

Vygotsky and Early Childhood Education in Italy

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Vygotsky was first translated in Italy from English, and then directly from Russian, in the early 1970s at a time when early childhood services, and, in particular, community schools for children from 3 to 6, developed in many Italian cities governed by socialist administrations. Today, Vygotsky is mainly studied and known in Italy because of his theory of proximal development and, more recently, within the development of cultural studies. I will argue that Vygotsky's original, strong importance within the Italian early childhood educational scene creates the link in his thought and works, between pedagogy and aesthetical thinking and his emphasis on the emotional and social components in learning and development. I will focus on his reflections on the pedagogical consequences of the artistic experience beyond its purely intellectual dimensions, on the active role of the child in this experience, and on his ideas about play, imagination and creativity. I will try to discuss how his work influenced or encountered the experiences that were germinating and flowering in the Italian cities in those years – e.g. Reggio Emilia – exploring the connections between political enthusiasm, strong participatory drives that were in the air, and the inspiration of his thought – free and, at the same time, rooted in a socialist background.