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## Introduction

Dorena Caroli

Over the past thirty years, the history of early childhood educational institutions, now known at the European level as early childhood education and care (ECEC) institutions, has been the subject of numerous studies that have given rise to new historiographical trends. Some are interested in European education policies and social changes that have affected Europe at the beginning of the new millennium, others in the function that these institutions have in the welfare and education systems of different countries or in the role that these institutions have played in family policies.

The birth and development of this historiography seem to have been marked by some important legislative acts, such as the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959). Thanks to the work of Philippe Ariès<sup>1</sup>, which reflected on the evolution of the idea of childhood as a cultural construct in relation to the structure of the family and social classes, new studies have investigated unknown aspects and chapters of the history of childhood, its culture and educational institutions. Among the first published studies after the Convention on the Rights on the Child (1989), which was an important impetus for the development of this field of research<sup>2</sup>, are those by Catherine Rollet, Edward C. Melhuish and Peter Moss that highlighted the international perspectives of a research that was taking its first steps in the early nineties<sup>3</sup>.

At the European level, other important and innovative studies have also followed, such as that by Hugh Cunningham, who offered a very signifi-

<sup>1</sup> P. Ariès, *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Anciême Régime*, Paris, Plon, 1960; *Seuil*, 1963 [English trans. R. Baldick, *Centuries of childhood. A Social History of Family life*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1962].

<sup>2</sup> Z. Moody, *Transnational Treaties on Children's Rights: Norm Building and Circulation in the Twentieth Century*, in «Paedagogica Historica», 50/1-2 (2014), pp. 151-164.

<sup>3</sup> C. Rollet, *La politique à l'égard de la petite enfance sous la III<sup>e</sup> République. Annexes : bibliographie, index*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1990; E.C. Melhuish, P. Moss (eds.), *Day Care for Young Children. International Perspectives*, London and New York, Tavistock/Routledge, 1991.