Research and experience give evidence of the importance of analyzing parental involvement as a product of the interrelationship between the perspectives and barriers of individuals and the philosophy and barriers of schools (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003). This complexity becomes more evident when teachers and parents do not share a common cultural background or language (e.g. Hayden et.al., 2003) as is more and more the case in many European countries where a significant percentage of children enrolled in early childhood and care services are children of recent immigrants. However, few studies in the field of early childhood education explore these issues from the perspective of immigrant parents.

In this presentation we will focus on what immigrant parents and teachers think of their roles and relationships using some of the preliminary findings from the international Children Crossing Borders study that explored what parents and teachers think and wish for their children in preschools in five countries (US, Italy, Germany, UK, France). Focus groups with teachers and parents were conducted in each country using the method of video-cued and multi-vocal ethnography to give voice to participants in preschools (Tobin, Wu & Davidson, 1989).

Our data suggest that Italian teachers and parents have quite a good relationship and a good level of communication, but they often have different and sometimes contradictory beliefs about the meaning and the purpose of connecting and communicating with one another. These differences, however, are rarely openly discussed and may become barriers that can block understanding and connections on both sides. During the study we encountered many teachers who though themselves supportive, inclusive and without prejudice toward immigrants, but made stereotypical and sometimes naïve statements. Most of the parents expressed appreciation for the warm approach of the teachers, but when we asked them to tell us about their experiences we gathered examples of the differences in educational beliefs and perspectives that could create tension and confusion, reducing the potential for dialogue.

All voices heard in the study underlined the need for teachers and parents to become more aware of the beliefs and expectations about their roles and responsibilities that implicitly affect the quality of their relationship, as well as the need to improve strategies for fostering dialogue and collaborative discussion.
Keywords:
Immigrant parents, teachers, early childhood, mutual expectations

References:


