enjoy full freedom in terms of the educational approach, which accounts for (as in Italy) a local tradition of innovative projects, under the control of conditions for subsidies. The evaluation of staff and establishments is the work of two networks of inspectors, who are themselves teachers, whereas training is assessed through university research (Crahay, 1994). The new arrangements introduced in 1991 finally brought salaries into line with those at primary school (and they are due to be brought into line with 19 secondary school salaries in 2007). Training lasts three years, not at university but in “High Schools” (*Hautes Écoles*, public or free), for the recruitment of teachers for each network, but requires students to opt early on for education and its level: as in Switzerland, the choice of teaching at “nursery school” determines specific training. This choice has enabled the old *Écoles Normales* to be maintained and a professional culture to be transmitted (a network of schools for training courses, links between theory and practice), by extending training by one year (new diploma). These advantages have had their negative effects: better students gravitate towards university and the image of the High Schools is one of second-rate training. The question of handing training over to university still remains (in the framework of the European LMD). The recent reassessment of the function has also widened the gap between mistresses and the auxiliary staff who help them look after very young children (aged two and a half). These “*puéricultrices*”, or nursery nurses, whose training is short, but far superior to that of French nursery school assistants (ATSEM), are poorly paid and their jobs are insecure, a situation that is not exclusive to Belgium (OECD, 2000).

There are currently two issues on the agenda. The publication of the PISA 2004 (VERIF) results revealed uneven performances among fifteen-year-olds: on average those in Flanders fared far better than those in the French-speaking part of the country, though the opinion did not give a “sociological” explanation, i.e. the fact that the mining and industrial crisis has hit the South, or the French-speaking part, harder. The confidence of the French community in its educational network was shaken (Demeuse, 1999, 2005). As in Germany, there is now a movement in favour of making nursery schools part of the primary system (systematically teaching children to read and write, with less emphasis on playing, making school compulsory at five, etc.). The other urgent social question is that of care for the under-threes and care for three- to six-year-olds in and out of school hours. Integrated care projects, the subject of experiments in communal childcare homes (Pirard, 1994, 1997), are being discussed in Belgium, as in other European countries (OECD 2000).

France

The French nursery school came into being with the great school laws of 1880, when it became part of primary education, unlike the *salles d'asile*. It cared for children aged two to seven, but in 1887,

the preparatory class for primary school, or the final year of nursery school, was attached to elementary schooling. In the countryside, the creation of nursery schools was unthinkable (premises were financed by municipalities, which were under no legal obligation). To extend this early schooling it was possible to open an infant class in a primary school (with a full-time mistress), or an infant section in a single-class school (sharing a single room where different classes would take place). These pupils were accepted according to the number of places available. In the years of rural exodus, they avoided or delayed many job losses. Thanks to Pauline Kergomard, inspector general of nursery schools under Jules Ferry, schooling was made longer, as she lowered the age for learning to read from seven to six. On the other hand, nursery school was to exclude excessively early learning (in reading and writing) and formal lessons (in morals and “science”), with emphasis instead on physical activity, games, singing and storytelling. Unlike Belgium and Italy, France banned all religious education and prayers from nursery schools. Between the wars, emphasis was placed on language (vocabulary enrichment, articulation and correct usage) and the acquisition of “good habits”. Mistresses looked after children’s health and well-being, even intervening where families were negligent, whether that meant correcting gestures (holding a pencil) or even behaviour (discipline, rules of politeness and safety). A corps of inspectors was specially entrusted with controlling the network, which fell outside the supervision of primary school inspectors until 1990. Unqualified municipal employees, in charge of cleaning and maintaining the school, also helped to look after the children (washing, dressing and undressing, supervision, meals and afternoon naps).

When France was liberated, almost 27% of children under six attended nursery school: they were working-class children. But, when nursery schools had to take in the children of the baby boom, they also had to meet growing demand from middle-class and even better-off families. In 1958, 85% of five-year-olds were at school, in 1970 almost 98 %. This was a time of considerable changes in economic life; the number of working women (whose numbers had dropped between 1900 and 1960) grew once more between 1963 and 1968 and “rocketed” after 1968 (Norvez, 1990). Enrolment rates steadily increased, through the growth rates differed according to age group: 36% of three- to four-year-olds were enrolled in 1960, 100% in 1998 (61% in 1970, 90% in 1980, and 98% in 1990), whereas attendance by two- to three-year-olds levelled off at one third (10% in 1960, 15% in 1970, and 36% in 1980). The question of schooling for two-year-olds was the subject of a stormy political and educational debate at the end of the 1970s (cf. below). Everyone recognized that ordinary schools and their facilities are inappropriate for such young children (full day, staff, school canteens, dormitories), but should they be improved or should other approaches be considered? Another issue is that school hours do not match parents’ working hours. The organization of day care centres on school premises, before and after classes, and special centres for Wednesdays became an issue for municipal policies. The pedagogic movements for training qualified day care centre staff (requiring the BAFA: *brevet d’aptitude à la fonction d’animateur*) came under the Ministry of Youth and Sport, and trainers were often former teachers, militant supporters of new educational approaches and education for the less well-off, but town halls also used some of their own staff to do the job.

Another educational debate concerned the effects of the “school crisis” on nursery schooling. The widespread extension of secondary schooling revealed, empirically and statistically, the numerous schooling difficulties of all secondary pupils. Class repetition rates gradually increase as children work through secondary school, but the debate surrounding the origins of schooling failure divided sociologists and pedagogues. The teaching of reading was first called into question, and pupils’ problems were blamed on pedagogic problems (arguments over different teaching methods), or psychological issues (dyslexia or emotional blockages), or sociological difficulties (the lack of books in working-class homes and the ubiquity of television). But nursery schools were put in the dock when school language was called into question. Developments in the 1960s, welcomed at the time as beneficial modernization, were regarded in a new light: the trend to abandon a directive,

modelling approach, for a pedagogy of expression and spontaneity, took place when not only better off parents started sending their children to nursery school but also when teachers began to come from higher levels of society (Berger, 1959, 1979). The new pedagogic standards were those of middle-class education, which accentuated the failure of children from less well-off backgrounds (Bernstein 1975, Plaisance 1986). The accusation levelled at nursery schools, considered nationwide as the undeniable jewel in the crown of French schooling, eventually was to have major repercussions. Educational approaches and innovations would no longer be measured in terms of the child's blossoming, in terms of pleasure and motivation, and progress noted empirically by the teacher, but in terms of their effectiveness in the "fight against schooling failure" (CRESAS, 1982). The supervision of nursery schools, which since 1880 had been carried out by a corps of autonomous inspectors, was entrusted instead to the primary school inspectors. The aim was to reduce the "break" with elementary schooling (albeit at the cost of some loss of autonomy).

In 1990, the new guidance law on schools included nursery schools in the administrative network of elementary schools. The introduction of three 3-year cycles of teaching (Cycle 1 for initial learning, Cycle 2 for fundamental learning, and Cycle 3 for further learning) reorganized the prescribed curriculum. Most of nursery schooling was assigned to Cycle 2 (the five- to eight-year olds, for learning to read and write), while still applying the "holist" educational approach specific to nursery schools. Designed to avoid repeated classes and early stigmatization, while ensuring continuity with longer learning times, this organization is proving difficult for teachers to implement. Should the educational tools of elementary school, its handbooks, the giving of marks, be adopted? Should children regarded as "mature" systematically be taught to read? How can they easily consult their colleagues in elementary school, who are part of the same "cycle team" but do not work on the same premises? On the other hand, the move of most of nursery education to basic school learning practices is confirmed. The organization of Cycle 2 (5 to 8 years) looks rather like a French version of the Anglo-Saxon model, in which reading is taught in three years, as of the age of five in classes attended by all children (kindergartens in the United States, compulsory schooling in England). This institutional change is not visible to parents, for whom the premises and teaching staff remain separate. For the children, the preparatory class, before entry into elementary school, is still the one where they learn to read, a symbolic change in their pupil status. This reform of cycles comes at the same time as a reform of training, bringing first and second degree careers into line. Recruited and selected in competitions open to graduates, future teachers undergo one year (or nine months) of vocational training. Nursery school educational methods are not an optional subject (any primary schoolteacher may teach at nursery or elementary school), and while provision is made for a brief training period in a school, the training is inevitably felt to be insufficient. It is on the ground, in informal exchanges between colleagues, or during continuous training courses, that most current educational practices are transmitted.

In all three countries, the same phenomenon can be noted: over the years, parents have been putting their children into preschooling earlier and earlier, owing to policies that have opened classes in response to strong social demand, and also to improvements in care conditions (smaller pupil/class ratios, presence of an adult as a back-up). In Italy, some municipal policies have developed faster than elsewhere the question of integrated early childhood care (for the under-sixes), in accordance with approaches to education that differ from those applied in elementary schooling. In France, whereas the question of childcare has divided public opinion, there has nonetheless been a tendency to turn nursery schools into primary schools and an attempt to make the basic learning curriculum more coherent (main section/preparatory class /elementary class). In Belgium, a country where children are offered care from two and a half years of age, it is the issue of teacher training, split between two models (nursery specialization or single status), and more recently, the uneven school results of the three communities that have been the subjects of debate.

In Italy, Belgium and France, the lives of young children have radically changed, as collective

socialization has become part of the experiences being shared by the masses. Nursery schools have also changed, as children attending them have become younger and more numerous. Thanks to widespread preschool attendance, more and more children stay at nursery school for three years (sometimes even four years, in France and Belgium). This situation has revealed in all three countries the weaknesses and segmentation of the child care networks of earlier years.

3.4. Forms of care, public health and family welfare in France since 1945

In the years following the end of the second World War, there was a demographic explosion across nearly all of Europe; in countries ruined by war the population at large suffered from ill health, especially children, which was made all the more alarming by the “baby boom”. In towns and cities, there was a shortage of food, coal for heating, and milk for babies. Housing was old, insalubrious and, owing to the new births, overcrowded. In areas that had been bombed, whole districts were in ruins and there was a fear of epidemics. In France, the November 1945 decree that rescinded the Family Code, introduced by the Vichy regime, set up, for preventive purposes, systematic medical surveillance in a network of neighbourhood medical dispensaries, and a widespread system of family services, dependent on the number and age of children, rather than on families’ level of income. Pregnant women and all young children were required to be medically supervised at regular intervals and to be vaccinated, by a family doctor, or (at no cost) in the “Centres de Protection Maternelle et Infantile” (P.M.I., Centres for Mother and Child Protection). During these medical visits, the staff at the “Centres de Protection Maternelle et Infantile” (not only doctors but also nurses and child carers) monitored pregnancies and babies’ growth, detecting deficiencies, proposing treatments, and informing and advising mothers on childcare (breastfeeding and artificial feeding, gradual weaning, washing and hygiene, contagious diseases, scratches and grazes). Many ill-nourished, sickly or poorly treated children were sent for “health cures” in the countryside.

