Migliorare la partecipazione e il pluralismo nell'ECEC

Lezioni apprese dalla creazione di un catalogo sonoro multilingue da parte di un team educativo e di famiglie

Persico Greta¹ e Norma Porcellana²

Sommario

Il testo restituisce l'esperienza di realizzazione di un catalogo sonoro multilingue, nato per rispondere all'interesse prima di un bambino e poi del gruppo, presso un nido d'infanzia. L'articolo esplora la progettazione del catalogo, realizzato grazie al coinvolgimento di figure adulte familiari, e descrive come nel tempo tale proposta si sia collocata all'interno di una progettazione educativa articolata. L'esperienza mette in luce la generatività di una positiva contaminazione tra servizio educativo ed esperienze vissute nell'ambito dei contesti familiari. La multiculturalità e il plurilinguismo fanno da sfondo allo scritto senza esserne l'oggetto centrale, che è invece il vissuto di bambini e bambine e la diversità di cui ciascuno è portatore nel contesto educativo, arricchendolo.

Parole chiave

Catalogo sonoro multilingue, Partecipazione, Relazione servizio-famiglie, Progettazione educativa, ECEC.

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Enhancing participation and pluralism in ECEC

Lessons learned from creating a multilingual sound catalogue by an educational team and families

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Abstract

The article describes the experience of creating a multilingual catalogue of sounds in a nursery school in order to respond to the interest first of a child and then of the group. The article examines the design of the catalogue, which was realised thanks to the involvement of adult family members, and describes how, over time, this proposal became part of an articulated educational setting. The experience sheds light on the generativity of a positive contamination between educational services and experiences within family contexts. Multiculturalism and multilingualism form the background of the writing, without being its central object, which is instead the experience of the children and the diversity that each of them brings to the educational context, enriching it.

Keywords

Multi-language sound catalogue, Family's participation, Educational planning, ECEC.

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Multiplying knowledge by integrating perspectives: theoretical framework and method¹

It is well known that the pedagogical guidelines of the integrated system «zerosei»² set the general principles for the early childhood services educational practices. From the first pages, premises and perspectives clearly emerge that refer to a scenario far beyond national borders. Children are thought of as growing persons in their uniqueness, in relation with the group, in a continuous dialogue with heterogeneous family realities and social contexts (Guerra & Luciano, 2023; UNESCO, 2022; MIUR, 2021, 2022; Di Giandomenico, Picchio & Musatti, 2018).

The guidelines suggest that educational services should be developed in an integrative way (Zecca et al., 2023; Stornaiuolo, 2021; Lazzari et al., 2020), considering both the individual story and the wider picture of the social and cultural dynamics in which families are involved (Giuliani, 2022; Guerra & Luciano, 2009, 2014). The document stresses that the family and the early childhood services observe and share experiences with the same child, but through specific roles and in different environments, and therefore each perspective should be integrated and seen as a resource for both.

Thus, the theoretical background of this paper is the extensive literature exploring the relationship between educational services and families (Sabatano, Sibilio & Zollo, 2023; Foni, 2015) in dialogue with studies addressing educational services as plural contexts (Silva, Deluigi & Zaninelli, 2022), also in relation to migrant families (Bove, 2020; Bove e Sharmahd, 2020; De Canale, 2015).

Moreover, we refer to the literature related to the work of documenting daily activities (Biffi, Zuccoli e Carriera, 2021; Carlsen e Clark, 2022; Schulz, 2015; Luciano e Guerra, 2014), which is understood both as an observational tool, and as a means of communication with families. Among the documentation tools, special attention is given to diaries, as well as the use of photographic material (Faggion, 2017; Luini e Mussini, 2023) to describe daily life and significant details of activities, individual actions, and interactions among peers and with adults. In the essay the theoretical and methodological framework is followed by a description and analysis of the experience: the genesis of a «multi language sound catalogue» and the pedagogical proposals that emerged through it. The aim of this article is to critically reflect on an experience in which the encounter between school and families gave rise to an articulated and participatory educational project. The

¹ This paper is the result of the joint work of the two authors. However, paragraphs 1, 3 and 4 can be attributed to G. Persico, while paragraph 2 can be attributed to G. Persico and N. Porcellana.

² https://www.istruzione.it/sistema-integrato-o6/allegati/decreto%20ministeriale%2022%20novembre%20 2021,%20n.%20334.pdf (Retrieved from 30/05/2024).

pedagogical project that underpins the whole process is then revisited in order to highlight the attention given by the educators to permeate the work with the group of children from the organisation of the space, the involvement of the families, to the valorisation of the materials, objects and input brought by the families from domestic and external environment. For these reasons, although this contribution is somehow related to soundscape, music education in early childhood is not addressed.

An analysis of an empirical experience, based on the collaboration between educational teams and families, is the basis for this essay; an integrated and dialogical perspective that was generated starting from a periodic conversation to share updates about a child, a meeting we could define as a privileged place of encounter between professionals and parents.

From a methodological point of view, we refer to what Piasere (2002) calls «retrospective ethnography» namely, *a situation on the borders of ethnography, in that liminal place of ethnography, in the sense of a blurred condition, where one can gradually slip from a common everyday experience to an ethnographic experience. In these cases, the experience was not, at the time it occurred, an intentional experience experiment (ndr. un esperimento di esperienza intenzionale) and the written report becomes a retrospective ethnography, a thought experiment applied to one's memory of the events experienced (Piasere, 2002, p. 49, our translation). While participant observation enables researcher to «step in», to perform an action of immersive knowledge, through retrospective ethnography, is it possible to «step out» (Piasere, 2002, p. 52) of the experience in order to observe it from different perspectives.*

Besides being the authors of this text, we are indeed also a childcare worker with several years of experience, as well as a coordinator of the same, and a researcher who has had the opportunity to know this service (ECEC) as a parent. As educational professionals interested in studying the complexity of pedagogical processes, we decided to critically analyse the entire unexpected action research process (MacNaughton & Hughes, 2009) in which we took part to for about eight months.

The set of data considered includes also the audio recordings of three interviews collected in the crèche, which took the form of a meta-reflective dialogue between the two authors; secondly, personal diaries that were made available by educators, diaries written both for; the purpose of keeping track of ongoing educational projects, as well as with the aim of fostering the sharing of different experiences with the children's adult reference figures. Moreover, visual documentation produced was collected and analysed and although to a small extent, is included in this paper. Finally, Detailed descriptions of the pedagogical proposals' design background were collected. During the writing process, two different narrative styles are adopted: the academic writing style and the pedagogical documentation style. This double track is deliberate and considers the different positions of the authors.

Valuing participation and pluralism from individual interest to pedagogical design

The ECEC in which the research was carried out is called Nido del Faggio, and it is a municipal nursery, located in a town in the province of Province of Bergamo. Founded in 1980, it has four classes with children from 0 to 3 years old, divided into heterogeneous age groups, and is run by a teaching team, as well as auxiliary staff, trainees and young civil servants. Over time, this ECEC has been characterized by a reflexive skill and innovative thinking. The following is the narration of the whole process from excerpts of the educators' diaries, starting approximatively two years ago, when two parents and an educator were talking about a baby just over 24 months old, discussing his growth path, relationships and what interests him most.

These are probably not mama G.'s exact words... but surely this is where it all began. «You know N., U. [the child] seems interested when he hears someone talking or listening to songs in other languages...».

This was the input that came from a family during an interview, which led us educators to start thinking about what could be proposed within the group, which would meet the needs... curiosity... interest of a child but which could, at the same time, become a wealth of experience for the whole group. Mindful of a proposal made to some children the previous year; we thought it might be interesting to collect the voices of some members of our section's families, so that they could be heard by the children at certain times of the day. Starting with this idea; we then opened up a dialogue to understand how to make it concrete.³

In the months that followed, two things happened: the teachers treasured the interview, and the family became active in designing and creating an object, a multilingual «sound catalogue», that could be useful on the path they had chosen. At the same time however, other events occur. The educators begin meticulous work to valorise what children and families bring to the life of the group. Soon they are collecting images, sounds, objects, experiences, books, curiosities - important resources gathered during their time at nursery, or from life outside of it.

³ Diary, selection.

While the work of collecting the soundtracks was underway, other events were taking place: two children were preparing to go on a trip abroad (to Senegal in one case and Jordan in the other).



The anticipation and curiosity about the upcoming trips also helped fuel interests, narratives, and a desire for discovery for the whole group. Also, from these distant countries, voices in different languages could have arrived so as to make the linguistic offer of the sound panel even richer.

The January 2022 diary reads:

Often S. and U. would explicate to us educators, during the moments of conviviality; at lunch... or in the onset of sleep... their excitement of imagining these trips, perhaps without really knowing where they would be going, and even, us adults realized that we knew nothing, or very little about these faraway places. Thus arose the desire to be able to do image or film research together with the children, which could satisfy their, but also our [the educators'] curiosities and be a cue for dialogue and storytelling in the group. For S. the return to nursery brings with it a special excitement. The family is preparing to go on a trip to Senegal, so together with her here at nursery, we talk about what this experience will be like, and, on the PC, we look at pictures of these wonderful places that are very different from ours.

U. and S.' travels become opportunities to learn about new places and some different cultures within the world. The families of M., Y. and F. also have a mi-

gratory background, and this heterogeneity of experiences becomes a great asset to us. We decide to put a small cabinet in the section, where, with order and care we can store all the treasures. A book about mothers of the world, a small album with inserted pictures of landscapes, animals, populations of the world, a box containing various musical instruments and all of the treasures (e.g. photos, objects,) collected and brought back from travels. The older children can access them whenever they want, but at the same time, the cabinet with its closed doors «protects» these items from curious, and sometimes, less than gentle interventions by younger children. Precious things should be kept with care.

Upon returning from travels, after a few weeks of work, the catalogue is ready. The March diary reads:

Finally, the music also becomes an opportunity to collaborate with parents in order to undertake a small project. G., with the help of Carla, a friend, created a multi-task panel where the children can find CDs with songs and nursery rhymes in different languages (French, Spanish, Wolof, Italian, and Bergamo dialect). The recorded voices were placed on different CDs, differentiated by the photo of the person who gave his or her voice, and then all placed in the sound catalogue's pockets, also differentiated by the same photos that are on each CD. Each pocket contained its own CD.



Us educators, then began to think about where to place this tool and how to offer it to the group, so that it would also be functional and usable independently by each child/ growing person whenever they wished. Thus, we decided to move

the CD player (previously placed up high — out of reach) to a cabinet near the corner, where we would hang the catalogue, at the height of the children.



The panel was placed in the reading corner, in a spot that is more protected, and less within reach of the younger children. Like some books, this tool also needs care and attention; older children, independently, but with the attentive presence of an adult, can choose which CD to listen to, take it out of its pocket and insert it into the CD player.

For some children, the choice of CD was based on the emotional bond, so their mother's or grandfather's was taken out of their pocket; for others, it was dictated by the sheer pleasure of listening to languages with very different sounds. Then, slowly, the CD, which was once named by the name of the singer, was named with the spoken language as the days went by, S.'s CD, was no longer S.'s CD, but for some children it had become «the French CD». Even us adults had our preferences... personally, I would always choose Grandma Nene's CD, which very sweetly whispered a melody in the Wolof language (the first few times I listened to it, it moved me to the point of tears).

The interest in the proposal was immediate, and our role, as educators was, initially, to accompany the children with gestures and words to let them understand its use, which gradually became more and more autonomous, and it is preciousness; respected.

The making of the sound catalogue is thus linked with a broader and more articulate texture, which permeates the physical setting of the section with pedagogical intentionality, as well as the proposals and relationships within the group, and between the educational service and families.

The experiences in this multi-purpose corner with the cabinet of treasures brought back from trips, the sound catalogue, the stereo for listening to CDs, musical instruments and books, were documented over a period of time with some photos that we then included in the section's diary pages to demonstrate to families the children's approaches, and the dynamics that arose from this project.



The experience, however, never petered out; every day, in fact, until the end of the year, these voices accompanied the section in a gentile after-lunch routine that got them off to sleep and were, for us educators, a useful tool that, like a red thread, let us to keep the simple pleasure of the relationships and bonds alive.



After retracing the educational experience from the narrative point of view of the educators, the aim of the next paragraph is to analyse from a pedagogical perspective, dwelling both; on the relationship between the educational service and families, and on the methodological attentions favourable to the formulation of educational proposals that, starting from individual and group interest emergence, multiply the possibilities for experimentation and relationships (Galardini, 2020; Russo, 2020) within the educational contest itself.

Discussion and limits

The sound catalogue was intended to respond to the interest in the sounds of different languages and melodies from other musical cultures, it was possible to adopt several strategies to reach this goal. The aim was to create an object, an artefact that, as happens with classroom libraries, could be enjoyed with ease and autonomy, both, individually and within the group. Music was in fact very present in the lives of that particular group of children, yet its enjoyment was almost completely tied to the presence of an educator to manage the technical part. The sound catalogue, although much more limited in the amount of content offered, was intended to eliminate the need for educators' intermediation between the children's desire to, and enjoyment of listening material. The choice to encourage autonomy of use reflected different skills, creating relational dynamics within the group. In fact, the sound catalogue was made (the pockets had a small piece of velcro that did not make them immediately openable) in such a way that; for the smallest children in the group, still engaged in oral explorations, it was not easily accessible.

Moreover, the idea was also to produce an object made of readily available materials, thus making it inexpensive. These attentions to detail stemmed from the desire to facilitate other groups in the nursery with packaging for their own sound catalogue, if this first experience would have positive feedback. After various researches, the choice then fell on the use of CDs, an obsolete object among instruments for listening to soundtracks, but one that was particularly suitable because of its shape, solidity and handling. The surface of the CD, unlike, for example, a USB flash drive, allowed the image on the panel's pocket to be applied to it, indicating the place to store each CD, making the sound content recognizable.

In addition, the panel was built with the possibility of it being transformable over time; in fact, the CDs and their related images can be easily replaced, added, or the sound catalogue's contents can be changed, depending on the needs and interests of those who use it. The choice to apply photographs of the faces of those who had donated a soundtrack, on the other hand, responded to an emotional instance. Of particular interest was the opportunity to access different language-related sounds, starting from the resources provided by the families of the children involved. Cultivating the emotional dimension was, thus, a beneficial effect that, for some, fuelled their interest and desire to enjoy the catalogue. Moreover, instead of reducing linguistic differences to an element of separation based on associations with territorial or nationalist contexts, it was important to raise awareness of the diversity of languages and sounds that the group of children, with their families near and far, carry. Once the planning phase was completed, the children's adult caregivers were invited to participate in the initiative through various channels and communications. Initially, the invitation to share soundtracks was communicated to them by the educators during the welcome and meet up moments, then a message was sent and once the institutional communication had taken place; contacts became more informal and operational.

The placement of the sounds catalogue in the section was carefully chosen. In fact, a soft corner was favourited as the symbolic space, in continuity with the one intended for illustrated books, equipped with cushions on which to sit and relax to listen to the music. Near the catalogue and the stereo, marking the space and enriching it by multiplying the possible experiences, the two-door cabinet containing travel treasures (salt from the Dead Sea, coins, stones, musical instruments from Senegal), books with photographs of animals found in different habitats, as well as photo albums and a book depicting pictures of mothers in every part of the world was also placed.



The layout of the educational setting (Weyland & Galletti, 2018) thus progressed hand in hand with the construction and enjoyment of the sound catalogue, expanding stimuli and proposals from the sounds of different languages to curiosity about unfamiliar contexts and objects.

In accompanying children, educators assume a posture of listening and discovery. They take in an individual's interest and ask questions in order to expand it to the whole group. Such movement, from the individual subjectivity to that of the group is, however, not a given since it is not sufficient to continuously share a space and time for significant relationships to arise. These relationships, and with them, the creation of a group need time to be cultivated, and this process is also activated and nurtured through a positive contamination of individual experiences; the same, brought to classmates can activate a virtuous process of learning amplification. For instance, the educational team for example, did not know the destinations of the trips taken by U. and S., they did not know anything about the places, but cultivate, with them, the curiosity to discover; not knowing puts them in the condition of not giving answers but, instead, adding questions and searching for answers together. The adult figures assume a position of exploration and discovery that they share with the children, and with them, they also experience, for example the bewilderment of not understanding some of the soundtracks in the catalogue.

Relational geometries those based on individual expertise are thus constantly changing. Different levels of attention and involvement of some children more than others, as well as heterogeneous levels of language skills in the group also require educators to exercise a mediating role. The concern that the sound catalogue might be used with little care or might elicit very limited attention over time, and the finding out that this was not the case, allowed the educators to pause and reflect on their own expectations. It also allowed them to observe how the younger children of the group had internalized, in a short time, the fact that the material was not readily available to them, respecting its use, and, at the same time, for the older ones, it was about having a special object dedicated to them.

