

Contributions from Reggio Emilia for Early Childhood Education: listening as a practice for the realization of children's rights

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1

Summary

This article aims to reflect on the contributions of the Listening Pedagogy of Reggio Emilia's Early Childhood Education to guarantee children's rights. Such rights have been a historical, political and social construction that represents a new conception of childhood and of children as subjects of rights. Listening to children emerges as a fundamental element for these rights to become effective. In this direction, we opted for a qualitative research, based on a bibliographic review of studies about the Reggio Emilia approach and children's rights. This research revealed that the Pedagogy of Listening collaborates in the self-perception of children as subjects of rights and protagonists of their teaching-learning processes, besides promoting experiences of exercise of such rights and the breaking of adult-centeredness.

Keywords: Pedagogy of Listening. Reggio Emilia. Children's rights. Early Childhood Education.

Contribuições de Reggio Emilia: A escuta como prática para a realização dos direitos da criança

Resumo

Este trabalho visa compreender como a Pedagogia da Escuta permeia a proposta pedagógica das instituições de Educação Infantil de Reggio Emilia, com ênfase na análise da relação entre esta prática e a garantia dos direitos da criança. Partindo da trajetória histórica, política e social destes direitos e da construção da sua concepção como sujeito de direitos, parece que um aspecto fundamental para que estes direitos se tornem efectivos é a escuta das crianças. Por conseguinte, a investigação das práticas de escuta presentes na abordagem de Reggio Emilia surgiu como uma forma de compreender a importância desta abordagem na vida das crianças. Esta investigação revelou que a escuta colabora na auto-percepção das crianças como sujeitos de direitos e protagonistas dos seus processos de ensino-aprendizagem, e promove experiências do exercício de tais direitos e a perturbação da centralidade do adulto.

Palavras-chave: Reggio Emilia. Pedagogia da escuta. Os direitos das crianças. Educação da primeira infância.



1 Introduction

2

If we carefully analyze the relationships established between adults and children in Early Childhood Education institutions, we can notice that, frequently, such relationships are not established in a democratic and respectful way, and in many situations they are based on hierarchization and authoritarianism. Monção (2013), in her thesis, observed how challenging it is for Kindergarten teachers to listen and understand the various manifestations of children, highlighting the complexity of educating young children in collective contexts.

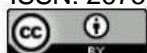
Such finding reveals the need to rethink these relationships, trying to break with the adult-centric view and understand children as subjects of rights, who must be listened to and respected, through horizontal and respectful relationships, paying attention to the children's wishes and actions. This process requires that we learn to listen to what they have to tell us, and, more than that, that we feel the need to listen to them.

Listening to children and babies in Early Childhood Education units is based on a conception of children and childhood that respects their rights, needs, and ways of being. According to Paulo Fochi (2020), in times when austerity is so present in relationships, choosing to establish them based on respect is a revolutionary act.

Reggio Emilia's approach to early childhood education helps us think of ways to build a pedagogical practice based on respect for the rights of children and on sensitive and attentive listening to their manifestations, establishing a pedagogical work in which the child is the center of the educational process.

The purpose of this article is to reflect on the contributions of the Listening Pedagogy of Early Childhood Education from Reggio Emilia, to guarantee the rights of children. To meet this goal, we opted for a qualitative research based on a bibliographic review that involves studies and legislation about children's rights and Early Childhood Education in Reggio Emilia.

The literature search on the CAPES, SciELO, ANPEd and Google Scholar platforms, using the descriptors "listening to the child in Early Childhood Education",





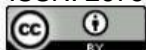
"listening to the child in Reggio Emilia" and "active listening in Early Childhood Education", showed that there are few works available on this topic. We found six articles (FOCHI, 2020; GUIMARÃES; LEITE, 1999; MORUZZZI; TEBET, 2017; COTONHOTO; AGUM; COELHO, 2015; SCHABERLE; SOUSA; ANDRADE, 2018; FORTUNATO, 2010), three dissertations (ARCURI, 2017; NUNES, 2009) and two monographs (OLIVEIRA, 2014; SANTANA, 2016). In addition to these works, we used three Italian bibliographies available in Portuguese, Rinaldi (2012) and Edwards, Gandini and Forman (1999 and 2015).