These national public health arrangements, which made the carrying of a health and vaccination carnet compulsory, had considerable consequences on the education of urban working class families (the only ones to visit “Centres de Protection Maternelle et Infantile”, while the others consulted family doctors). Family habits changed in a matter of a few years: home births became a rarity, infant mortality dropped, along with problematic childbirth, and childhood diseases became less serious. This health education was also given at school. Girls were taught domestic science, hygiene and childcare. Schoolchildren were mobilized to hold fund operations to send “young people to the countryside”, by selling stamps at home after school. Many teachers staffed holiday camps in the summer holidays, often in former sanatoriums or camps on loan from the army, where they tried to inculcate in children habits they were not taught by their families (daily showers, dental care, afternoon naps, and a balanced diet without sweets or alcohol).

It was as part of the “Centres de Protection Maternelle et Infantile” that urban crèches for the underthrees were set up. They charged parents progressively according to their incomes but, until the 1960s, demand from the middle classes was low or inexistent: at the time they could easily afford daily help. In the crèches, children were looked after by child carers or their assistants under the supervision of a doctor. Only gradually were educational aims added to hygiene, food and supervision (speaking to children when they were changed or fed, offering them activities and games, in addition to giving them educational material and safe toys).

These developments coincided with social changes affecting the way that early childhood was perceived; it was no longer transmitted in practice from mother to daughter by experience but through books that were widely reported in the women’s press. The two bestsellers written by Laurence Pernoud (*J’attends un enfant*, 1968 and *J’élève mon enfant*, 1972) are proof of the media success of publications intended to replace traditional oral culture. Laurence Pernoud’s advice was

still imbued with the earlier obsession with hygiene along with reassuring psychology. But it was Dr Spock's book (*Baby and Child Care*, 1946), which sold over 25 million copies and was translated into French in 1960 as *Comment soigner et éduquer son enfant?*, that was to popularize a more "liberal" concept of early education, impregnated with psychoanalysis. For example he advised feeding babies when they wanted to be fed whereas doctors laid down strict timetables. Mothers were not meant to abide by artificial rules. He was convinced that the practical skills of attentive and well-meaning parents were under-estimated, and that their intuition should be trusted rather than doctor's orders or prohibitions. These books opened the way to an abundant literature on the psychoanalysis of early childhood (led by Françoise Dolto). She was absent from the conflicting representations of early childhood education of the 1950s, but made a breakthrough in professional reviews and magazines in the 1960s and 70s. The question of contraceptive methods, explained in family planning centres since 1956, became a public topic of discussion after 1968, just as the number of qualified women entering professional life really took off. This intensive media attention prepared the public for the Weil Law authorizing elective abortion, passed in 1975. One of the arguments used by the doctors in favour was that it would put an end to the many backstreet abortions which often led to death.

1975 could be given as the symbolic date when the public health emergencies of the post-war period were lifted. The medical corps faced different kinds of preventive issues, thanks to the new technologies that were bringing about a sea change in neo-natality (care for the extremely premature) and foetology (IVF, echography, prenatal detection, etc.). Children were no longer expected or suffered but "born because they were wanted", and this new anthropological approach provided a brand new backdrop for the discourse surrounding approaches to early childhood education, even going beyond developed countries. Whereas those involved in medical prevention at first considered that ignorant working class parents should obey their orders, or be educated at the same time as their children, the fact that children were seen as being "wanted" (potentially at least) brought about a change of attitude towards all parents. They became partners in education as children were brought up by their families and by early childhood professionals. By saying that "babies are people", Françoise Dolto uttered a truth that was not only de facto but also de jure. But whereas babies could be regarded as "people", parents could definitely no longer be regarded and treated as minors.

4. ISSUES AND INNOVATIONS FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

4.1. The involvement of parents in infant care structures

One of the recent but recurrent themes of education policies is parental involvement. Whereas in the nineteenth century, the concern was to make up for parental shortcomings, and in the twentieth to educate parents while taking care of their children (medical supervision, food standards, educational guidelines), the first years of the twenty-first century are marked by explicit policies of coeducation and partnership. What lies behind such proclamations? In what respect do they change possible approaches to early childhood education? Many community structures are known to provide for the involvement of parents in their decision-making bodies or in their operation, although in practice this involvement may prove extremely superficial. Thus, in France, parents form part of the "educational team" of schools, which is broader than the "pedagogical team", limited to members of the teaching body, and they take part in their own right in nursery school council meetings. But this presence gives them no power to decide on the school's policy choices. On the other hand, in Denmark, parents form a majority in the governing boards of the municipal infant care services (Rayna and Bennett, 2005). National traditions play a very important role, sometimes being conducive to collaboration and at other times impeding it, by perpetuating relations of trust or mistrust between parents and teachers. Wherever community structures are still marked by the idea of alleviating family shortcomings, making up for parental

irresponsibility or removing children from a harmful or uncertain environment, it is hard to establish collaboration with parents on a basis of reciprocity. The training given to professionals is explicitly affected by this, showing a range of concerns running from attempts to form an alliance with parents to efforts to sideline them.

What arguments militate in favour of this new approach ? Among those put forward by policies of the various countries, some constants can be identified. It is generally on the basis of the most “difficult” situations that professionals have realized that children could not be looked after in ways that would be beneficial to them without the collaboration of the family. Such is the case in the developed countries when efforts are made to integrate into the regular structures children with special educational needs (cf. below), in particular with disabilities, children suffering from ill-treatment or children in situations of extreme poverty (ODASS, 2005 ; ONED 2005, El Hayek, 1992,1997).

In the emergent countries, with the development of extreme poverty in urban areas, the collaboration of professionals with families and in particular with mothers offers a means of bringing about a lasting improvement in children’s hygiene and health (prevention of infectious diseases, AIDS, tuberculosis) and in the education and literacy levels of girls (UNESCO, Education for All, 2005).

Developments in educational thinking, which increasingly assign central importance to coeducation, implicitly assume that it is possible to pursue common educational aims. Collaboration between parents and professionals is then thought to ensure a coherence that is felt to be necessary for the child’s “harmonious development”. This presupposition is tinged with idealism, and sometimes indeed with naïveté. There can be conflicts between the educational aims of parents and professionals (as is seen in the education of girls) and there is nothing to be gained from denying or ignoring them. On the other hand, these exchanges are the only means of enabling each partner to grasp (if not to accept) the other’s point of view. Professionals may thus understand why some of their recommendations will be ineffective or futile or be regarded as aggressive by certain families, when they presuppose inadmissible rules of life or enter into contradiction with the collective values of the reference group (cf below, indigenous languages ; Koranic education). If these realities are disregarded, parents may be reluctant to entrust their children or may prefer to resort to more costly and less protected forms of care, but less alien to their social representations and their ways of life. In the nineteenth century, the social distance between the “bourgeois” supervision of English infant schools or German kindergartens and the target working-class population is what accounts for the long persistence of the practice of using the services of undeclared child minders who belong to the same working-class world, despite the critical remarks made about them by the authorities.

This is no doubt how we should interpret the establishment of many “parent support” systems, in which infant care structures play a central role. For the USA, we may cite the workshops developed under the Head Start programme; for Italy, the weekly meetings between parents and teachers at Reggio Emilia; for France, the *Classes passerelles*, the *Maison verte* (sponsored by Françoise Dolto), the association ACCES (in which the voluntary helpers go into Mother and Child Protection Centres and day care centres and introduce toddlers to their first books).

These exemplary measures (very often covered extensively by the media) remain however the work of “activists” ; they are not easily institutionalized or adopted on a lasting basis. The fact is that all relations between professionals and parents require time and working parents are of course those who have the least time. When parents are unemployed, the time when they are available does not coincide with that of professionals. Informal exchanges (discussions with the mothers at the supermarket, on the occasion of a party or the sickness of a child) are often more fruitful than

formal meetings but, by definition, they cannot be scheduled. The fact that professionals almost never live near their place of work does not facilitate such exchanges. However, the significant cultural gaps that exist between the most fragile social groups and early childhood specialists cannot be surmounted unless both sides can be relied on not to move around too much. Relations of trust are built up over a period of time. The combination of two kinds of mobility – that of professionals, for reasons of career, and that of families, for reasons of precariousness – gives little cause for optimism for the coming years. Only institutional measures (for example, accumulation of index points for teachers remaining five years in a “difficult establishment”, as is the case in France for teachers in the Priority Education Networks, formerly known as Priority Education Zones) offer a means of slowing down turnover, which, according to researchers, is the primary cause of the low efficiency of American day care centres.

4.2. Integrated models and the invention of new professions. The example of Sweden and Denmark

The 2001 OECD report on early childhood compares the way in which 12 countries provide care for children up to the age of six/seven. Two years later, 12 other countries were examined. While it is relatively easy to compare economic and budgetary investments, it is more tricky to compare educational approaches. One first reason lies in the existence of “untranslatable” terms, in so far as what the term designates does not exist in other languages, in particular in English (Moss, 2004). Thus, the term “pedagogy” is often translated by “education”, but the real difficulty lies rather in the fact that the profession of “pédagogue” does not exist in the Anglo-Saxon countries. The use of the word “teacher” to translate it gives it a scholastic connotation absent from the relational and holistic tenor of the functions involved. “The *pédagogue* seeks to address the child as a whole, a child with a body, a mind, emotions, a creativity, a history and a social identity.” (Moss and Petrie, 2002). Underpinning the designation of functions is an institutional (and not only conceptual) definition of the work, hinging therefore on what it involves pedagogically : “ We often see the term *pédagogue* translated by teachers or social educators (...) which reveals an inaccurate understanding of the significance of pedagogy in Denmark and in other parts of mainland Europe” (Jensen and Hansen, 2003). Similarly, when the title “kindergarten teacher”, linked historically to the kindergarten and to the educational model it represents, is replaced in France by “éducateur de jeunes enfants” (EJE) (infant educator), only insiders know what profession is involved, in what way it resembles or differs from that of other “educators” (specialized teachers, rehabilitation personnel, community educators, etc.) or other early childhood specialists (nursery school teachers, school or independent child minders, infant teachers, recreational and day care centre personnel, nursery nurses, assistant nursery nurses, etc.). Ends and means are currently described in such blanket terms that it is difficult to identify actual approaches in the formulation of goals and curricula and, above all, to understand how “work sharing” translates into the organization of care (who does what, with whom, when and where ?).

