

# Listening And Documenting in The Reggio Approach: The Challenge And The Vision Stemming From Bruner's Contribution

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## **Abstract**

The pedagogy of listening was born and developed in Reggio Emilia's schools in northern Italy. This article analyses the pedagogy of listening in the light of the fundamental texts of the Reggio Approach literature. The aim is to explore some key concepts such as language, context, relationship, and evaluation, and also to link them to Jerome Bruner's work and contributions. Moreover, the authors attempt to offer an in-depth view of "documentation" as the crucial tool to ground listening into the dynamics among the many educational actors involved. In the last part of the article, we underline the importance of democratic values in the Reggio Approach and in its socio-constructivist approach to active citizenship and children's rights.

Keywords: pedagogy of listening, Reggio Emilia, Bruner, psychodynamic relation, narrative, documentation

## **Escuchar y documentar en el enfoque de Reggio: el desafío y la visión a partir de la contribución de Bruner**

### **Resumen**

La pedagogía de la escucha nació y se desarrolló en las escuelas de Reggio Emilia, en el norte de Italia. Este artículo analiza la pedagogía de la escucha a la luz de los textos fundamentales de la literatura del enfoque Reggio Emilia. El objetivo es explorar algunos conceptos clave como lenguaje, contexto, relación y evaluación y también vincularlos con el trabajo y las contribuciones de Jerome Bruner. Además, los autores intentan ofrecer una visión en profundidad de la “documentación” como la herramienta crucial para fundamentar la escucha en la dinámica entre los muchos actores educativos involucrados. En la última parte del artículo se subraya la importancia de los valores democráticos en el modelo Reggio Emilia y en su enfoque socioconstructivista de la ciudadanía activa y los derechos del niño.

Palabras clave: pedagogía de la escucha, Reggio Emilia, Bruner, relación psicodinámica, narrativa, documentación

## **Écouter et documenter dans la pédagogie Reggio : le défi et la vision découlant de la contribution de Jerome Bruner**

### **Résumé**

La « pédagogie de l'écoute » est née et s'est développée dans les écoles de la ville de Reggio Emilia, dans le nord de l'Italie. Cet article analyse la pédagogie de l'écoute à la lumière des textes fondamentaux de la pédagogie Reggio. Son but est d'explorer certains concepts clés tels que la langue, le contexte, les relations et l'évaluation ainsi que de les relier à l'oeuvre de Jerome Bruner et à ses contributions. De plus, nous tentons d'offrir une vision détaillée de la « documentation » comme outil crucial pour ancrer l'écoute dans les dynamiques des nombreux acteurs de l'éducation impliqués. En dernier lieu, nous soulignons l'importance des valeurs démocratiques dans la pédagogie Reggio et dans son approche socio-constructiviste au citoyen actif et aux droits de l'enfant.

Mots-clés : pédagogie de l'écoute, Reggio Emilia, Jerome Bruner, relation psychodynamique, récit, documentation

## Listening in The Reggio Emilia Approach

Through a perspective founded both in pedagogy and psychodynamics, our intention is to point out some of the salient features of the educational experience born and developed in Reggio Emilia, in particular what Carla Rinaldi defines as "listening pedagogy" (Reggio Children & Harvard Project Zero, 2011; Rinaldi, 2014). The image of the child that the Reggio Approach conjures and places at the center of its educational project is that of a competent child, an active subject and a true protagonist of the learning processes (Edwards & Forman, 2012). Far from being a common vision, Reggio's pedagogy immediately fits into a peculiar pedagogical trend, which refuses to place the child at the center of its actions, with the risk of seeing him or her as a unique, abstract, and immutable object. Rather, it puts in the center the relationship between children, between children and adults, between adults, in a socio-constructivist perspective (Dahlberg et al., 2007).

To do this, Reggio immediately equipped itself with a "toolbox" that contains an ever-varying number of versatile and varied tools available to the whole community: real "democracy screwdrivers." To put it in the words of Malaguzzi, the inspirer of Reggio's pedagogy, "It is necessary to believe that reason is an ally of fantasy and vice versa and to create scores suitable for action" (Malaguzzi, 1988). Among other tools in this toolbox, the pedagogy of listening certainly occupies an important space.

In Reggio Emilia, we are therefore faced with a competent and active child, who formulates interpretative theories that are developed by them during the activities that come to life only when they are shared, and therefore listened to, both by the peer group and the reference adult. Sharing with the group and participation are essential elements for learning in Reggio Emilia. Hence the importance of the pedagogy of relationships and listening in the toolbox of children and educators (Reggio Children & Harvard Project Zero, 2011), within what is defined as the "spiral of documentation" and which below we will treat.

Reggio does not intend to define the pedagogy of listening in a nomenclatory way. Just as in any psychoanalytic listening, when we listen we don't take anything for granted, thereby keeping open the door to further meaning. "There is always reason to expect narrative revisions that supply more meaning, sometimes contradictory meaning, and therefore more understanding than initially seems possible or expectable" (Shafer, 2005, p. 272).

As often happens for a community of concepts around which Reggio's philosophy revolves, definitions involve the risk of stumbling upon nominal reductivism, which lacks shades of meaning, multiple connections, and possible variations on central themes. In the narratives around the pedagogy of listening, many elements are recurrent and interconnected with each other, but the educational relationship takes on a new depth and is defined in a new light. It is no coincidence that Reggio's texts often refer to the pedagogy of listening also with the term "pedagogy of relationship."

In examining the concept of listening, however, such pedagogy assumes an ambivalent position: it can build relationships but it is also the prerequisite for these to

occur (Cagliari, 2014). It can therefore be said that it is an emerging construct, whose foundations lie in the individual reflective activity of the actors involved and a measurable construct only along the experimental path, framed in this pedagogical context as a continuous research-action activity. The resulting educational practice is capable of creating relationships but is also an essential prerequisite. Due to, or thanks to, this peculiarity and ambiguity, defining how listening practices can be acted becomes a difficult operation to sustain at a theoretical level. An ambiguity that, in Reggio Emilia is experienced as a resource and as a possibility that invites us to make choices—educational and pedagogical, therefore political—among the many possible ones. This idea of positive ambiguity, or resource, which comes from Malaguzzi—"a right ambiguity" (Malaguzzi, 1988)—is one of those distinctive features that can bring Reggio Emilia's educational experience closer to the paradigm of postmodernity (Dahlberg et al., 2007). By postmodernity, we mean "a resolute emancipation from the characteristically modern urge to overcome ambivalence and promote the monosemic clarity of the sameness" (Bauman, 1991, p.98).

Despite this intentional ambiguity, however, there are some properties that help to understand and explain the potential of listening and of relationship pedagogy in educational activities. Listening, for instance, is an emotion; it is a suspension of judgment, and it is sensitivity to the other (Cagliari, 2014). For this reason, this element takes on a central role as a marker of quality, a formative imprinting among educators, inherent in relationships, and therefore profusely widespread. Never this imprinting is declared, summarized, or made explicit because in being an emergent property, it is an integral part of the educational setting, informing shared knowledge and shaping the approach to the child.

The school is, therefore, by definition, the first context outside the family unit in which the child has the opportunity to encounter a listening context. The school involves both adults and children in the process, listening to themselves and others, giving strength to the learning dimension at the group level. To create this context, it is first necessary for the individuals who inhabit it to feel entitled to express their theory and their interpretative narrative regarding the cognitive issues and problems that the learning community encounters. To this end, the educator's task is not only to allow differences to be expressed but also to be cultivated and negotiated through discussion, dialogue and exchange. In this way, the group becomes and is recognized by children as a place for teaching and sharing, as a truly listening context (Rinaldi, 2014).

## **Strategies for Listening Environments**

Although the theoretical framework of reference and the aims of pedagogical listening appear clear, its practical application may not always be immediate. The documentation in the Reggio educational experiences is practiced and constantly renewed by pedagogues, teachers, educators, and by the children themselves. In this great variety and complexity of educational activities, common lines can be traced, especially

applicative ones, which we proceed to make explicit here in an attempt, albeit reductive, of synthesis.

The first, obvious and recurring key element in the practice of pedagogical listening is the design and construction of the context. Solid contact with reality is an opportunity to relaunch towards the possible: the context in the Reggio sense allows us to weave an ideal thread between material and imaginary, bridging between real and fantastic. Most of the interventions collected in Loris Malaguzzi and the schools of Reggio Emilia also start from this *trait d'union* with the present and the reality of the child (Cagliari et al., 2016). The author announces the antecedents, recalls the latest events, and renews the relationship with the near and distant past. Giving a foundation to the context is, therefore, not only an educational practice but also a research practice, a sort of in-depth process that informs all educational activities in Reggio.

The relevance of contextualization as one of the main features of the pedagogy of listening is even more evident from the analysis of the activities that are offered to children. For example, the activity of Laura was born from this assumption (Rinaldi, 2014). The little girl retraces the relationship with reality to discover the sounds of the clock, thanks to the recall of the image that the teacher showed her. The choice of objects that populate the learning contexts is never casual: it is placed in the present, lending itself to a swing of references between intuition and perceived, and between material and imaginary. So, the image of the clock is not a fortuitous fact, but a choice meditated by the teacher's reflection on what is close to little Laura, which can suggest food for thought.

An opportunity for further development of the issues related to the pedagogy of listening is precisely the relaunch questions. This implies not proposing closed questions to children, or questions that foreshadow univocal answers, but rather questions that open exploratory scenarios, capable of relaunching further questions and themes of investigation. The conduct of these activities through the relaunch mechanism, which greatly resembles a rebound of more and more suggestions, is well described in the documentation relating to the experiences of children (Vecchi & Giudici 2004). Both the introspective dialogue and the inter-individual dialogue are revitalized and are always reported in the form of aloud reflections and method choices shared between children. The subject and object of the relaunch questions are always setting elements, objects, and tools that populate everyday life. The issues still unfold starting from the real, the tangible—almost like a problem-solving activity which, far from being a solving exercise of a problem, represents the beginning of a path of discovery. Such unfolding of the dialogue “also depends on the distinctively human capacity to reflect, that is, to engage in discourse with oneself or with other figures in our internal worlds—those partial or complete, conscious or unconscious images of others with whom, upon introspection at critical moments, we remain in verbal and non-verbal communication” (Shafer, 2005, p.272).

An example of relaunch questions can be found in the experience with shadows that Bruner describes as “surprising freedom of exchange”: it accurately reports the interjections and exchanges between children who are listened to and welcomed by the

teacher as "if he was dealing with Nobel laureates" (Bruner, 2004, p. 27). The same approach is evident in the documentation relating to the long jump project (Fyfe, 2014). From the reinterpretation of the experience, the element of listening appears clear as the ability to remodel the experience through dialogue with children. The teachers choose and plan an activity that reaches its goal by accompanying the multiple paths that children co-build in groups. Thanks to the spontaneity with which it is conducted, participants raise new problems, experiment with solutions, and spark debates on many aspects: from the functioning of the tape measure to the signage to be invented. It is a surprising freedom of exchange resulting from the revival of suggestions triggered by dialogue.

"Can you show Mr. Yanko what we did?"

"Hold on a second, let me find it," replies Gregory as he glides his index finger on the screen to bring up a video. He presses the "play" button and hands it to me. It's a video of the boys dropping different sizes of rocks into the creek creating various dynamic levels and tone colors of sound.

"What type of sounds did you explore?" I ask.

"Um, splashing?" shrugs Marcus.

"And rock sounds like this," adds Carlo as he skips a rock into the creek bank. It bounces off a few rocks creating an offbeat clink-clink, clink-clink before sinking into the water.

I dig deeper, as I pick up two contrasting rocks out of the creek bed, and ask, "Did the size of the rock make a difference?"

"Sort of, Mr. Yanko, the bigger rocks make a slower 'boom' in the water," says Gregory as he makes an exploding gesture with his hands, "and the smaller ones made a quick, 'pop-pop-pop' sound."

I hand Gregory the iPad.

"Keep on exploring. I'm going to see what your classmates are up to."

This excerpt is taken from an article by Gouzouasis and Yanko (1995, p. 8) aimed at analyzing the documentary practice as a contribution to the construction of the identity of children in a musical pedagogy path. A peculiarity of the experience is the carrying out of part of the same outdoors, in full contact with nature, safeguarding the collection of materials, both in progress and in secondary revision in the classroom, for the attention of the teacher, children, and parents. In our opinion, the transcript makes it particularly clear what is meant by relaunch questions and how these are difficult to trace, and necessarily deserve the highest level of attention.

## **Bruner's Tools to Listen to Reggio's Children**

The use of the relaunch technique in the relationship and in the language of listening in the classroom can be reinterpreted in the light of Bruner's thesis regarding hypothetical teachings. By "teaching in the hypothetical form" the author means an active posture of the listener-student towards the speaker-teacher, in which formulations, ideas, and theses are shared. The alternatives, the "as-ifs" and the information are evaluated, in

the hypothetical version, by both protagonists and only as they arise (Bruner, 1979). Just as in the early stages of analytic interpretation, the pedagogical listener focuses on those processes that reveal a continuous openness of the educational relationship, that captures the sense of “evenly hovering attention” (Schlesinger, 1994).

Jerome Bruner participated with his works in the definition of the context as a participant in the child's learning process of the Reggio Approach. If the context is the most ancestral integrating, relational, real, and negotiated background, then the interaction in the teaching activity is defined by Bruner as a narrative type. And here is another tool of the pedagogy of listening, this time a purely linguistic tool: the narrative language. Bruner defines narrative thoughts as an elective vehicle for the transmission of meaning, the tool and means of didactic activities. On several occasions throughout his work, Bruner identifies narrative thought as the antithesis to analytic thought (Bruner, 1996; Bruner, 1979). Narrative thinking is an active builder of dialectical relationships between the learner and society, between the child and the adult, between the student and the peer group, or even intrinsically in the construction of the personal identity of school children. Brunerian narrative thought includes a community of practices related to telling sensations or facts, narrating culturally shared stories and myths, describing emotions and events of high personal value, revealing precious secrets. In defining narrative thought, the author defines its bearing value as a vehicle for the construction of identity within the context. In fact, in Bruner, as in Reggio Emilia, narrating means telling the other but also himself, making meaning and structuring a way of thinking.

The pedagogical assumptions of the context in the pedagogy of listening are well present in Bruner's work, placed within a pedagogical poetics similar in many ways to that of Reggio. In fact, for Bruner, Reggio Emilia has always been “the place of the possible.” The role of listening in Bruner's thought is, as in Reggio, that of mediator of meanings, negotiator of results, vehicle, and facilitator of understanding. In fact, the stories, told with narrative language, act as follows:

Stories need an idea about human encounters, assumptions about whether protagonists understand each other, preconceptions about normative standards ... [This] provides a reasoned base for the interpersonal negotiation of meanings, a way to achieve mutual understanding even when negotiation fails to bring consensus.” (Bruner 1996, p. 148)

There is no narration possible if it is not listened to, and the gaze of another and his or her story is necessary to define one's own identity (Cavarero, 2009). In this sense, all human beings are, since childhood, interested in their narration and that of others, and have an interest in stories, communication, and relationships that overcome all barriers, and want to be told—and listened to—because this helps to build their identity.

As Bruner (2006) pointed out, literary fiction does not refer to anything in the world, but only provides the meaning of things. And yet, it is precisely that sense of things, often derived from narrative, which later makes the reference to real life possible. For the moment he only intended to state that fiction shapes things in the real world and often even gives them a title of reality. The literature of imagination is not a lesson, but a

temptation to re-examine the obvious. Great fiction is, in spirit, subversive, not pedagogical.

The encounter between Bruner and Reggio Emilia is, therefore, once again concrete in all the practices that enhance dialogue, elicit debate, and favor the encounter, through that unique and vocational use of the word that regains a central role in the experiences of the schools in Reggio Emilia. It is the design of the square in kindergartens and preschools as it is the constructed and deconstructed dialogue between children and teachers, between teachers and educators.

## **The Value of Participation in Making Listening Visible**

Far from these observations being only formal and declaratory statements of Reggio's theoretical explanations, we find a clear example of them in the charter of the Schools and Infant-Toddler Centers of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia. The document represents the tool with which schools present themselves to citizens as a service by offering an overview of the educational pact and the organization of the educational services of the city as a system (Comune di Reggio Emilia, 1998). It is the presentation of an identity path undertaken by the Reggio schools and infant-toddler centers in search of their best appearance at the moment of the initial meeting with the citizens. There is no lack of opportunity here to retrace the characterizing elements of the pedagogy of listening, such as dialogue, co-responsibility, or the circular educational relationship between all those involved in the process (Comune di Reggio Emilia, 2017).

On the other hand, the Service Charter, which is the result of a participatory process, explains the main distinctive elements of the Reggio educational experience and is offered as an invitation to participation, for parents and citizens. For Reggio, participation, is "the value and strategy that qualifies the way of children, educators, and parents to be part of the educational project, generating and nurturing feelings and culture of solidarity, responsibility, and inclusion" (Comune di Reggio Emilia, 1998, p.3).

On several occasions, the invitation for families and citizens to participate in the school's activities is emphasized as a fundamental element for the success of the pedagogical project, as well as the strong push to open dialogue and mutual understanding between teachers, parents, and other protagonists of the child's reality. The actors involved in this process of mutual participation and exchange are striking for the variety of roles they play: the cooks, the atelieristas, the parents (Edwards et al., 2014), and the whole city (Comune di Reggio Emilia, 2017). Participation, therefore, converges towards a collaborative culture of childhood which, in dialogue, recognizes the value of children entrusted to the care of the public institution by taking part in it as a civil society (Malaguzzi, 1995).

Participation is a constant invitation addressed to children, educators, and parents to exercise mutual listening and welcoming (Comune di Reggio Emilia, 2017). It is also substantiated through a design of horizontal, transparent spaces, opening between inside and external, in which the central square has a particular place as a place of meeting and communication—communication also fed by pedagogical documentation. In this way, the Reggio educational project affirms the centrality of schools as a political,



democratic, participatory place and project, in which the culture of children, and human culture, is not only transmitted but produced (Rinaldi, 2014).

The participation of families in the educational project of schools and infant-toddler centers is embodied in the Childhood-City Councils, one for each school and nursery, made up of parents, teachers, pedagogues, and citizens who are democratically elected every three years. The role of the Councils is to be protagonists of initiatives, meetings, events, projects, with the intent of involving not only all those who attend the nursery or school but also to offer themselves to the territory and citizens as an opportunity to meet the culture of childhood and educational services (Comune di Reggio Emilia, 2017). The City Childhood Councils find in the town council a place of connection, exchange, and shared planning.

The exchange with families is also fueled by the documentary material collected in infant-toddler centers and schools, with the aim of making visible not only the learning processes but the democratic and participatory culture of childhood. In this sense, "understood as a public place, the documentation substantiates the idea of nursery school and school, a forum in which a culture of childhood and education is developed through a democratic process" (Comune di Reggio Emilia, 2017, p. 44).

Participation and management are elements that revolve around an educational project based on communication, which has children, families, and staff as its protagonists and their well-being in general, in an interconnected form, as its objective (Rinaldi, 2009).

The participatory factor is linked to the practice of listening when the curricula of Reggio Emilia schools reach a relational dimension, where "relational dimension" means the ability to modify interventions and objectives according to the plasticity of contexts. It is a process of resistance and opposition to the power-knowledge connection that the regimes of absolute truth try to determine by uniquely defining the binomials of true-false, right-wrong, above all in pedagogy (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Bonilauri & Rubizzi, 2014). In fact, the process moves from the predefined programming of class activities to the contextual curriculum, and this happens while developing along the lines of the legislation with the courage to diverge, meeting contexts, rewriting the paths for groups and communities of children (Comune di Reggio Emilia, 2017; Reggio Children & Harvard Project Zero, 2011). The change of perspective, firmly anchored to the context from which it arises, leaves the indivisible and circular relationship between observation (listening), documentation, and interpretation unchanged.

This pedagogical posture, oriented to the critical examination of curricula and their reflexive remodeling, has its roots and is the fruit, once again, of the fortunate encounter with J. Bruner. The spiral curriculum of the American scholar is in fact the formulation that fosters school programs based on the great structures of the disciplines as the only possibility to improve lower and higher education (Bruner, 1979). In this holistic conception, the founding nuclei of knowledge are all inherent in the teaching subjects undertaken from an early age with the aim of building a unity of learning that is structural and non-content in continuity. The founding concepts and ideas of the disciplines are revisited repeatedly and at an ever-higher level of sophistication

throughout the entire school career. The spiral to which Bruner refers is figurative and not literal in the interweaving of contents, is heuristic rather than technical, and is an inspiration to move from the simple to the complex in the constant revision of previous ideas, excluding a pre-established structure to be imposed indiscriminately on class groups. Thus, for Bruner, teaching takes place in a hypothetical, narrative form and in a continuum that provides tools for development throughout life by supporting the child in their relationship with the other, different from themselves.

“I shall operate on the assumption that discovery, whether by a schoolboy going it on his own or by a scientist cultivating the growing edge of his field, is in its essence a matter of rearranging or transforming evidence in such a way that one is enabled to go beyond the evidence so reassembled to new insights.” (Bruner 1979, p. 82)

Here in this spiral, built within the framework of the founding concepts of the disciplines, new knowledge emerges that the child discovers in its educational environment. In Bruner, serendipity is a rare and occasional occurrence: it happens, in fact, along happy hypotheses to be traveled like routes. The discovery, in fact, Bruner highlights, only favors a well-prepared mind (Bruner, 1979). This road to knowledge is strewn with clues that must be reorganized in the great puzzle of knowledge. The concretization of this theory is visible in the use and formulation of the Reggio documentation.

## **The Documentation That Builds Relationships**

Documentation in Reggio Emilia is an important tool, a protagonist and companion on the path of children, parents, and teachers. Intended primarily as a tool, documentation is a public place that "substantiates the idea of a nursery and school, a forum in which, through a democratic process, a culture of childhood and education is developed".

As already highlighted in the circular process of observation and interpretation, documentation is the subject of this process, making it a way for teaching to act, a starting point for planning interventions, and an endpoint for intermediate steps. The ethics of discovery is therefore evident in composing the mosaic of clues that learning sows along the path (materials, photos, drawings, videos, sounds) and making it an instrument of debate (between children and adults), a means of updating, a subject of work, a source of memory and an object of disclosure (Comune di Reggio Emilia, 2009). If discovery becomes a process through documentation, it is essential to go back to highlighting how it uses and can only use the strategies of the listening pedagogy: the relationship, the narration, and the context. When teachers document, they already make choices, make a selection, and are called to reflect on how this process of attribution of meaning becomes aware in them.

Formulated in this way, the practice of documentation makes listening visible because it starts from the ethical encounter between the documenter and the occasion to witness (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). It is a concretization of listening because it starts from the relational perspective and the language of the relationship. Without these prerequisites of availability to the context, no form of documentation could take place or could be useful for reworking. As mentioned earlier, it should not be overlooked that

updating activities for teachers, meetings with families, weekly section meetings, and also comments and debates with children start from the collected materials. The child is excited to see the value attributed by the teacher to his work when the teacher considers it with attention and care, studies it with others, values it.

