

## The Pedagogy of Listening

*Quoted directly from Carla Rinaldi's chapter entitled "Documentation and Assessment: What is the Relationship?" in Project Zero and Reggio Children (2001): Making learning visible: Children as individual and group learners. Reggio Emilia, Italy: Reggio Children.]*

How can we define the term listening?

Listening as sensitivity to the patterns that connect, to that which connects us to others; abandoning ourselves to the conviction that our understanding and our own being are but small parts of a broader, integrated knowledge that holds the universe together.

Listening, then, as a metaphor for having the openness and sensitivity to listen and be listened to – listening not just with our ears, but with all our senses (sight, touch, smell, taste, orientation).

Listening to the hundred, the thousand languages, symbols, and codes we use to express ourselves and communicate, and with which life expresses itself and communicates to those who know how to listen.

Listening as time, the time of listening, a time that is outside chronological time – a time full of silences, of long pauses, an interior time. Interior listening, listening to ourselves, as a pause, a suspension, as an element that generates listening to others but, in turn, is generated by the listening that others give us. Behind the act of listening there is often a curiosity, a desire, a doubt, an interest; there is always an emotion.

Listening is emotion; it is generated by emotions and stimulates emotions. The emotions of others influence us by means of processes that are strong, direct, not mediated, and intrinsic to the interactions between communicating subjects.

Listening as welcoming and being open to differences, recognizing the value of the other's point of view and interpretation.

Listening is an active verb that involves interpretation, giving meaning to

the message and value to those who offer it.

Listening that does not produce answers but formulates questions; listening that is generated by doubt, by uncertainty, which is not insecurity but, on the contrary, the security that every truth is only such if we are aware of its limits and its possible “falsification.”

Listening is not easy. It requires a deep awareness and at the same time a suspension of our judgments and above all our prejudices; it requires openness to change. It demands that we have clearly in mind the value of the unknown and that we are able to overcome the sense of emptiness and precariousness that we experience whenever our certainties are questioned.

Listening that takes the individual out of anonymity, that legitimates us, gives us visibility, enriching both those who listen and those who produce the message (and children cannot bear to be anonymous).

Listening as the premise for any learning relationship – learning that is determined by the “learning subject” and takes shape through his or her mind through action and reflection, that becomes knowledge and skill through representation and exchange.

Listening, therefore, as “a listening context,” where one learns to listen and narrate, where individuals feel legitimated to represent their theories and offer their own interpretations of a particular question. In representing our theories, we “re-know” or “re-cognize” them, making it possible for our images and intuitions to take shape and evolve through action, emotion, expressiveness, and iconic and symbolic representations (the “hundred languages”).

Understanding and awareness are generated by sharing and dialogue. We represent the world in our minds, and this representation is the fruit of our sensitivity to the way in which the world is interpreted in the minds and in the representations of others. It is here that our sensitivity to listening is highlighted; starting from this sensitivity, we form and communicate our representations of the world based not only on our response to events (self-construction), but also on that which we learn about the world through our communicative exchange with others. (80-81)