To compare national educational practices and understand ongoing developments, one of the most effective means is to describe the various professions involved. This gives a definition of the public concerned, the level and the content of training required, career prospects and the hierarchy of posts. It offers a direct means of knowing, behind the fine words, what “value” a country really gives to those who take care of young children. The Belgian nursery school nurse and the French nursery assistant could both be defined as carers providing support to teachers, but their status and salary immediately show the difference between their functions and those of nursery nurses, day care centre psychologists or teachers. The comparison also sheds light on the surrounding cultures and priority values of the various professions. While training and pay levels may be the same, it is not the same thing to have been trained in an institute coming under the Ministry of Social Affairs (school of welfare workers and educators), the Ministry of Public Health (schools of nurses and nursery nurses) and the Ministry of Education (primary teacher training schools).

What is new is that a number of these courses of training have been or are in the process of being attached to universities. Curriculum design and content, length of courses and examinations have had to be spelt out in writing in order to have official approval, while traditional systems of training operated (and sometimes quite well) on the basis of practical and non-verbal knowledge, which made them familiar to their users but very impenetrable to outsiders. Universities must on the contrary define common core training courses, systems of equivalences, credit systems for professional experience, and methods of evaluation. The clarity and simplicity of a training system (as reflected in an organization chart) are decisive qualities for serving as a benchmark in international comparisons, but does this clarity make the system more efficient? Does it make any difference to actual effectiveness? It fudges over the place of the lesser-qualified and precariously employed auxiliary staff who abound in the different systems. In any case, it produces changes in image portrayal which have objective effects (as we saw with the Belgian *Hautes Ecoles*), even though their effects on future professional identities cannot yet be anticipated.

This does not mean, for all that, that the cultures of origin of the former professions have vanished into thin air. For the space of a generation (the time required to renew completely all of the teaching staff), continuity prevails. In training centres, the forms of knowledge, values, behaviour and ethics associated with the former profession persist. As the young people undergoing training gradually assimilate old and new, so they develop a professional identity whereby each person distinguishes his function from that of all the others and recognizes himself in that of his colleagues. Thus, in France, teachers in primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education have for the past 15 years had the same initial university qualifications, the same salary and the same training institutes. That has not removed the difference between educational cultures at primary level (multi-subject teachers responsible for a class) and secondary level (teachers having an academic speciality and a timetable divided between several classes). Typically, the former still continue to “have classes” and the latter to “give courses”, reflecting two different pedagogical models.

If we consider infant care services from the perspective of professions, ongoing developments allow us to distinguish between countries where such services form part of an integrated whole (Sweden, Denmark) according to an innovative model, and those where they are divided into two main sectors. In this older model, the sector responsible for early schooling is separated from that receiving children up to the age of two or three or even up to the age of compulsory school enrolment. The first sector includes teachers or “infant educators” of university level (*école maternelle* in France, Italy and Belgium, kindergarten in USA, Germany and the Netherlands, and infant classes in England), whether or not aided by lesser-qualified assistants. The second sector comprises “educators” with very different kinds of training and status who work in other infant care services (day care centres, crèches, nurseries).

In England before 1998, for example, functions were ranked in descending order as follows: teachers, “social workers” in infant care centres, classroom helpers and, lastly, untrained and very poorly paid home child minders. It should be recalled that at that time, preschool-age children with working mothers were minded by the family (more than one in two), child minders, “nursery assistants” (more than one in four) or nannies who would look after children in their homes (40 per cent of nursery nurses became nannies). Public or private day care centres (companies, local authority, voluntary organizations) concerned only 4 per cent of children (2 per cent of 0-to-four-year-olds) (Melhuish, 1992). Since 1998, the number of classroom helpers has increased through the action of the government, which has also tried to put in place an “ascending scale”, making changes in status possible by way of continuing training. But there still remains a sharp division between “child minding” in the hands of auxiliary personnel and social workers, and the education given by teachers (Moss, Coram, 2003b). The latter seek to ensure universal access to

education, whereas the former are entrusted with a mission to provide social protection and combat exclusion “with emphasis on lowering poverty levels and mounting unemployment. Priority has been given to the further development of day care centres for working parents”. Since “a concept like that of pedagogy does not exist” (Moss and Petrie, 2003a), there is no real prospect of integrating care and education. In contrast, the two countries proposed by the OECD and UNESCO reports as models of “integrated services” are Denmark and Sweden.

In Sweden, all early childhood services have since 1996 been incorporated into the education system, which caters to young people from 0 to 18 years of age. This remodelling has radically affected teaching arrangements in schools, as preschool age children and seven-to-nine-year-olds are now accommodated in the same premises throughout the entire day, under the care of teams including primary and preschool teachers and “free time activity leaders” under the supervision of a *rektor* who may be from one of these three bodies. “Hence this does not constitute a takeover by the school but the possibility for all services to find a new and equal meeting place” (Johansson, 2003). This pedagogical reform legitimately requires a reshaping and upgrading of the training of these three professional groups which will eventually be brought together within a single body. Only those students aiming to teach in the final stage of compulsory education (16-19 years) have to undergo four years of training. The others have to follow a three-year training course comprising modules of which some lead into all levels of education, while others are more specially targeted at preschool centres or care services for children of school age (out-of-class supervision). As no members of this first generation have yet taken up a post, it is too early to evaluate the effects of this reform, negotiated with the trade unions on a fairly consensual basis.

Denmark is the only country where young children are looked after collectively from the age of one, from the end of maternity leave (the employment rate for women is among the highest in the world: 90 per cent). Child care structures organized on a day-to-day basis ensure a “twofold socialization” of children, 70 per cent of whom between the ages of one and five are commodated within the public system (20 per cent in an approved home day care centre for one-to-three-year-olds, and 50 per cent in a collective centre). Children aged between two and seven, including a majority of three-to-six-year-olds, go into kindergartens. One full-time adult is responsible for six children, but it is more common to have larger groups (from 18 to 24 children of different ages) with two or three supervisory staff. Children enrolled in school (six to ten/eleven years old) are looked after each day in leisure centres and care centres outside school hours (Langsted, 1992). Since 1992, three child care professions have emerged (kindergarten teachers, three-to-six-year-olds, specialists in after-school and out-of-school activities, six-to-eleven year-olds, social workers in education working with children under the age of three and children or adults “with special needs”). Training is now at university level (three and a half years, vocational degree level) with possible further training afterwards. Previous professional experience is taken into account, since most of the students have served as unqualified assistants in childcare services (17 per cent are men and 5 per cent belong to ethnic minorities). Training covers four fields, psychology and educational science (30 per cent) social and health studies (20 per cent) communication, organization and management (10 per cent), and physical education, arts, language and environment (40 per cent). The course is scheduled to last 15 months (20 per cent of students spend one month abroad). On the other hand, teacher training has remained specific (and teachers continue to be slightly better paid than child care personnel). What makes the project original is that in future some of the outlets will not relate to early childhood but to the provision of support for all dependent persons (disabled and elderly persons in particular). Thus, on the basis of a specialization in “early childhood”, another, wider speciality has been envisaged, from an angle that separates this profession from the teaching profession, contrary to what is happening in other countries, including Sweden.

The two reforms are consequently very different, but in both cases the education policy choice has been to blend separate functions in order to provide “child care specialists” (and not only infant care

specialists) with shared references. Training is not in itself enough to ensure a common educational culture (as we saw with the separation between primary and secondary education in France), but it is the condition for the possibility of professionals to consider the specificity of their action within a single framework of goals, knowledge and values. In this case, the clear rationale of training is not only an effect of the European protocols (LMD) but seems underpinned by an original educational project.

4.3 The impact of care arrangements on two/three-year-olds

The polemic in France in the 1970s

What measures should be taken to meet the growing social demand for child care before preschool age? In France and Belgium, nursery school can begin before the age of three (two and a half in Belgium, two in France by law, but in actual fact two and a half). This early entry into the collective life of a large group has been the subject of a recurrent debate in France, since the attainment of saturation level for the preschooling of three-year-olds (90 per cent in 1980).

Teachers' unions then demanded that posts be created and that "toddler sections" be opened for the numerous children placed on waiting lists that school principals do not know how to choose from (according to age? social need? the fact of having a working mother?). By the late 1970s, childhood specialists were warning parents and teachers that the diversity of children's needs was making it difficult to put in place a collective educational project worthy of the name (Montagner, 1978); they were also pointing out that forced socialization could cause regression at an age when children are not capable of self-mothering (Dolto, 1977). Because of the large number of children in their care (40 children on average in 1970), teachers cannot respond to individual demands. The experience of waiting and not receiving an answer is painful and frustrating for children ; admission into the class is a source of anguish and separation from the mother a cause of distress; and children may quickly become aggressive when obliged to live together in the same space. It was during that period that studies were published based on Bowlby's theory of attachment, highlighting the anxiety-inducing character of non-parental, or rather non-maternal, care (Pierrehumbert, ed., 1992).

It follows that the public authorities have a choice between three solutions:

- invest in collective care arrangements other than nursery school (develop day care centres and, more generally, the educational care of 0-three year-olds, as is favoured by certain leftwing political and trade union groups);
- promote home care (with authorized child-minders, allocation of parental leave up to three years, increase in the number of temporary care facilities such as child-minding centers, etc) ;
- develop preschooling in nursery school (free, near at hand), which is the solution recommended by teachers' unions, but with adjustments that would need to be given careful thought. Should two/three-year-old sections be set up, separate from the three/four-year-olds, with small numbers and modified timetables? Should mixed groups be encouraged (two-to-four-year-olds, or even two-to-five-year-olds), thereby allowing the little ones to speak with the bigger ones and to imitate their behaviour? Should play areas be organized and part-time schooling, as in kindergarten? Should the presence of a half-time or full-time municipal nursery assistant be demanded? Should separate sleeping and eating arrangements be made for the tiny tots ? (etc.)

