

CASE STUDY

T. is a 44-year-old mother from Ukraine. She arrived in Italy two years ago as a refugee, fleeing the armed conflict. She has two children: Sv., 7, and Si., 5. While Svi. Successfully integrated into primary school, Si.'s experience during the first year of preschool was marked by significant difficulties.

During Si.'s integration into school, teachers observed signs of emotional distress: crying spells during separation from his mother, difficulty interacting with peers, and withdrawal from group activities. Educators suspected problems related to early childhood trauma and attachment difficulties: Si. had been forcibly separated from his home environment at age 2, during a particularly violent phase of the conflict. Thanks to the presence of a cultural mediator, a collaborative approach involving the school, family, and health services was initiated. The case was monitored by the Servizio Sanitario Nazionale (SSN) and, later, by the UFSMIA (Functional Unit for Mental Health, Childhood, and Adolescence).

Simulation: Interdisciplinary Case Meeting

Roles: T. (mother), Preschool teacher, School principal, Cultural mediator, Social worker,

During the interdisciplinary meeting:

The role of the mediator is essential in creating a bridge between institutional language and the mother's emotional world, helping to clarify the proposed steps without reinforcing fear or shame.

PRACTICAL ACTIVITY

Content:

Before the start of the school year, T.'s eldest son, Svi (age 6), was enrolled in a summer camp organized by a local association in collaboration with the school and municipal education services. The camp had an intercultural approach and featured the regular presence of a Ukrainian cultural mediator, already active in school inclusion projects in the region. In the months leading up to the summer camp, Svi also received support from a private Italian (L2) tutor, who visited him regularly to give him personalized lessons. This initial language support helped him build a solid foundation in Italian, facilitating his communication and participation during the camp and later at school. The summer camp aimed to provide Svi and other children with a positive first experience in their new environment before the start of classes. Through games and creative activities, the camp helped the children familiarize themselves with the space, the educators, and their peers in a relaxed and welcoming environment. It was also an opportunity to observe how each child interacted with the others, without the pressure of formal education. Another important goal was to help the children feel safe and accepted. Many of them, like Svi, had experienced displacement and loss. By creating a supportive environment where they could express themselves freely, the camp allowed the children to slowly build confidence and security. Finally, the summer camp also celebrated cultural identity. With the help of the Ukrainian facilitator, the activities included elements of the children's culture of origin, such as traditional songs and games. This helped them feel seen and valued, as well as creating meaningful connections between their past and present experiences.

Main activities developed

Cooperative games led by the facilitator encouraged interaction among children and helped overcome language barriers.

Creative workshops (drawing, music, movement) allowed children to express themselves nonverbally.

Musical moments with Ukrainian dance music, selected by the facilitator in conjunction with the children, created an emotional connection with their culture.

Observed impact:

During summer camp, Svi showed remarkable progress in his ability to adapt to his new environment. Day after day, he became more open, confident, and willing to participate in group activities. He began interacting naturally with other children, even those who didn't speak his language, and began to understand and use some basic Italian.

The presence of the cultural mediator during the camp played a fundamental role in this process. Svi quickly built a relationship of trust with her, which helped him feel safer and more supported. Thanks to this sense of security, he was able to explore the camp environment more freely and actively participate in all activities.

Furthermore, because Svi attended summer camp before school started, he already knew some of the children in his future class on the first day of school. This familiarity helped reduce his anxiety and made the transition to the new school smoother and less intimidating.

Overall, the summer experience helped Svi feel welcomed and included, not just as a newcomer, but also as a kid with a story and identity that mattered.

His culture and background were not ignored, but rather appreciated, and this recognition seemed to increase his self-esteem and his willingness to engage with others.

Materials:

- Playlist with Ukrainian and other countries' music, Italian and other cultures
- Small percussion instruments (tambourines, maracas, drumsticks)
- Open space for dance

Keywords:

Creativity | Music and dance | Fidelity | Conditional



Forum - Reflection on the case.