The collection of children's materials also feeds cultural paths that testify to the value of childhood culture, understood as a product of childhood and not for childhood. These paths can lead to real exhibitions and shows, such as the exhibition "The Eye if Jumping The Wall" (Comune di Reggio Emilia, 1984), which later became "The Hundred Languages of Children" or the more recent "The Wonder of Learning" (Cavallini et al., 2011). From this last text, one of the possible forms of documentation comes to life: a narrated collection, an illustration of a process. The visual testimonies contained are the result of the work of the teachers but also of the children who are often in charge of keeping track of the paths in favor of a reflection that can be shared afterwards with the teacher and the peer group.

## **The Political Implications of The Pedagogy of Listening**

In this Reggio capacity, documentation is one of the forms of narration, embodying the story that the community makes of itself in the process of building meaning and identity. It is in fact essential to highlight how this process is not and can never be neutral, but involves choices given by personal attitudes and individual tensions that the documenter exerts on the learning process (Reggio Children & Harvard Project Zero, 2011). In this sense, documenting involves an inalienable responsibility: attributing meaning to one's reality and that of others. In the documentary process, it is a question of making ethical choices and exercising them on the learning groups: selecting what will be commented on and analyzed again. In this way, the teacher indicates what is worth considering, what needs to be put back into circulation, and what takes on additional value. It is a delicate operation of discernment characterized by the assumption of roles and the definition of intrinsic objectives. Children are naturally included in this path, which for them represents, in all age groups, a relationship with external reality, one of the forms of the relationship with the adult.

Documentation is thus also a first form of evaluation and self-evaluation. In the first meaning, documentation is free from the reductive attribution of the docimological score of standardized tests: it is to return to another sense of the evaluation process. The type of classical evaluation to which the documentation is closest is that of formative evaluation, containing the evolution of the research-action model in a nutshell but making it shared and participated by children themselves (Bonilauri & Rubizzi 2014).

In the sense of self-assessment, on the other hand, the objective of teachers in choosing documentary materials is, essentially, to accompany children to "learn to learn" because they are naturally able to rethink their work and reflect on what has already happened (Bonilauri & Rubizzi 2014). The goal is therefore to argue the reflection and share it in the group's narrative through the selected materials. However, the self-assessment of teachers can also be understood as self-assessment.

Reflectively, the teachers, in dedicated moments, question themselves about the reasons for the choices made. They have the opportunity to review their actions, to reflect on them, and to question themselves in an uninterrupted process of metacognition, in a fundamental step of self-training.

Additionally, in the Service Charter—a document designed for dissemination to the community—the documentation assumes a fundamental role in the evaluation process. The evaluation "takes place through the method of dialogue, listening, and shared redesign" starting from what has been documented (Comune di Reggio Emilia, 2017). The text also emphasizes the times that Reggio's pedagogy leaves adults to reflect on the documentation: meetings between teachers, section meetings, and interviews with parents. This dimension gives a broader breadth to school time than the chronometric one, extending and expanding the reflections on learning to spaces other than classrooms. This same dimension also amplifies the value of the work of teachers who see themselves reinforced in their responsibility thanks to the recognition of the value that their time on documentation acquires.

It is easy to reconnect the concepts expressed up to now around documentation with Brunerian socio-constructivist theories. The image of a child in Reggio Emilia, which at the beginning meets the vision of the American psychologist's mind: a "multi-dimensional" mind (Bruner, 1986) capable of autonomously attributing meaning to reality thanks to the cultural contextualization of learning—exactly as happens in the Reggio documentation, a mind that undertakes a shared process of construction of meanings.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the examination of the intimate relationship between listening and documentation leaves open questions that have not yet been resolved, that need to be addressed with new tools, and with the tools of current reality.

This is mainly the case of two challenges that the Reggio documentation, together with the Brunerian philosophy, deliver to the educating communities: summative or docimological evaluation and the expansion of the pedagogy of listening to higher education levels.