In any case, seeking to facilitate higher preschooling rates without any change in the the resources available seems to be a cheap policy choice, which meets parents' demand for child care at low cost, but under conditions that make the implementation of an educational project very uncertain. In France, school enrolment rates for two-year-olds accepted in the first year of nursery schools increased until 1980 (1960: 10 per cent ; 1970:15 per cent ; 1980:36 per cent), but then remained stable for 20 years before again declining owing to the drop in population growth (less than 30 per cent in 2003). The number of places has remained stable, except in schools in the Priority Education

Networks (which then seem to be serving a policy of social prevention for “children at risk”). The absolute number of children concerned has risen and, in the meantime, staffing ratios have distinctly improved (the number of pupils enrolled went from 40 per class in 1970 to 30 in 1980, averaging out at 26 pupils in 1998 (23 in elementary school) (MEN/DEP, 2004).

State of the question in 2004 in international comparisons

- Identification of variables

Between 1980 and 2000 the terms of the problem changed. On the basis of international information available we can make comparisons between systems, using criteria of quality so as not to attribute positive or negative effects to a particular type of child care arrangement (e.g. crèche) without taking into account its mode of operation (the crèche is not a good environment in the United States, and a good one in Sweden and Denmark). We also have well-documented data on the effects of child care arrangements, finely distinguishing between different types of effects (social, intellectual, emotional behaviour). It is no longer taken for granted that cognitive and social development is spontaneously improved by satisfactory affective and emotional development. It has been seen that “good” child care arrangements at the age of two do not always have visible effects on subsequent school success.

In European countries, the majority of children under the age of three are in private care structures. Crèches are very much in the minority (4 per cent of children in France), except in Denmark. In France, 67 per cent of children under the age of three are minded at home. Research has shown that educational interactions (time spent playing, talking with children) increase when the number of children decreases, as it is not possible to cut down the amount of time that goes into physical care (toilet, food, undressing/dressing) and organization (transport, distribution and putting away of material) (Palmerus, 1991, 1995, in Pierrehumbert 1992). However, persons acting in conjunction with one another have to reach agreement on goals and methods in order for these positive educational effects to be perceptible. In the USA, the groups are small, but the instability of staff with little qualifications, given the low salaries, accounts for the lesser development of children (as in Spain and Greece).

- Emotional development

What about the impact on emotional development, which was at the centre of polemics in the 1970s? The examples of Sweden (1992) and France (1991) show that collective structures may have a positive effect on the capacity to express positive emotions, if adults engage in an individual relationship with the child. On the other hand, breaks in the child's routine (change of child minder or nursery nurse) are unfavourable factors and plead in favour of stability of care. One unexpected finding is that the French nursery school is felt to offer greater security than the crèche, owing to the fact that the adult serving as reference is clearly identified (in the crèche there is a succession of adults), but there is no relationship between feeling secure and being more competent socially. In crèches as in schools, children who do not derive much sense of security from their mothers make up for it with friends (if they are outgoing) and not with adults. In the light of Bowlby's attachment theory or Belsky's criticisms of collective care arrangements, it can therefore only be concluded that there is no satisfactory alternative to having a mother at home. Finally, the subjective idea that professionals and mothers have of what constitutes the ideal in child care seems more important than the objective characteristics of the child care arrangement itself (Pierrehumbert, 1992, 2002).

- Social and cognitive development

In the matter of social and cognitive development, the comparative advantages of the different arrangements show that the path of crèche plus school is conducive to a problem-free school career, particularly in working-class communities in France (Zazzo 1984, Cohen 1990, Boulanger-

Balleyguier and Melhuish 1995). However, the expected benefits of a particular child care arrangement in facilitating the beginning of schooling are not as lasting as was initially thought (Florin 1991 and Duru-Bellat 1995). Experience within a group facilitates verbal exchanges in the nursery school (Florin et Martinaud 2002), and ensures a better anticipation of the mental state of other people (decentring), but surveys show the length of waiting times (as much as 40 per cent of the time) both in crèches and in nursery schools. As regards subsequent success at school, the advantages noted are real but by no means make up for differences due to age (depending on the three-month period in which the child was born, differences in evaluation range from 2 to 8.5 points), or to family environment (between higher and lower socio-occupational categories, differences in results range from 5.5 points to 15 points).

How are we to analyze the differing cognitive effects of educational interactions? “Tutorship interaction (Bruner 1983) corresponds first to behaviour serving to support, underpin and make available knowledge and know-how presented by the tutor, and second to behaviour whereby the learner participates and acquires knowledge” (Florin, 2004, p. 18). A field survey (Florin, 1999, 2002) revealed “prototypal” kinds of behaviour on the part of the adults present during an educational game activity. Mothers (working-class and middle-class communities) and child minders directly help the children so that they “succeed”; crèche educators leave the children to act alone while at the same time speaking to them (explaining and analyzing the task); nursery school teachers modify their intervention according to the child and the task and encourage “metacognitive” strategies. Each educational situation thus incorporates a representation of the child’s potential development and learning process and makes choices with regard to transmission models. Whereas mothers and child minders see themselves as being outside the child’s development and crèche educators think of the interaction in terms of a global awakening, teachers immediately view games as an opportunity for learning and the acquisition of knowledge which will be used again later. However, despite these studies, the consensus-based conference planned by the Ministry of Education in 2004 did not take place.

Recent international research findings have thus shed light on the origin of the contradictory results, which attributed to a particular child care arrangement the effects produced by its being used in a particular place. The excellent results obtained by collective child care systems in Sweden and in Denmark in international comparisons show that the quality of care does not result solely from a combination of independent variables. Whereas, in the 1980s, “quality” was defined a priori as being dependent on the level of training and salary, professional experience and equipment, which determined the activities proposed, since the 1990s there has been a return to an *a posteriori* definition. The attention given to the child, the match with individual needs, the stability of staff (which also corresponds to the subjective gratification derived from the exercise of the profession) are factors that make all the difference between objectively equivalent systems. The case of the two-year-olds provides particularly clear evidence that approaches to early childhood education cannot be reduced to early childhood policies.

4.4. Approaches to early childhood education and children “with special educational needs”

Although it has long been thought that children affected by various disabilities, diseases, deficiencies and physical or mental disorders should be cared for in specialized institutions, which alone can offer them the attention and care required by their “special educational needs”, there was a radical shift in approach in the last third of the twentieth century. This trend to integrate such children in their age group and in regular child care structures spills over from the world of childhood and forms part of a broader movement against all forms of lasting social segregation. In Italy, the integration of disabled children in regular classes fits into a long-standing tradition, but the closing of psychiatric institutions has become a general rule since the 1980s. In France, companies are required by law to seek to take on a quota of disabled persons, and specialized education

courses, which were provided for almost 4 per cent of one age group in the 1970s, have gradually been reduced. The situation has recently changed, following adoption of the Disability Act of November 2005.

Moreover, a number of disabilities only become apparent when the child concerned mixes with children of his own age, since so long as a child remains isolated in the family, parents do not notice his “difference”. Hence the primary role of infant care professionals is to alert parents and specialists (doctor, psychologist) in order to request an examination and an assessment to pinpoint the nature of the difficulty and propose special care, which can be given at an early stage. A number of disorders (visual, auditory, speech, psychological) are indeed reversible if they are treated sufficiently early. Others are identified as being irreversible, in which case the child and the family must reconcile themselves with the disability, “a traumatic event that is a source of psychological upheaval for the parents” (Herrou, Korff-Sausse, 1992), but early detection facilitates care and progress.

These measures hinge on ethical and psychological considerations (refusal to create “ghettoes” based on the “exclusion of normality”, a co-educational approach involving partnerships between parents, children and teachers, learning by the other children of the gestures of non-reciprocal aid and solidarity towards others). They also hinge on economic considerations (specialized structures are extremely costly and naturally endeavour to increase their “clientèle”, whereas such children can be integrated into normal structures at little cost) and on psychological ones (children would be able to develop their abilities better in a normal environment, offering a greater range of interactions). A number of psychiatrists have stressed the disastrous effects that collective care arrangements may have. If staffing levels are low, not enough demands are made on children; if they are high, the large number of persons makes it difficult for there to be stable figures who give the children a sense of security. On the other hand, integration into a peer group, when it is possible, has undeniable therapeutic effects (case of parental inadequacies) (Bonnard and Baicoianu, 1992). When such integration cannot be achieved on a full-time basis, as it would threaten the security of the child and of the group (case of a psychotic children, for example), brief shared moments are nevertheless possible, under the supervision of an educator accompanying the child. In France, the creation of posts of school helpers (*auxiliaires de vie scolaire*) is designed to enable the most seriously disabled children to participate in school life without being an additional burden on teachers (children suffering from cerebral motor infirmities, children with appliances, etc).

However, integration is not always possible, nor can it be achieved anyhow. OECD recommends that children with special educational needs should be integrated whenever it is in the interests of the child (and not of the parent -- having a free day care centre nearby -- or of the institution -- filling up numbers to prevent a post from being abolished). In order to take care of infants with disabilities, exchanges of educational experience and know-how are needed between professionals belonging to different bodies (health, psychiatry, education) as well as attentive collaboration with parents. The right of families and children to benefit from collective care arrangements (crèches, nursery schools), as provided for by law, is far from having been translated into reality on account of the costly adaptations and additional workload entailed. Care arrangements are available in the Nordic countries, but Norway is the only European country that guarantees priority right of access for such children. The kindergarten structure (small groups, half-day attendance) might seem more conducive to integration than nursery school classes, but the example of Italy shows that other factors are involved. In fact, as soon as the institution applies pressure on the acquisition of knowledge that serves as an effective tool for the child's subsequent school career, children suffering from psychological disorders are faced with greater difficulties. It is plain to see that the pedagogies of early childhood are so to speak caught between contradictory demands, because the efficacy so urgently sought for knowledge acquisition can be said to be achieved at the cost of other

dimensions of education. The question of children “with special educational needs” reminds us that preschool structures should enable children of mixed development and needs to live together, should foster exchanges between different children, and ensure that the institution truly caters to the respective capacities of each child. It is easy to make these imperatives sound compatible in theory, but for them to be so in practice, the institution must decide on its priorities, which means deciding on its values. Efficient learning does not necessarily rhyme with happy learning.

