

INTERVIEW TO CATIA ZONTA - PROFESSIONAL EDUCATOR

SCRIPT

You are a professional educator. Where do you work?

I work in an integrated service of a local health center and two town halls (Latisana and San Giorgio di Nogaro). Its name is "Equipe Integrata Tutela Minori Famiglie" and it concerns the families with an order issued by the juvenile court because of child abuses and serious carelessness.

Is it a public or a private job?

I am the employee of a private firm that provides a caseworker, a psychologist and two educators to the equipe consisting of municipal employees as well as employees of the health center. On the whole, we are eight people.

How long have you been working there?

I have been working there for almost eight years, since 2005 and I am 38.

Did you have previous jobs?

Yes, I did. I worked with children for a cooperative contracted by the town hall of Latisana.

How did you find your current job?

I was the employee of the cooperative and the town hall announced an invitation to tender: they chose four candidates out of about forty people, I had a job interview and finally they chose me.

The prerequisites were not only a degree in Education Sciences but also a five-years working experience with children.

What does a professional educator concretely do?

Since the educator works in equipe with other experts, he carries out direct as well as indirect interventions. Direct interventions imply the presence of the educator at "protected meetings" (meetings of children and parents in a neutral place or in centers, in the presence of an expert) stated by legal decrees or at domestic educational meetings, if the educator is required to provide a judgement about the familiar situation. Moreover, a professional educator may ask for the opinion of another educator, before deciding how to make up a project of rehabilitation. On the contrary, indirect interventions require the participation of the educator to periodic meetings with other experts about each case. Moreover, as educators, we often follow "from the screen" the psychological sessions for families held at our center by the psychologist and, if necessary, we cooperate with him. In addition, educators hold lessons about prevention: in this period, my colleague and I are having a course about bullying at Palazzolo in the previous years we organized courses for educators in centers about abuses.

Consider now the level of autonomy of your job...Are you quite free? Think about the flexibility of working time for example...

Well, since the centers in which I must carry out the interventions are often far from my firm and I try to fulfill parents who have a job, I sometimes work in the late afternoon or in the evening and I start working in the late morning on the following day. I'm quite free and the working time is quite flexible: what counts is working so many hours a week.

How many hours a week do you work?

I work 38 hours a week, as every other employee of a private firm. On the contrary, they who are public employees work 36 hours a week.

Which are the abilities and skills required by your job?

A lot of abilities are required, since my job is not a "basic-job". The educator's interventions are usually first level interventions at school or at home with children and handicapped people, but mine are second level interventions, since they suppose a specific formation or at least a working experience with children who have been victims of abuses. I have been favored by a rich stage I made in a center dealing with this matter. You acquire the specific skills while working, but the other people of the equipe and I after the degree attended a continuing education form (paid by our employer company) in order to acquire a common and systematic working method to apply to each case. The seat of the course was a center in Milan called TIAMA.

Why have you chosen the school of education and, as a consequence, this job?

Because when I went to the university it was a new faculty, full with expectations. I wanted to work in the social area but I was uncertain between the educator and the nurse. Since the school of education was new and well proclaimed I chose it: at the beginning, I wanted to work with old people, but after the stage I understood that also children could just be what I needed.

If you could go back in time, would you do it all again?

I'm lucky because many other educators have a very hard but bad paid work, even on the level of working time and duties. My wage is not higher than theirs because law does not allow a second level degree but I think I raised my experience at the point that I can spend my knowledge in private projects and get satisfaction, since I have part in the improvement of some children's quality of life. I would do it again if overlooking the economic aspect because, as I said, unfortunately there is not a full praise of the profession.

What is the most satisfying thing in your work?

You must forget about difficulties, incomprehension and fights and consider the well-being of a child that after our intervention has a better life and is happier.

Is this the secret to overcome difficulties?

Sure. Since I share my office with eight other colleagues, we sometimes have different ideas and it is hard to go on well with them all. Moreover, sometimes our interventions are not so effective, but satisfactions make me go on. At this point of my job carrier, I wouldn't work in a factory. My job is full with gratifications.

Is it hard to have a distant relationship with patients? Have you ever happened to create strong affective bounds with them?

It depends on situations and experience: some families do not cooperate with you and they see the educator as an enemy, some children are fussy and some others immediately go on well with you. At the beginning, you are surely too involved but when you become more and more expert you learn how to be objective and it helps you as well as the child, since he needs strong and lucid people near him. If things go on well, there is a climate of cooperation and trust with families: they look at you as a reference point for advice and a guide. It is a very strong relationship, even if not personal.

What about your studies from the secondary school ahead?

I attended the ITC and graduated at the school of education. That time, it lasted four years, then I attended the continuing education form at TIAMA and many other courses for educators, for example at a center called Paradigma in Turin (courses about abuses and mistreatment). The teachers there are really young and full with innovative proposals for us. I also took part to national conventions in Triest and Pescara. My job requires a continuous formation but sometimes the companies help us with the costs of the courses. Finally, every year a psychologist from Milan comes for a necessary supervision of the equipe.

Your study plan included apprenticeships... where did you do them?

I worked 400 hours in a center in Casarsa called "Il noce". I chose this center that is no more open and it received children with a decree for abuse or mistreatment.

Did you work alone or were you supported by an expert?

Since I was in a center, there were other educators, a psychologist and the supervisor of the center, my tutor. I was lucky because they immediately gave me the custody of a girl. I had to stay with her during the meetings and in her daily life. Anyway, the tutor gave me advice and helped me in doing so.

Did you find an effective correspondence between the theory you studied at the university and the practice during the apprenticeship?

The faculty was very useful because it gave me solid bases also about psychology and pedagogy that are very useful for my work in equipe, since I can analyze a case not only from the educational but also from the psychological point of view.

Do you think the job is growing up? What will be the future of the professional educator, in your opinion?

I think there are good chances for an educator because town halls prefer contracting private firms with their own employees instead of creating their own services. I think there are numerous possibilities but you must adapt to them.

What would you advise to a girl like me, who would like to become an educator?

If you feel it is your passion and you would like to work with people instead of things, it could be the right choice for you. If you please, you will surely find a job: I graduated in July and I got my first part-time job in November. It was far from home, I had to drive a lot and the wage was very low. From the economic point of view, the job does not give you stability even because there is no possibility to make career (differently from psychologists and caseworkers) but from the point of view of the content, it gives you enormous satisfaction!