In the first case, it is considered appropriate to point out that the documentation, created and practiced in listening represents a very valid tool for self-assessment in both teachers and children. Teachers can express themselves in this regard by reporting their self-assessments also in the form of final documents or reports to leadership. Similarly, it can take place for children who can express in words the dialogue they listened to, and sharing with teachers their metacognitive ideas on the paths made visible by the documentation. On the other hand, the achievement of a numerical objective, of a docimological evaluation, based on standardized parameters is more problematic. The effort that the system encounters in matching the two aspects is mainly in the definition of the indicators that must then be realized in numbers. Therefore, if it is true that paths and solutions are not epistemic entities, it is equally true

that the school system requires a final position that responds to standardized and shared criteria in a way that is sometimes too lean. This is the case for year-end report cards or evaluations at the end of the intermediate periods. In primary school, the recently introduced novelty of descriptive judgments tries to smooth out this effort, then saves the inevitable need for docimological reductionism, as in the case of cross-sectional or national tests.

This problem is all the more urgent when it is situated in secondary school, be it first or second grade. It is inescapably true that the quality of education is particularly relevant during the first years of life. This is the moment of maximum neuronal plasticity, of accelerated cognitive and motor development, the age of possibilities, and with it the age of frailties. However, it is equally true that the great opportunity that Reggio's pedagogy reveals is that of the image of the child as an active builder of their reality, at the same time restoring the possibilities of an adult in constant development and dialogue, with the reasons and forces of empathy and creativity born and nurtured in childhood.

It, therefore, becomes appropriate to extend this reflection on listening and documentation at the age of development, from puberty to adolescence, to allow the processes triggered in childhood to continue to flourish within educational institutions.

As with the documentation, this expansion of the pedagogical discourse to other age groups also leads to reflection on shared responsibility. In these terms, the pedagogy of listening acquires a value that is not only social but also more clearly political.

Listening is one of the metaphors of encounter and dialogue, recognizing the value of the other's point of view and interpretation. In this dynamic of continuous exchange, of group and group listening, the "learning community" is formed, which involves children but also, and above all, parents, who learn to listen and value their child not only in their exceptional nature and singularity, but also as a child who is part of and contributes to the group of greater learning, made up of many, with equal rights and responsibilities. In this sense, the pedagogy of listening does not only have to do with school, but becomes an attitude in life (Rinaldi, 2009).

The documentation, strategy, and tool for reflection and self-reflection, comparison and exchange, support; in the logic of the pedagogy of listening, the social and political role of the educational institution in its social and cultural exchange with the surrounding society. It feeds, in the participatory process, the continuous renewal of a social contract between individual and individual, and between individuals and institutions. In this sense, the pedagogy of listening proposes and requires that the educational institution opens itself in the manner of a permanent forum, a place for meeting and mutual listening (Dahlberg et al., 2007).

If we make this idea of school our own as a forum, as a place for listening and therefore for meeting, a generative place for change, in some way we respond to Paulo Freire when he asks—and asks us—whether the school is "a tool that serves to facilitate the integration of the younger generations into the logic of the current system and make them conform to it or (as) the practice of freedom, the means by which men

and women critically and creatively face reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of the world?" (Shaul, 2014, p. 34).

The practice of listening is also the way that Reggio Emilia has been able to propose to address the broad issue of rights, first and foremost those of children. Starting from the right to be heard—and therefore be recognized—as rights holders, citizens of today, not only of tomorrow, and as active subjects of research and not just objects of educational practices (Dahlberg et al., 2007); protagonists of the construction of cultures, identities, autonomies, together and in alliance with adults, thanks to that trust that mutual listening can build (Malaguzzi, 1995). This allows us to frame childhood not only as an age of life but as a quality of life, of the human being, for life.

Carla Rinaldi invited us to have confidence in participating in a culture of rights and responsibility in every part of the world, because rights are never given, never acquired; rights are generative, rights generate rights (Rinaldi, 2009).

For this value returned to the activity of schools, educational services, and the work of teachers, Reggio Emilia, with its central image of a child, combines the pedagogical value with the political one, today as well as in the 1970's. A value of democracy and the involvement of civil society in the choices of social equity that make Reggio "a city to imagine": "What struck me in Reggio Emilia was seeing how imagination was cultivated there, reinforcing at the same time the children's sense of the possible" (Bruner, 2004, p. 27).

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