Furthermore, we used the Federative Constitution of Brazil (1988), the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (1996), the official documents produced by the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC), Barbosa (2009), Campos; Rosemberg (2009), Brasil (2010), Dallari; Korczak (1986) and Korczak (1981) as bibliographic references that support this article.

In the first moment, the text focuses on the legal conquests about children's rights and discusses the fundamental role that the educator Janusz Korczak had in these conquests, by vehemently defending the rights-freedom of children. Next, it seeks to reflect on the aspects of the pedagogy of listening in the work developed in Reggio Emilia, discussing the historical context that gave rise to these schools, the concept of the hundred languages of the child and the importance of sharing ideas; and some practices that underpin the work of teachers. Finally, the final considerations are presented..

The child as a subject of rights

The history of children's rights can be analyzed from international and national documents that were drafted in order to overcome the inhumane situations to which children were subjected and guarantee their rights. The Geneva Declaration (1924), the Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959), the International Convention on the Rights of Children and Adolescents (1989) and, in the case of Brazil, the Federal Constitution (1988) and the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (1990) mark an important process of social and political struggle, from which have come great achievements, but that,





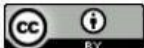
undeniably, there are still many obstacles to enforce them. According to Maria Malta Campo (1999), the problem is not in the philosophical field, but in the political one, in how to make them a reality and protect them.

The Geneva Declaration was the first formulation of international rights for children. It establishes clauses that ensure the protection and defense of children, who are seen as vulnerable and fragile beings, physically and mentally immature. According to Monteiro (2006), the main objective of this declaration was to make adults aware of their duty to preserve the physical integrity of children. It is a document that guarantees passive-rights or protection-rights.

The Declaration of the Rights of the Child, written in 1959, was inspired by the Geneva Declaration, and points out principles for a happy childhood, with rights and freedoms. A major achievement of this document is the conception of the child with which it works. In the 1924 Declaration, the child was an object of rights, and in the 1959 Declaration, the child is now considered as a subject of rights (MONTEIRO, 2006). This consideration recognizes the child as a historical, social and cultural subject, who is able to participate in his formative process and in the construction of his own history, as a social actor.

The year 1979 was marked by a series of debates around children, and ended up being declared by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as the International Year of the Child, due to a great movement in the theoretical field of childhood and education. The International Convention on the Rights of the Child was drafted, approved and signed by several countries. Compared to previous declarations, the Convention innovates because it goes beyond the exclusively protectionist and ethical dimension of rights, and encompasses a liberating dimension, in which the child no longer only has "rights to It is at this moment in history that the autonomy of children and their right to participation, the active-rights or freedom-rights are recognized. There is a new category of citizen: the citizen-child.

For a better understanding, there are two types of rights proclaimed by the Convention: rights-freedom and rights-protection. The first comes from the idea that the





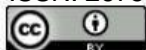
child has his identity as a man, a subject, a citizen, and therefore these rights, subjective and individual, guarantee participation in his spheres of action. They are rights that can be exercised by the individual himself. The second right, on the other hand, is based on the idea that the child is a subject with specificities, vulnerability, and fragility and, therefore, needs protection, including economic, social, and cultural rights, requiring the intervention of legal representatives so that they can be ensured.

Brazil ratified the Convention only in 1999, and the Brazilian government released its first report to the UN only in 2003. For Maria Malta Campos (1999), the 1988 Federal Constitution is considered a historical landmark in the social construction of the child as a subject of rights in Brazil, as it integrates all the struggles and demands, from those that originated in the feminist movement for day-care centers for all children from 0 to 6 years old, to those brought by the human rights movement. It is fundamental to remember that all legal achievements for children's rights did not originate from theoretical principles, but are the result of historical conquests of popular struggles. Two years later, these rights were also incorporated by the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (1990).

The Law of Directives and Bases for National Education (1996) determines that Early Childhood Education, besides being a child's right, has as its objective its integral development, conceiving daycare as a space for the realization of children's rights. Unfortunately, laws that guarantee these rights are not enough; we can state that the big issue surrounding children's rights in Brazil and the documents presented is not to justify their importance, but to protect them on a daily basis. We reiterate the assumption that this is not a philosophical issue, but a political one (CAMPOS, 1999).