The theme of expectations is then intertwined with looking at each child with whom we relate; on what we see, or don't see, in regard to that person. This was the case of a child that was thought to be too young and not self-sufficient in the fruition of the catalogue until, that same child manifested an interest and created the conditions for himself to be able to use it too. Of course, this transition is not an automatism and is not always practicable, but the attitude is of that to welcome an interest and then to revive and continue that process of knowledge that has been triggered. This trend, which could be summarize as welcoming, relaunching and multiplying, is evident in the educational intentionality that acts as a glue to the experiences proposed by the educators to integrate the sound catalogue. The relationship once again becomes central, since according to the educators it is not so much the individual proposal that is central, but how it allows children to enter into relationship bonds, in finding pleasure in being together, which results in the wellbeing of both, the adults, both educational team and families, and the children.

The focus is then on the relationships within the nursery's section, an element that works if it integrates and feeds on the relationships that occur on another level as well, the relationship between the service and families. In fact, listening to a family's contribution is not limited to noting information or another point of view, but is to pool together resources that contribute to the achievement of a common goal. There are many ways to do this, in this essay the importance of meetings as a privileged space of encounter is emphasised, as well as the involvement of adult family members in the process of making the sound catalogue. And again, to conclude; dialogue returns in the section's diary narratives where the whole process is recounted.

There are a number of limitations to this study which, in our view, are worthy of clarification.

In this experience, what emerged to be missed the most was a more accurate restitution of the project and the design complexity that was nurtured during the collection of voices and songs in different languages, going beyond the catalogue. In fact, the educators reinstated, through the section's diary (Luciano & Guerra, 2014), the use of the catalogue, but without making sufficiently explicit the interconnection with the educational proposal that was being carried out as a whole, that meaning, there was a lack of emphasis on the sound catalogue as a tool that integrated a more articulated learning path. The foresight of making clear the complexity of the pedagogical planning in which the contribution given by the families for the creation of the sound catalogue was inserted, would perhaps have more effectively conveyed the great value of their participation, also considering just how much the families were involved, and did — and that this is not always a given.

Moreover, is it important to stress a methodological issue: the positioning of the writers that can be interpreted as both; a strength, as well as a potential limitation. While direct involvement in the field favours a privileged proximity, at the same time, it would seem to lack the proper distance that ethnographic research has understood here as immersive presence with respect to that of what the contexts and processes analysed would require. In this respect; the times in which the direct experience, data collection, and then data analysis took place fostered a distancing, as well as, a transformation in the roles of engagement with respect to the process.

Conclusion

This article stems from the observation of an educational experience carried out in a 0-3 years old ECEC, starting with the interest detected by the parents of one of the children, the stimuli shared by the children with their educators, and the involvement of the families. We observed how a cue, limited and circumscribed, became a resource for the group and an opportunity to shape an articulated educational experience. The sound catalogue, in the craft form that characterizes it, is easily reproducible; moreover, if thought of as a method and tool, and not for the content it conveyed on this occasion, it can be used with a certain versatility. Indeed, it fulfils the function of a sound library, constructed in a participatory way, to explore a specific area of interest that can change depending on the group with which it is used. Think, for example, of the multiplicity of fields that can be explored from a sonority point of view; natural contexts, the animal world just to name a few.

This experience was characterized by its duration over time and pervasiveness in involving children in discovery, exploration, listening, reading, and storytelling activities. This analysis carries with it the «availability to look back» limitation, which thus cannot fully capture the reasons for some of the choices, and paths taken in order to pursue them at the time they were being made. Just as it is, now, not possible, for obvious reasons, to adopt different strategies in the face of any critical issues noted. At the same time, this glimpse made it possible to detect a great richness of the entire proposal, namely, the possibility of thinking of oneself in discovery, of discovering oneself as «other,» for all the people, children, parents and educational team, who went through it, regardless of their family, cultural, or linguistic background.

The stimuli proposed by the educators solicited the children from different points of view and through multiple languages; personal experiences entered the daily life of the section, and it is through them that the issue of cultural and linguistic multiplicity, of otherness, was thematised. It was particularly interesting to observe how the pervasiveness of the proposal, accomplished gradually thanks to the careful observation of the educators, over a stretched time of a few months, made it possible to give valour to the multicultural dimension (Pescarmona, 2021; Gamba, 2018) even without making it the subject of a dedicated project proposal. In each of the nuances of the experience, each person could rediscover him or herself to be other than someone or something (an object, a voice, a language), or familiar to someone or something. And that boundary was constantly changing, as were the relationships that took shape there, depending on what fields of experience and the subjectivities that were crossing them.

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