4.5 The question of mother tongues and local cultures: Mexico and indigenous languages

The International Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes that each child should be able to speak in his or her mother tongue at school. This undertaking was made in order to reverse the situation inherited from colonization, which continued in the countries concerned after the attainment of national independence. The dominant language, the language in which the elites are schooled and administrative authority is exercised, has indeed long been the only recognized and authorized written language, although it is foreign to the oral languages used for the ordinary exchanges of substantial parts of the population. This prohibition has speeded up the disappearance of minority languages or dialects, as parents who have attended school prefer to learn to speak to their children in the dominant language in order to facilitate their social and educational integration. Approaches to early childhood education are then directly affected by the question of the language or languages of education, which make for either continuity or a disconnection between the family and the child care structure. Recognition of the right to the mother tongue in education is a recent development aimed at remedying the situation that has had many contrasting effects. It has gone hand in hand with the revival in Europe of regional languages long prohibited at school. In Spain, Catalan, Galician and Basque have recently become national languages on an equal footing with Castilian; in the United Kingdom, the languages concerned are Welsh and Gaelic, while in France, bilingual nursery schools (using Occitan, Breton, Basque and German) have come into being in this context. Multilingual countries (Belgium, Canada, Switzerland) have had longer experience in this area, which has been a source of guidance, but this right runs up everywhere against the problems of groups uprooted by immigration, which mixes together populations of very different origins and languages. In Vancouver, for example, 35,000 immigrants arrive each year and the most widely spoken languages after English are Chinese, Punjabi, German, French, Dutch, Italian, Tagalog, Spanish and Japanese (OECD report, Canada, 2005). This situation cannot be dealt with in the same way as the right of populations born and educated in their own land. This is then clearly a right bound up as much with geopolitical realities as with linguistic ones.

It is not easier to respect this right in countries where complex social or political situations underlie the language used (case of Arabic imposed on the Berber or Tuareg population, Mandarin whose widespread use in mainland China is due to its use in education, and Hindi in India). The question becomes doubly acute when there exist many spoken variants in nearby language areas (as is seen in the case of the dialects and many patois of the “Franco-Provençal family”), phenomena of diglossia (vernacular forms of Arabic as opposed to written Arabic) and the numerous types of Creole (Caribbean). Maintenance of the colonial language is sometimes a way of avoiding conflicts between communities by adopting for education a language of international communication. In addition, literacy instruction in unwritten or little-written languages raises difficult questions. Linguists, for ethnographic reasons, and missionaries, for reasons of religious pastorship (translating the Bible into all the languages of the world) have provided most spoken languages with systems for transcribing speech into writing, but not always using the same principles. Even if there was sufficient agreement on common forms of written codes (which raises formidable linguistic but also ideological and political problems), the existence of a system of writing is not enough. A number of African, Asian, American and Oceanian languages do not offer access to any written heritage, past or present. The fact of teaching in the local mother tongue does not for all that

lead to children being brought into a universe of social texts that would give a meaning to the learning of reading (primers, school textbooks, newspapers). Then again, because of the publishing market, writers in those countries are encouraged to write in English, French or Spanish, rather than in Amharic, Lingala or Quecha (Casanova, 1999). Without public media stabilizing writing standards (newspapers, books, administration) and without private practice (correspondence) a dominated local language is in danger of soon being disparaged by native speakers themselves and of surviving only residually for intra-community exchanges before disappearing in the space of a few generations. According to linguists, dozens of languages are currently disappearing every year. Those who have become actively involved in combating the disappearance of a number of fragile languages have clearly understood the key role that can be played by early childhood education in safeguarding measures. Conversely, educationists invoke the findings of ethnolinguists to reject an approach that consider only the usefulness of language and reducing it to the role of a mere communication tool needed to succeed at school and to be “employable” on the market. They also reject a repressive approach which sees traditional languages and cultures as no more than obstacles to progress, in that they carry superstitions, backward-looking beliefs and values incompatible with contemporary society. It is easy for them to stress how much phenomena of delinquency, violence and urban pathology, produced by immigration, cannot be reduced to economic problems of poverty, but also spring from a sense of identity loss felt by people who have been uprooted. The pedagogies of early childhood cannot disregard the role of language and culture in the shaping of identity, without which there can be no education.

There are currently two educational approaches to this question, existing side by side. According to the old approach, implicitly based on the example of the colonizers, success in learning at school requires the early acquisition of oral bilingualism. In French-speaking Africa, this is the purpose of the splitting of first grade into two years (CP1 and CP2). The establishment of nursery schools, infant classes and kindergartens, more often private and public, is an important issue for the urban middle classes, who see it as an asset for their children's subsequent education (example of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Youdi, UNESCO, 2005). For the working classes, places of early socialization, like the *Case des tout-petits* (tiny tots’ cabin) in Senegal (Reyna, 2003) are likewise intended to offer a grounding in the language of education upstream from school. This trend began in the 1970s, during the period of rural literacy campaigns, when it was noted that many children who had received little or no formal education remained monolingual, “prisoners” of local rural speech. The watchword of international bodies at that time, reflected in many national policies, was “educate to integrate”.

It was mainly the activists in Latin America, seeking to help the rural populations to catch up with their education, who became aware that the teaching practice thus being encouraged was contributing to the disappearance of local languages. Mexico can be taken as an example. This country contains a wide range of indigenous peoples who were able, during the colonial period, when education was under the supervision of the Church, to use their languages and, in some cases, develop significant forms of legal and political written expression. State schools wavered between two approaches to imposing Spanish: excluding indigenous languages from school in order to impose directly the national language as the language of cultural identity, or use indigenous languages as a support to facilitate “castilianization” (Hernandez Lopez, 1982). In the 1920s, with the revolution, the use of vernacular languages was forbidden in education in order to “integrate” Indian peoples (25 per cent of the population) more speedily into the nation. The Indian question was treated as a problem of backward development until the 1940s with the establishment of the National Institute of Anthropology and History in Mexico City and of the Inter-American Indian Institute (III, 1940) which gave a cultural dimension to the question. A body of bilingual teachers (soon regarded as junior teachers because of their lower academic qualifications) was established to help indigenous children to succeed at school (1963). The development of preschool education dates from the 1970s, a period when the trend was still towards

integration.

“Educar para integrar, léase, educar para exterminar las lenguas y culturas indígenas” (Educate to integrate, which means wiping out indigenous languages and cultures), such was the view expressed by a coalition of teachers and Mexican Indian leaders in the State of Oaxaca (CMPIO). Involved in the special rural development programme, and hence actively concerned about the castilianization of young children, they decided to change tack (Fernando Soberanes Bojorquez, coord., 2003, p. 5). In that State, Indian populations form the majority. The specific machinery brings together the indigenous teachers’ union, linked to the official union, civil society (teachers and associations, supporting foundations or NGOs, providing a means of covering from their own funds the cost of premises, publications and certain operations) and the education authority of Oaxaca State, which pays salaries and oversees schools and school results. This development programme, which concerns only a minority of schools in the State, exists in parallel with the city school where Spanish is the language of education. It concerns several language areas (Mixtec, Zapotec, Mixe, Trique, Huave, etc.) of unequal importance. Some have a visible existence in contemporary society (writers, newspaper or radio journalists and rock or traditional music groups speak and write in Zapotec or Mixtec, for example), while others concern far smaller communities. Some of the members of all these communities have emigrated to the United States (and therefore speak English).

What is the educational approach adopted for early childhood? The primary concern has been the rapid training of teachers from the communities concerned, to make them capable of providing a bilingual education in keeping with national standards. The length and quality of the training vary and often fall short of regular teacher training. They have produced working tools where none previously existed and incorporated local cultural resources into educational activities in a country where state textbooks are the rule. The education centre, which guides the activities of the Coalition of Indigenous Teachers and Promoters of Oaxaca, operates as a resource centre, somewhat along the lines of Freinet’s Cooperative Institute of the Modern School (*Institut Coopératif de l’école moderne* – ICEM), Freinet pedagogy being indeed an explicit source of inspiration in Mexico. Teachers recruited on the basis of their bilingualism now have special university programmes (they are often speak indigenous languages better than they read or write them, having received their secondary education in Spanish).

Rural nursery schools seek to promote the active interest of parents in early education, to make them appreciate the value of their own language (many of them do not imagine that it can/should be taught) and to develop the language-related skills of children (vocabulary, syntax, and knowledge of proverbs and traditional “tales and legends” or the great founding myths of Indian culture). The local language is no longer treated like a back-up language to arrive more quickly at the Spanish language (source language to target language). Periods of time when either one is being used are carefully divided into pedagogical teaching sequences (for the children, a clearly visible symbol indicates what is the language of communication at any particular moment in the class). The following activities are conducted in the indigenous language: learning of numbers orally or in writing, first operational activities, discovery of the alphabet (far longer than the Spanish alphabet), introduction to graphophonemic relations, writing and the reading of vocabulary-enriching words or texts linked to the surrounding natural world and to family activities. The further one goes into the course, the more that this learning content is conducted in Spanish, but adopting finally a teaching method based on a “second language of immersion” . The assumption is that spoken and written Spanish will be learnt more quickly after this “introduction to writing” in the mother tongue and that the mother tongue will thereby be enriched and stabilized. Spanish is very present in the social environment on account of television (as is English). The situation in the 1960s, when many remote villages spoke only their own language, no longer exists because of the mass media.