Janusz Korczak's contributions to the constitution of listening and children's rights

In dealing with children's rights, it is fundamental to situate the important contribution of Janusz Korczak (1878-1942). His life and work are widely recognized for having been dedicated to children, showing deep love and respect for them. Although he





was an educator who loved children, Korczak said that it was not enough to love them, but it was necessary to respect and understand them as the people they are and not as small adults. Janusz Korczak's entire educational elaboration was built on respect, seeking to understand what it is to be a child and the feelings that surround this phase of life.

6

He developed a form of organization in which the children themselves were responsible for governing the orphanage, with a parliament and a court, a true Republic of Children (ROSEMBERG; MARIANO, 2010). A pedagogy was achieved that was truly based on respect and aimed at the active participation of the children. In this dynamic, children could practice democratic life in society and acquire autonomy and responsibility.

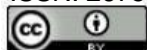
The place I devote in this book to children's courts may seem, to some, overly important. It is because I see in them the first step toward the emancipation of the child, the drafting and proclamation of a Declaration of the Rights of the Child. He has the right to demand that his problems be treated impartially and seriously. Until now everything has depended on the good or bad will of the educator, on his mood that day. It really is time to put an end to this despotism. (KORCZAK, 1997, p. 332).

Living with children, Korczak had the opportunity to observe them, listen to them, and talk to them, becoming an educator trained by the true experts in childhood, the children. His concern for children's rights led him to write *The Child's Right to Respect*, in which he discusses the child's right to be what he is and not to be treated by adults with contempt, mistrust, and ill will..

We don't allow children to organize themselves. We don't take them seriously, we distrust them, we treat them with ill will, we barely take care of them. To know how to do it right, we would need a specialist; but the specialist is the child itself. (KORCZAK, 1986, p.83)

According to Korczak and Dallari (1986), children's rights derive from two primordial and essential rights: the right to be who he/she is and the right for the child to live his/her life as a child, because the life he/she leads is not a life of play, childhood is a long period of man's existence.

Every child is born with the right to be. It is a very serious mistake, which offends the right to be, to conceive of the child as only a project of a person, as something that in the future may acquire the dignity of a human being. It must be recognized





and not forgotten at any time, that by the mere fact of existing, the child is already a person and for this reason deserving of the respect that is due in exactly the same measure to all people. (KORCZAK; DALLARI, 1986, p. 21)

According to Korczak, the more contact we have with children, the more sensitive we become to them and to the minutiae that are worthy of our attention and care. It is this attentive gaze that motivates us and helps us to continue on the arduous journey that is educating.

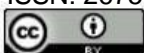
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Do we give her too much milk to drink or an egg that is not too fresh to eat? She vomits. Do we pass her information that is beyond her understanding? She doesn't understand. A worthless piece of advice? You don't listen to it. I am not just speaking for speaking's sake when I say that it is fortunate for humanity that we cannot force children to obey educational doctors who go against their common sense or their healthy will [...] Then, these ideas having crystallized in my mind, I think that the first and unquestionable right of the child is the one that allows him to freely express his ideas and to take an active part in the debate concerning the appreciation of his conduct and also in the punishment. When the respect and confidence that we owe her becomes a reality, when she herself becomes confident, a great number of enigmas and mistakes will disappear. (KORCZAK, 1997, p. 67)

In this passage, the educator points out a right that has much to contribute to the preparation of this work: the guarantee that children can express their ideas freely and take an active part in the debate, having their opinions, suggestions and ideas heard and taken seriously by adults. Respecting this right requires that the adult does not impose himself in any way over the child, be it because he is older, stronger or more powerful, but implies being attentive to his needs and wishes, collaborating so that they are understood and respected.

Korczak is recognized worldwide as a pioneer in the fight for children's rights, and the Declaration of the Rights of the Child is based on his works. The ideas and proposals of the Polish educator boosted the discussions and the document drafted at the Geneva Convention, in 1924.

In the 1980s, his pedagogical proposals were also included in the drafting of the text of the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child. Korczak's fight for the active rights of children, that is, the right to express themselves on issues that were of their own





interest, were the basis for the document drafted in the 1989 Convention (MONTEIRO, 2006).

The social and political struggle waged by Korczak resulted in a crucial change in the concept of childhood and child. His work, reflective about his experiences with children, points to the commitment and coherence that are necessary in the practice of educational.

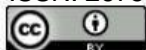
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The right to live only exists when the child is given the possibility to participate in life. [...] To live is to participate in life, is to add something to the child, is to imprint your mark on the created world. The right to live exists only for those who have all these possibilities. (KORCZAK, 1986, p. 54-55)

The Reggio Emilia approach to Early Childhood Education, the focus of this article, understands that for the child to take ownership of his/her rights and be aware of the role he/she plays in society, pedagogical and educational practices that provide the right to participate, to be heard and respected in decision-making on matters that concern him/her are necessary. By participating actively in their formative process, children become aware of their right to know, to think, to be respected, to speak and to be heard, in short, to live.

The educational proposal in Reggio Emilia

Reggio Emília é uma cidade localizada no norte da Itália, e amplamente reconhecida no meio educacional pela proposta pedagógica que construiu. Durante o período do regime fascista italiano, diversas iniciativas de educadores progressistas foram cerceadas. Com o fim da Segunda Guerra Mundial e a derrocada do fascismo, o governo e a população passaram a se reorganizar em busca de mudanças com base nas ideias socialistas; também chegavam à Itália novas ideias, como as de Celestin Freinet e John Dewey, e o movimento de escolas populares. Difundiu-se por Reggio Emilia a concepção de democracia participativa, que foi também aplicada à educação. Neste contexto de protagonismo dos cidadãos e de tomada de consciência dos direitos é que surge a abordagem educacional de Reggio Emilia (EDWARDS; GANDINI; FORMAN, 1999).



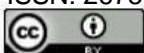


Reggio Emilia is a city located in northern Italy, and widely recognized in the educational environment for the pedagogical proposal it has built. During the period of the Italian fascist regime, several initiatives by progressive educators were curtailed. With the end of World War II and the collapse of fascism, the government and the population started to reorganize themselves in search of changes based on socialist ideas; new ideas, such as those of Celestin Freinet and John Dewey, and the popular schools movement also arrived in Italy. Reggio Emilia disseminated the concept of participatory democracy, which was also applied to education. It is in this context of citizens' protagonism and awareness of rights that the Reggio Emilia educational approach emerges (EDWARDS; GANDINI; FORMAN, 1999).

Loris Malaguzzi, who is considered the creator of the educational approach in question, joined teachers who were very receptive to the new ideas and with courage, determination, and enthusiasm, but who were largely inexperienced and trained in Catholic schools. To deal with this situation, Malaguzzi proposed that "everything about and for children would only be learned from children" (EDWARDS; GANDINI; FORMAN, 2015, p. 48). This conception gave strength to the collective of teachers and parent administrators to continue that work, learning while teaching, by listening to the children. Here is a logic that subverts the idea of the teacher as the holder of knowledge, and that values the centrality of the child in the educational process. In Reggio, everyone is a builder and co-builder of knowledge.

This panorama leads us to conclude that the Reggio schools were built on the values of collectivity, popular participation, solidarity, and cooperation. New relations of interdependence between individuality and collectivity were developed, in which each citizen plays a key role in society, and the individuality of each one is only built from living with others.

The pedagogical proposal of a school is always closely linked to the history and culture of the society in which it is located; thus, the Reggio Emilia educational approach, which comes from a post-war period, proposes to





[...] challenge and deconstruct dominant discourses; understand the power of these discourses in shaping and driving our thoughts and actions [...]; reject the establishment of rules, goals, methods and standards, and, in doing so, take the risk of uncertainty and complexity; have the courage to think for oneself in the construction of new discourses and, in doing so, dare to choose to understand the child as a rich child, with infinite capabilities, a child born with a hundred languages; build a new pedagogical project, putting in the foreground the relationships and encounters, dialogue and negotiation, reflection and critical thinking; [...]" (DAHLBERG et al, 1999 apud RINALDI 2012, p. 32)

10

The result of this conception of learning is a flexible curriculum, which develops and changes according to listening to the interests of the children. If the prevailing conception of the child is that of a child as protagonist, investigator, and producer of interpretative theories, the main verb for educators becomes "listen" rather than "talk". In this way, the whole curriculum is based on listening to the community, and this includes children, parents, and educators.