As nursery school operates on a half-day basis, the adults accompanying children who live far away sometimes stay at the school, thereby allowing them to reassure the children, as the idea of “abandoning” a four-, five- or six-year-old child in the hands of an outsider often runs counter to family custom (Lucero Marquez, 1986). At the beginning of the year or in the toddlers’ class, it happens then that teachers often work under the gaze of parents or grandparents, who sometimes look after smaller children at the same time. These adults provide occasional assistance (in putting things away, cleaning up, taking care of the children and giving information), making it necessary for teachers to show tact in the way that they handle public relations with the families, especially when they are themselves from the area. All the adults in the community can discover what is taught and learnt, how the children are treated, and how they react in different situations. They acquire a familiarity with a school culture which they did not experience in their own childhood and can speak about it to other parents. The nursery school thus plays the part of a “parents’ school”, while at the same time teaching children the rules of life in a big group and the existence of a curriculum in stages (first, second and third year classes). The children learn how to speak in front of the group, to memorize the knowledge acquired (nursery rhymes, counting, vocabulary), to repeat stories read out to them or that they themselves have read (illustrated books produced by the teachers, etc) and to perform writing and drawing exercises. It is too early to measure the effects of this early classroom experience on their subsequent schooling, but this first experience has clearly given the status of school languages and hence of a medium of writing to languages that have had to become standardized for the purposes of formalized and collective practices of transmission. The educational approach used in early childhood thus plays a key role in the evolution of cultural and political issues through the “twofold socialization of children”, to use the Danish term. This twofold socialization brings together family and school educational models around the values or knowledge carried by each language that each adult transmits “without thinking about it” when speaking to his or her children in a given language. The educational use of a “natural” language modifies that language (process of standardization, which is also experienced as a loss of local specificities or variants) and calls into question each person’s relationship to his or her cultural identity, by putting a distance between the language of community communication. The whole question is whether progress in teacher training and in the extension of school attendance for indigenous children together with ongoing economic changes

(better road network taking villages out of their isolation, accelerated rural exodus and the giving of folklore status to indigenous rituals and craftwork for the purposes of mass tourism) will have the effect of consolidating and stabilizing the dual system of education or, on the contrary, of making it less necessary.

This experience can be compared with other experiences concerning language policies for indigenous populations, as in Canada with its education programmes for indigenous communities (Canada, OECD 2005), in New Zealand with the Maoris (New Zealand, UNESCO 2002) and in Papua New Guinea, Norway or Sweden with the Sami population. What marks out Mexico is the size of the populations concerned (indigenous populations account for only 3 per cent of the Canadian population). All of these studies consider that educational approaches that enable children to build an enhanced image of themselves and of the community to which they belong entail an upgrading of the status of the language and culture of origin. It is also necessary for the communities concerned to be strongly involved in the programmes, through the training of teachers from those communities. Another aspect of such approaches is the question of the follow-up given to these bicultural forms of education in the big cities where the immigrant population live in economically precarious conditions, but also in situations marked by cultural “disaffiliation” and a loss of bearings (R. Castel, 2000). The Inuit Tungasuvvingat pre-school assistance programme, in Ottawa, particularly noted by observers, concerns a small urban immigrant community, suffering from poverty and the devastating effects of an urban lifestyle that undermines all the educational benchmarks of families. It is ultimately based on principles that fit in with those underpinning the

Mexican programme. The educational approach adopted for young children ensures family involvement, while immersion in the Inuktitut language is made possible thanks to bilingual Inuit educators who introduce children to the Inuit way of life (organization of space, decoration, games, food and music). Inuit words are posted up everywhere, in Latin writing and in Inuit syllabic writing, with pronunciation guides, which enable parents who no longer have the language to practise it again with their children (OECD report, Canada, p. 71). If other programmes that proclaim the same goals do not have the same positive structuring effects, it is because their implementation requires a level of investment that is not obtained without the effective training and lasting commitment of those involved, which in turn called for the recognition and lasting support of the public authorities.

4.6 Languages and religious cultures: early childhood education and Koranic education in Morocco

In Morocco, a third of children go to preschool between the ages of three and seven. They go into one of two networks, neither of which comes under the responsibility of the State. In 1996, according to official statistics, 234,000 children were enrolled in day care centres and kindergartens, with a balance between girls and boys. These places were run by private individuals, and a small number of them by cultural missions, but many employed personnel without the requisite training. In Koranic schools (*kuttabs*) 583,000 children were enrolled (Bouzoubaâ, 1997). This attendance rate is higher than that of Algeria where, after the closing of nursery schools in 1965 (Nouria Remaoun-Benghabrit, 1992) and the gradual reopening, from 1980, of district kindergartens or nursery schools and infant classes under the care of teachers appointed by the Ministry of National Education, the availability of preschool facilities remains smaller and restricted to urban areas (Zoubida Senouci, 1992). The preschool attendance rate of Morocco is also higher than that of Tunisia where the goal set for the 1991 programme was to increase above 5 per cent the proportion of children enrolled in preschool institutions and Koranic schools.

The whole question is how can the State intervene in these two early childhood education systems and what educational model it should favour. The link between the Arabic language and Muslim culture is particularly evident in the instruction given in the *kuttab* from the age of four. These elementary classes, connected with a mosque but set up anywhere, have long served as the source of basic education for all boys, who there learnt the Koran in written Arabic. The texts, which range from the shortest suras to the longest, are gradually memorized with the help of wooden boards on which the verses are written, which each pupil repeats while reading the written words one by one. Everyone advances at their own pace in the learning process, without any external timetable being imposed. Children learn the texts “without understanding them”, since the meanings they contain, in terms of dogma, ritual and spirituality, will become clear to them only very gradually in the course of their lives, thanks to the commentaries provided by imams when preaching in the mosque. However, once the child has learnt to recognize the three written forms of each letter, according to whether it is at the beginning, in the middle or at the end of the word, the pupil who knows a verse by heart can relate the letters to the sounds, since the correspondences between them are of a perfect regularity. Memorization of the Koran and its recitation backed by the written text consequently offer a powerful and economic means of learning. This method serves at one and the same time to give children literacy instruction, to teach them the written language used throughout the Arab world (both in newspapers and on radio or television) and to steep them in a text that serves as a point of reference in Muslim life and culture.

The *kuttab* which provided schooling for children between the ages of four and twelve had to compete in colonial times with the French school model, with its graded classes and progressive exercises. The postcolonial school retained that structure (before and during the period of

Arabization) with the result that the *kuttab* survived only as a pre-school structure, for children between the ages of four and six or seven. In the context of economic change (women in the world of work), mothers saw it as a convenient place in which to put their children, thus entrusting the *kuttab* with a role for which it was by no means prepared. The type of education provided by the *kuttab* has often been criticized for its retrograde (mechanical use of memory), repressive (corporal punishment), sexist (boys only), ideological (religious inculcation excludes all non-Muslims and does not permit any discussion) and finally linguistic character (children repeat a text in classical Arabic, far removed from vernacular Arabic and completely foreign to the Amazigh/Berber language that many of them use in everyday life). For this reason, “modern” preschool education projects have generally inclined towards the nursery school or kindergarten, on the European model. Such is the model favoured by the intellectual and middle-class elites who make use of private kindergartens for the schooling of their own children. The number of such private day care facilities has considerably increased in the space of a few years, since, according to the director of primary education (Aziz El Houssine, 1992), there were 34,000 children enrolled in 1992, whereas official statistics give 200,000 more four years later (Bouzoubaâ, 1997). This growth shows the size of unsatisfied demand and could only have been achieved on the basis of individual initiatives. Various surveys note that supervision is generally ensured by young women who have not completed their education, with the result that the educational principles proclaimed are a matter of form rather than reality. One may wish to shape the child's personality, refer to scientific psychological data, favour activities conducive to play, free expression and peer-to-peer socialization, but the implementation of these principles is not possible when there is only limited space available, without adequate equipment, and when the excessively large number of children being looked after rules out any proper consideration of individual expression. Moreover, inspectors from the Moroccan League for Child Protection or the Ministry of National Education emphasize that, even in more favourable material conditions, the educator's lack of experience and training causes her “to continue working in accordance with the principles of authoritarian teaching (reasoning according to good and evil, taboos, splitting up of subjects and disciplines)” (Zhor Laâziri, 1992, p. 71).

Even if the quality of this type of schooling is gradually improving, it continues to be reserved for a minority owing to its cost, which makes it inaccessible to working-class children (whereas enrolment costs for a *kuttab* are low). It also represents a Western mode of education, rooted in a conception of early learning and spontaneous child development, which is at variance with Moroccan family values. On the other hand, this is the model that is spontaneously studied and given prominence in university research and international meetings. Thus, at the first symposium in the Maghreb on preschool education, “most of the presentations and discussions were devoted to kindergartens, which in actual fact account for only some 5 per cent of the total number of children in preschool education. The remaining 95 per cent are in other institutions, namely, Koranic *kuttabs*” (Mohammed Faiq, 1992, p. 31). In a way, what we see here are the same contradictions as were encountered by the Mexican innovators, charged with introducing children from Indian communities to the Spanish language and educational culture. Adoption of the dominant model of Western schooling was felt to be a denial or a rejection of the cultural and social knowledge carried by local models of educational transmission. The question is compounded here by religious considerations, as the secular model of the kindergarten, which remains unlinked to any religious denomination, is clearly in total contradiction with an education based on the learning of the Koran. The question of religious education and its legitimization by recognized authorities is not simple (either socially or politically) at a time when religious fundamentalism is on the increase.

In Morocco, the king is regarded as the authority in matters of religion and hence the question of the religious education of young children by the *fiqhs* is placed symbolically under his responsibility. Indeed, it was when he placed his own son in a *kuttab*, at the age of four, in 1968, that King Hassan II launched “operation Koranic school” aimed at safeguarding Arab-Muslim identity and combating

Western (and also no doubt fundamentalist) influences. A team of educational advisers, paid by the Ministry of National Education, recruited in the 1990s, were asked to inspect the *kuttabs* and to introduce changes in their educational practice so as to bring it more closely into line with the explicit goals of preschool education. They imported the French primary school model (benches, blackboard, school textbooks), consolidating a head-on, collective approach. The opposite tack was taken by an action-oriented research project developed by members of Rabat university, the AFTALE project (Work Alliance in Training and Education for Children). Seeking to take advantage of ordinary people's attachment to the *kuttab* institution and its age-old roots in Arab culture, the aim of the project was gradually to change educational content and methods, centring on the teaching of the Koran, without looking to align them with primary school methods.