The Pedagogy of Listening

Listening and dialog are essential in this approach. Dialog is a two-way movement; it requires that everyone be able to listen and be listened to with attention, seriousness, and respect. This is called the Pedagogy of Listening.

In the Pedagogy of Listening, each child's personal story is looked at with sensitivity and appreciation. Differences are welcomed, not erased, which leaves no room for standardization. For Rinaldi (2012), the greatest damage that the school can do to itself is to encourage standards and not try to break away from standardization. When standardization is sought, communication and dialogue are put aside, for the child no longer has a voice, is no longer heard.

From encounters with what is different, all immutable truths are abandoned, and space is made for the new, for doubt, for changes to occur in us. As a result, children are invited at all times to express themselves, to experiment and to share their ideas with their peers through the most diverse languages, in a unique and subjective way, because the beauty of education in Reggio Emilia is in subjectivity, in each child's point of view.

In Malaguzzi's pedagogy, listening to the child is the best way to relate to him or her, because by listening we become aware of each child's potential and demands.





Understanding how they act, the things they say and think, and how they feel makes the relationship with them easier, to the extent that we listen to them, in their different languages. Listening is a powerful resource to give children a voice and establish relationships that leave the obvious aside and open doors to the unexpected.

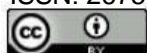
The hundred languages of children

11

Listening in Reggio is fundamental, because only through it is it possible to access what children think, create, question and interpret from their relationships with other individuals and with the world. There is in all children the vital need to communicate, and this communication goes beyond words. In Reggio Emilia, children are encouraged to speak with their hands, with their eyes, with their whole bodies, as they advocate the theory of the child's hundred languages. Loris Malaguzzi believed that the pedagogical approaches existing until then were not concerned with meeting the demands of children. In the poem "No way. The hundred are there" (MALAGUZZI, 1999, apud EDWARDS; GANDINI; FORMAN, 2015, p. 20), he argues that the little ones communicate and interpret the world in different ways, and proposes that it is necessary to stimulate the other ninety-nine languages that exist beyond speech, seeking that their everyday experiences and skills are enhanced and discovered. The Italian pedagogue also warns about the role of the school and society in respecting and understanding such languages.

According to Finco, Barbosa, and Faria (2015), the work developed by teachers in Reggio Emilia is based on criteria of listening to all these hundred languages, based on observation, mediation, communication, and interaction between adults and children, providing possibilities for them to read the world and feel encouraged to express and share their learning.

Creativity, aesthetics, freedom of expression, and sensitivity are factors that enrich the learning experience, and for this reason it is the educators' responsibility to guarantee and preserve them. It is common to come across pedagogical proposals that separate scientific thinking from imagination, creativity, and art, but in Reggio these





elements are integrated and inseparable. Separating them would result in the impoverishment of the work done and in the emptying of its meaning.

The artistic dimension present in the educational projects also implies relational and social issues, as it demands the participation and involvement of all, and makes it impossible to be indifferent to the achievements and discoveries of other members..

12

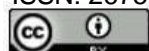
Sharing Ideas

For Carla Rinaldi (2012), the values and fundamentals of the Pedagogy of Listening are expressed by the sharing of ideas. A theory needs to be communicated and heard in order to exist. In a context of valuing listening, children feel legitimate to narrate their theories and present their interpretations about the world around them. Listening gives visibility, removes anonymity, and enriches both the listener and the narrator. Besides portraying the world and the relationships that children establish, the theories represent the children themselves. When they are narrated, they allow the experiences and the history of each one to be shared and accepted by the others (RINALDI, 2012).

The child as a being that has and builds rights, that demands respect and appreciation of these rights, in the name of its own identity, uniqueness and difference. Thinking of the child as the possessor of rights represents not only recognizing the rights that society grants, but also creating a context of "listening" in the fullest sense. This means that we must recognize and accept the uniqueness and subjectivity of each individual (and thus of each child) and also create spaces that are self-generating, that is, spaces in which each child can elaborate and produce new rights. (RINALDI, 2012, p. 224)

The sharing of theories is accompanied by the concept of "competent audience," used by Rinaldi (2012) to describe the ability to listen, to become sensitive and value others, even appropriating their ideas to enrich one's own. This movement of sharing and listening develops sensitivity in children to appreciate and integrate the ideas of others with their own. The moment different ideas come into conflict, we are forced to revise our theories, re-elaborating knowledge that will then no longer be the same as previously known.