Changes in content meant that schools involved in the project gradually added to Koranic education reading, writing and arithmetic, singing and physical education. Changes in methods meant that the schools started taking in children of both sexes (25 per cent of girls were enrolled in them in 1996; Bouzoubaâ, 1997) who were divided into two levels (four/five-year-olds and five/six-year-olds). This simple arrangement establishes different modes of intervention according to the age of the children, which is not the rule in the *kuttab* tradition. Alongside the *fiqh* responsible for the Koran, educators teach other activities. One of the main innovations has been to reorganize the physical space by establishing "corners" with mats, cushions and low tables, very much in the Arab tradition. Efforts to introduce material for the children to play with met with greater resistance from parents (unwilling to pay school fees so that their children "can go and play" and not learn) and from the educators, who do not immediately realize that play may have an educational function. Only during teacher training sessions do they realize this and produce material tailored to their educational aims, and as well as inventing novel links between educational play and the Islamic tradition. Thus alongside the "grocery", "library" and "pharmacy" corners, as in a conventional nursery school, the *kuttab* often has also a "mosque" corner, containing prayer mats, posted verses of the Koran and sometimes a model of a mosque made by the children. Lastly, attention is given to the environment, with outings to the public garden, and visits to craftsmen's workshops and to the local clinic. Health education is an important focus of the project, readily accepted by educators, families and the children.

In fact, it is clearly the training of educators (and hence the question of the income that they can expect from a job which is not a vocation) that is a key point for the future. There is currently a tendency for teachers, who before were all men, to be recruited increasingly among women, which has the effect of dequalifying the work and thus hindering its development. "The status of women educators has gone from being of that of housewives to that of group child minders, thus coming to occupy a place between that of a cleaning lady and that of a mother", owing to the fact that there is no legislation governing the *kuttab*, which forms part of the informal education sector. "Male colleagues no longer have the charisma and high standing associated with the image of the traditional *fiqh* and have not managed themselves to impose the image of modern educators" (Bouzoubaâ, 2000). This problem of identity may perhaps account for the excessive authoritarian and directive attitudes noted. The idea is not yet shared by everyone that an infant educator has to have high-level training and skills.

4.7 The gender issue in early childhood education

The gender issue has become a recurrent concern wherever training is dispensed. Irrespective of the surveys or campaigns conducted by feminist associations, a new type of research has developed since the establishment of university chairs devoted to "gender studies" in the United States, Canada and other countries. However, other countries (like France) have not created a university specialization in this field, and research, which exists particularly in sociology and

history, is less systematic (for a summary of the issues in gender studies, see Scott, 1988, 1996, and Thébaud, 1998). Surveys on the legal status of women, on their civic, marital and family rights (in particular their legal power over children), working conditions (professional restrictions, recruitment discrimination, salary and career differences), social protection (maternity leave, family allowances, retraining allowances, pension funds) and education (qualifications, choice of studies) have revealed “objective” inequalities and ongoing changes. Recent research has sought to discern the processes involved in the perpetuation of these inequalities, and the representations often internalized and accepted by men and women as being a matter of “differences” and not of “inequalities”, in other words, a functional if not a natural apportionment of roles between the two sexes (Scott, 1980). These studies, like others carried out on minority or oppressed cultures (descendants of slaves or Indians, homosexual minorities), trigger ideological, political and historical debates and lead to proposals for anti-segregation measures, designed to combat the reproduction of dominant stereotypes from early childhood onwards. As for the gender issue, this can be tackled from three angles :

- question of gender inequality in the matter of care and early education;
- virtual monopoly of women among supervisory personnel ;
- the way in which child care institutions manage the question of male/female roles and promote relevant standards of conduct.

Gender inequality in the matter of care and early education

Situations marked by the “unequal treatment” of very small children are determined primarily by family practices. These are undergoing rapid change on account of new medical techniques (contraception) and economic developments (rural exodus, urbanization). This becomes particularly worrying when we know that the gender of the child is the subject of highly asymmetrical family investments. In some countries, the fact of having a daughter is less of a guarantee for the future, as a son can be expected to bring home a daughter-in-law who will look after his aged parents, whereas a daughter will go off to take care of her parents-in-law in another home. As the Chinese proverb puts it, “ When you bring up a daughter you fatten a pig for your neighbours”. Progress in birth control, to avert risks of overpopulation, has paradoxically increased the pressure (Chinese single child policy). Health studies on South-East Asia, India and China especially reveal a shortage of girls in the population that cannot be accounted for by genetics but by concealed or unavowed practices of infanticide, abandonment or a lesser degree of care. In countries where children “belong” to the father in cases of repudiation, divorce or widowhood, little girls are entrusted more often than boys to orphanages (which explains the number of predominantly female children for adoption in Korea, Thailand and Vietnam).

For the same reason, lesser educational investment goes into girls than boys in so far as the effort required will be less useful to the family group. Consequently, they are used more than their brothers as family labour in their young years. In countries where parents work far from home, young people are often looked after by an elder child who is taken out of school. Studies show that girls are more often taken out of school in this way than boys. A comparative study of five countries (Botswana, Brazil, Mexico, Russia, South Africa) shows that the school attendance of girls has fallen disproportionately in households with children under the age of five who need a minder (UNESCO, Early Childhood, 10 February 2003). When there are two working parents in the family there is no or very little interrupted schooling, whereas this occurs on a significant scale when the child belongs to an extended or single-parent family. Children with interrupted schooling who belong to extended families of a traditional type living still in accordance with “rural” patterns, will probably fall behind in future years, whereas interrupted schooling in single-parent families is a “modern”, urban phenomenon, as in Brazil or Mexico. In those countries one elder child in three is taken out of school to mind the younger children when the mother is alone. As we know, this

phenomenon (poor mothers, living by themselves on the outskirts of cities and working far from home) is on the increase.

Infant care institutions consequently have an important indirect effect on the education of elder children, particularly girls. Infant care systems produced always less inequality than families. The separation of boys and girls was the rule after the age of reason, children being educated by adults of the same sex (which accentuated educational inequalities as women primary schoolteachers long received less training than their male counterparts). Unlike schools, infant care institutions were the first to practise an education grouping together boys and girls under the age of seven, except in the case of orphanages run by religious orders, where the friars or priests looked after boys alone (over the age of three or four), whereas nuns could take care of children of both sexes. Co-education in early childhood has long been based on the family model (as the title “nursery school ” still suggests). This has never been a problem for the authorities, even though the idea of an “innocent”, asexual childhood is a middle-class nineteenth century representation, demystified by Freud, rather than a belief held by the working classes, who see sexual games among small children as being just the kind of things that kids get up to, without any consequences. Thus, sanitary facilities are strictly separated for children over the age of seven (dormitories, toilets and showers for girls separate from those of boys), which is not the case before that age. Toilets have often been designed as open, collective areas, to facilitate surveillance for the purposes of security. Observance of the rules of decency is thus put off until later, often until elementary school age when children should no longer need help to keep clean. Nowadays, without using lavatories closed from inside, shoulder-high dividing walls protect the children's privacy. The treatment of boys and girls in infant care institutions, legally the same, is thus out of phase with family customs and in a way “in advance” over egalitarian family practices in the treatment of children. However, this observation should be seen in relative terms, taking into account two other phenomena. First, the supervisory personnel, the vast majority of whom are women, perpetuate in practice a model of task sharing that runs counter to the principles of egalitarianism; and secondly, the standards of behaviour proposed to children are marked by the values or prejudices (depending on the point of view adopted) of the surrounding society or specific to the supervisory personnel.

Monopoly of women among supervisory personnel

Contemporary studies on changes in the job market have led to it being regarded as a fact of life that there is a cause and effect relationship between the feminization and dequalification of a profession, this dequalification being at once economic (smaller salary) and symbolic (in the social image of the profession). Such is the view spontaneously taken by many historians, who regard the monopoly exercised by women over infant care professions as a sign of its low social value. This “non-qualification” (rather than dequalification) has long been based on the model of the mother, which serves as its benchmark. In Germany in 1885, the arguments put forward for refusing to establish a State examination for women child carers were that “the qualities of a good child carer depend more on her temperament, tact and overall personality than on the sum of her knowledge” (Budde, 1999, p. 69). Yet, for this author, the two branches of activity (day care centres and the more bourgeois kindergartens) both contributed to the promotion of women's employment in Germany, as in other countries (for France, Luc. 1998).

The presence of male child carers was however demanded as early as the nineteenth century, particularly in Germany where in churches, municipalities and schools, responsibilities were in the hands of men. When the German revolutionaries of 1848 asserted that men had a place in kindergartens, this demand could be interpreted as a progressive proposal (for male and female staffing) or as a refusal to lose a power that they considered to have been established once and for all. On the other hand, in the United Kingdom, United States and southern Europe, women rapidly

acquired a monopoly that was not to be challenged for a long time. This women's world was of course very much ordered by rank (from inspector of day care centres and schools to the simple child minder) in accordance with the usual social division of the time. For women as for men, intermediate professions (primary school teacher, crèche or school director) offered channels for social advancement.

This female monopoly, recently abolished in law, has not decreased in practice. Men who choose to work in nursery schools are a tiny minority, and paediatricians operating in crèches, who long were exclusively men, are now in the great majority women. The Nordic countries are an exception, seeing to it that men remain in certain activities (role of sports coaches for open-air activities, in Sweden and Norway). Denmark is the country that recruits the most men for the profession of child carer (17 per cent of students and 5 per cent from ethnic minorities). When the “paediatric” culture of professionals is greater than that of parents, they readily assign themselves a role in parental guidance, which may sometimes not be taken kindly to. Conversely, highly qualified parents expect crèches, child minders, child carers or primary school teachers to take specific account of their children, bearing in mind their own suggestions, which may be regarded by the professionals as an intrusion (Baudelot, 2000). Comparisons between child care arrangements in different countries, between France and Japan (Baudelot, 2005), France and the United States (Brogère and Tobin, 2000), and Sweden and France (Almquist and Brogère, 2000) reveal the existence of national paradigms or international models shared by parents and professionals as self-evident truths. In developed countries, the image of infant care professionals is currently linked to qualifications in the form of diplomas, some of a high level, but this is not the case in the rest of the world. Social representations of the Moroccan *kuttab* (cf. above) currently place the child carer between the cleaning lady and the mother; men belittle a profession that no longer enjoys the consideration shown towards the traditional *fiqh* (Bouzoubaâ, 2000).