The work of teachers in Reggio Emilia





The teachers at Reggio Emilia seek to provide situations in which children can think about the things that surround them, encouraging them to formulate theories and helping them in the process of understanding and shaping these formulations. This work is only possible through listening, an educator's tool for trying to understand the strategies children use to interpret the world around them. It is not up to the teacher to judge them, but to listen to them and serve as a bridge between the children and the new knowledge.

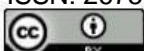
The work with Early Childhood Education is considered by common sense as something easy, which does not require qualification, or else as a simple transmission of knowledge. What happens in practice is that it is necessary for teachers to have diverse knowledge, which goes beyond Pedagogy and Psychology. The work of teachers, especially in Reggio, is complex and multidisciplinary, because it seeks to meet the diverse demands brought by children and society on a daily basis, whatever they may be.

As in working with and among children, teachers also rely on the cooperation of their colleagues. Not every teacher is expected to know what to do on her own in every situation. Just as children's knowledge is believed to be built through dialogues and group work, it applies to the teacher collective (EDWARDS; GANDINI; FORMAN, 2015). Finally, it is necessary that teachers feel they belong and are active participants in the process as educators, but, above all, as people.

Final considerations

In this article, it was highlighted that the central element to build pedagogical practices that respect and seek the realization of children's rights is the teacher's listening to the child. When the child is listened to, recognized and welcomed in his particularities by his teacher, he feels safe to learn and develop. Above all, listening makes them feel respected by the adults around them, allowing them to recognize themselves as subjects with rights.

Being sensitive to what children say means putting them ahead of the previously organized curricular contents, reorganizing all the planning done initially. Listening to children gives pedagogical practice a dimension of flexibility, it means that after each act



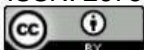


of listening, the proposal will be redesigned based on their needs, understanding them as the protagonists and focus of the teaching-learning process.

Listening is a strategy that provides several learning experiences, besides being a right for children in their daily lives and school life. With the realization of this right, children also assume their role as social actors, participating in issues that concern them. The participation of children in democratic decision-making processes gives them the opportunity to know and debate about their own interests, recognizing their place as historical and cultural subjects who always have something to add to the collective. An education that seeks to make children aware of their rights needs to offer experiences that stimulate autonomy in decision-making and a sense of democratic and collective responsibility.

In view of the studies carried out to prepare this text, it can be concluded that listening to children also contributes to breaking relationships based on adult-centricity. The world as we know it today is mostly focused on adult-centric hegemony, and often the rights of children are not respected, much less their voices are heard. It is urgent that pedagogical practices break with this logic and give back to children the place that has been denied them. In the relationships between adults and children, listening establishes a condition of mutual respect and equality. Above all, the child ceases to occupy the place of being submissive and dominated, and starts to exercise his or her right to be and live.

Despite the differences between Brazil and Italy, knowing the Reggio Emilia approach is very important for us to be inspired and create Brazilian pedagogical practices; according to Paulo Freire (1993, p. 43), "experiences cannot be transplanted, but reinvented. To do so, we must pay attention to the lack of working conditions and public policies for a quality work with children in the Brazilian context, such as: the excessive number of children per adult; institutions with structural problems; lack of pedagogical materials; lack of vacancies and initial training that, in general, usually addresses issues related to Early Childhood Education in a very preliminary way. It is essential that public policies have sufficient financial resources to ensure that the focus





on the child and listening are effective and, for this, it is necessary to invest in better working conditions for teachers. It can be inferred that the Brazilian scenario, in relation to Early Childhood Education policies, lacks advances to constitute the Listening Pedagogy presented in this article.

Finally, we show that the education of children is a complex task that requires public policies that anchor the teaching work, so that we can pay attention to what they have to say and teach us. To build relationships and pedagogical practices that respect their rights, it is necessary that we understand what they want and need, and this condition, which requires extreme sensitivity and attention, can only be reached through listening. I conclude by resuming the thought of Malaguzzi and Janusz, who state that we need to observe, listen and learn from children, understanding that what comes from them is what should guide our knowledge and actions.

15

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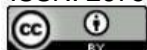
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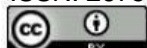
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