The predominance of women among infant carers has effects on relations between parents and children. As regards relations to parents, the women professionals concerned feel that they are first and foremost “mother substitutes”, so that they do not treat the two parents in an “egalitarian” way, but systematically give preference to the one for whom they feel that they are substituting, in other words, the mother. Thus, when a baby is sick at a crèche or when a child gets hurt at nursery school, the mother is unfailingly the one who is warned or called at work, even if the father is known to be available or nearer (Blöss and Odena, 2005). It is taken for granted that it is the mother who is “really” responsible for the child. This attitude is grounded in a reality, since women look after children much more than men (Boch and Buisson, 1998, but it makes such conduct the norm (the mother must be regarded as the one who is truly responsible for the child). Moreover, it is interesting to note that while it is mainly the educated classes who talk about shared parenthood (Delaisi and Perceval, 2000), the practice of sharing is more common among skilled workers, foremen and supervisors than among managers and members of the professions (Fagnani and Letablier, 2003). The fact that it is mothers who are turned to by nursery nurses or nursery assistants, whose levels of training are however very different, partakes of the same traditional ideology of mother-child relations: looking after children is (in fact and in law) the exclusive preserve of women, as is proved by the “specialist” professions. The absence of men from child care institutions is moreover particularly marked when power is in the hands of the parents: there are some male child carers in kindergartens and nursery schools, but the nursery assistants, chosen by families, are 100 per cent women. As is noted by Brogère and Tobin (2000), fear of imagined paedophilia is not irrelevant to this exclusion of men, even if it takes different forms according to the country. The immediate assumption is that all women have a dual body, that of a woman and that of a mother, whose contact is a “all-embracing and protective, then consoling and restorative”, whereas men, as represented, are less likely to be seen in the guise of a father (Moisset, 2005).

There are relations to parents, but also to children. In the eyes of infant care professionals,

who have read the psychoanalysts during their training, the fact of leaving a young child in care always runs the risk of producing an “emotional deficit” consequent upon separation from the mother (and not from the parents). Child care institutions express this through the omnipresence of “comforters”, intended to overcome the separation and to make up for the mother's absence. Families are asked to provide them, even when the child does not have one at home and does not express the need for it (Blöss and Odena, 2005). Nursery assistants, who look at themselves as good substitute mothers and could not develop the logic of the crèche without denying themselves, also see their role in terms of the single image of motherhood, associating the father with a masculinity that excludes him from this field of competence.

On the question of how to interpret these phenomena, which relate to representations of the mother's/father's role and their effects on other educational interventions, not everyone agrees. As the professional outlets in these sectors are reserved for women, it is stressed that they have been and continue to be a socially accepted platform for the emancipation of women (with a qualification, a salary and tasks that are considered to be role-enhancing). Stress may just as much be laid on the paradox of professions that are only role-enhancing “for women” and that often contribute to the social reproduction of domestic stereotypes. We see the height of the paradox when the women professionals concerned themselves have young children whom they leave in order to serve as “mother substitutes” for others.

Surveys revealing the excessive burden assumed by women, who have to manage a “double working day”, often lead into egalitarianist indictments, denouncing the disproportionately small participation of men, suggesting a view of “child raising” as no more than a domestic chore that squanders time and strength. More searching surveys show how this excessive workload also offers a means of assuming power over the child, a power that mothers do not necessarily want to share with their husbands, except as occasional backup. Their “female complicity” with the child care service helps to legitimize this power, which may be thought of as the domestic substitute for a power that they exercise less than men in the professional arena. Conversely, the power of men in the public (economic, social and political) arena may be said to be peripheral to the essential “anthropological” power, the right of life and death, held by the person who holds a life between her hands. Motherhood is seen as a means of enabling women to share the fantasies of “omnipotence” that form part of the professional imaginings of doctors, but in the domestic sphere. This interpretation overlooks the fact that in the world of work most men are confined to operational and service activities, or that the timetables imposed on managers and members of the professions generally prohibit them from thus sharing in the work of infant care, and that those among the working class who assume this task do so for economic reasons (so as not to pay for a child minder) and are not because of ideological considerations (Fagnani and Letablier, 2003). Those who take an ideological stand in favour of the parity of male and female social roles, after drawing their arguments from a comparison of the unequal distribution according to gender of jobs that enjoy high social recognition (material and symbolic advantages), are now turning to the unequal distribution of role satisfactions provided by a domestic function which is “essential”, because on it depends the life of a child. If child care personnel consisted of both men and women, even with men in a very small minority (as is the case with male paediatricians) the monopoly of the maternal relationship over the education of young children could no longer be taken for granted and the relationship of such personnel to fathers would change simply because the image of the “infant care professional” would be disconnected from the maternal referent, which currently rules out any other.

The way in which child-care institutions manage the question of male/female roles and promote relevant standards of conduct

Children's sexual identity becomes socially established in early childhood through outward

signs that convey to other people whether the child is a boy or a girl. There are few historical studies on the way in which family practices have or have not been adopted in child care centres, as reflected in symbolic manifestations of gender, such as clothes, colours and adornments (embroideries, jewellery and hairstyles), serving to distinguish between girls and boys upon their being delivered in maternity hospitals, but also in nurseries and crèches. As soon as children start walking, the typical male and female attributes become more visible (long/short hair; trousers/dress, etc). In many countries, compulsory school education means wearing a uniform, but this is not always the case for the smallest children. Through many forms of encouragement or regulation, boys and girls are led to regard themselves as members of one of the two groups and to adopt the expected behaviour. It is here that the educational choices of families play a possible shaping role by prompting children to repress reactions or to adopt preferential types of conduct according to the “gender” to which they belong. These incentives may or may not be reinforced in the infant care institutions. Even if the personnel of crèches and nursery schools may feel that they treat girls and boys in an “egalitarian fashion”, their reactions cannot be wholly detached from the habits, prejudices or values prevalent in the surrounding society (for example, encouraging energetic physical games for boys more than for girls). In the same way, the interventions of teachers are, usually unknown to them, marked by shared representations of the social roles of the two sexes. Studies have been carried out on the games and toys available in classrooms, as well as surveys on interactions between children and teachers at nursery school, but also on the spontaneous attitudes of children towards one another.

As regards the play materials made available to children in schools between the ages of two/three and six/seven, in Sweden as in France (Almquist and Brougère, 2000), certain types of material, even though widely bought by families, are not allowed into schools. Warlike toys (weapons, guns, military vehicles, tanks, military outfits, miniature soldiers) are absent from schools in 90 per cent of cases in Sweden and 96 per cent in France. Barbie dolls are absent in 70 per cent of Swedish schools and 89 per cent of French schools and, when they are present, are there in far fewer numbers than the baby dolls present in all schools. The games that are found in large numbers are “neutral” games (learning, creative, construction and motivity games). There is a similarity in the games of imagination associated with baby dolls, fluffy toys and dinky cars found in schools in Sweden and the first years of nursery school in France (as children go up from one class to the next in France, play materials give way to more educational materials). It is, however, not clear how this should be interpreted. It may be seen as a principled resistance on the part of the school to the consumer society and to the male/female (soldier/Barbie) stereotypes for which it serves as a vehicle, or simply as an educational throwback, with school mistresses favouring the toys of their own childhood with the result that Barbie dolls are gradually being introduced. Without a collective debate on practices and customs and the educational issues at stake in the use of such play materials, market consumer patterns end up by prevailing in schools notwithstanding their resistance. However, schools are very big consumers that may influence the choices of manufacturers (just as they may influence the production of children's albums and books). Light can be expected to be shed on this question by a survey currently being carried out in Brazil.

Where interactions between adults and young children are concerned, field surveys typically contrast the “egalitarianist” conviction of educators with behaviour or beliefs linked to a “differentialist” conception of expected abilities or standards imposed on children according to their “gender” (Acherar, 2003, Mosconi, 2004). In France, the way in which women teachers distribute their questions, congratulate children and express their approval or disapproval regularly shows that boys are systematically encouraged and called on to express themselves more than girls. In a coeducational class, the way in which exchanges are regulated is determined essentially by exchanges with the boys. Here too, it is difficult to interpret this, as it may be thought at one and the same time that the way in which school mistresses encourage girls to stay in the background or to act as helpers boosts external social stereotypes, but school mistresses also

know that at elementary school those pupils who are “statistically” most in difficulty are boys from working-class backgrounds (learning of reading and spelling in particular). To be relevant, surveys should therefore combine an analysis in terms of “gender” (interactions with boys or girls) with an analysis in educational terms (interactions with children according to their success at school) and social terms (interaction according to family origins).

In school playgrounds, children also make difference choices of activities and partners according to their gender. In an experimental study of Sheffield (Smith, 2000), playing areas and the quantity and types of play materials used were varied in playgroups for children aged between three and six. The results obtained show few differences between the sexes in regard to choices of games and toys. On the other hand, the choice of a play partner of the same sex is more common in big groups (15-25 children) whereas in small groups (6-8) there is a mix of genders. When the play area is smaller, aggressive behaviour increases but not only on the part of boys. When the groups are small (under 10 children), there are more spoken exchanges between the two sexes and more storytelling games (as opposed to motivity activities) and the games last longer. In French nursery school playgrounds (Acherar, 2003), boys take up the whole area for running and jumping games, whereas most of the girls often play in twos or in small groups of four to six girls. They have more stable contacts with the one another than the boys and their activities are calmer, with more symbolic games and more frequent verbal exchanges.

Thus, even when they are playing freely among themselves, children at a very early stage adopt behaviour patterns whose frequency depends on the sex to which they belong. This frequency easily establishes itself as a group norm which, if adults do not take care, may become, simply by way of interactions between children, a form of conduct which is compulsory or forbidden, admired or decried (according to the sex considered). The role of adults is therefore to seek to broaden the range of behaviour in which children can invest themselves in a positive way, and without denying the existence of behaviour linked socially to gender identities and without setting it up as a gender specific stereotype (Désert). A large number of educational programmes are currently being developed (either for teacher training or for children-oriented interventions) to promote a practical awareness of these issues. Thus “A quoi joues-tu?” (What are you playing at ?) is an educational programme supported by the European Commission in Brussels designed to promote non-sexist behaviour between girls and boys in nursery school (www.cemea.asso.fr/aquoijouestu/fr). Mention could also be made of the Québec programme “Les p’tits égaux” (adapted in France). The same work is being done with children's books, not in order to rewrite traditional tales in “politically correct” versions, but to get children to think about how gender identities are constructed (Novelle, 2002, 2003).

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