

Artigo

Child protagonism as social pedagogy tool in early childhood education: experience of a Brazilian educational centre

O protagonismo infantil como ferramenta de pedagogia social na educação infantil: experiência de um centro educacional brasileiro

El protagonismo del niño como herramienta de pedagogía social en la educación infantil: experiencia de un centro educativo brasileño

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Abstract

This article gives an account of a research experience in the Nossa Senhora Aparecida Centre, a Brazilian school located on the outskirts of Salvador de Bahia, run by the Fundação Betânia O.N.L.U.S. of the Franciscan Fraternity of Bethany. The Centre, which is free of charge, is responsible for the education of children aged 0 to 6 who come from highly disadvantaged social, economic and family backgrounds. The research aimed to investigate the applicability of the Reggio Emilia Approach in the context of the province of Salvador de Bahia and to investigate how the social value of this initiative is perceived by the protagonists of the Center. This article highlights a convergence between European and Brazilian education; the same pedagogical principles are valid and effective in different and distant contexts, in time and space. The child experiences a place where he or she can feel cared for, loved and appreciated; thanks to its protagonism, the simplicity of the educational contexts and the freedom to explore the environment, the child is able to enhance beauty and to be amazed. Child-centered pedagogy gives the school a social and human value, which is identifiable in the recognition of the child's dignity. The protagonism of the child, the main construct of the Emilian approach, reveals itself as the main tool of social emancipation, as Freire understood it, and therefore appears particularly reconcilable with a Brazilian pedagogical culture, that is the background to the social pedagogy projects of the educational Center analyzed.

Resumo

Este artigo relata uma experiência de pesquisa no Centro Nossa Senhora Aparecida, uma escola brasileira localizada na periferia de Salvador da Bahia, administrada pela Fundação Betânia O.N.L.U.S. da Fraternidade Franciscana de Betânia. A pesquisa teve como objetivo investigar a aplicabilidade da Abordagem Reggio Emilia no contexto da província de Salvador da Bahia e investigar como o valor social dessa iniciativa é percebido pelos protagonistas do Centro. Este artigo destaca uma convergência entre a educação europeia e a brasileira; os mesmos princípios pedagógicos são válidos e eficazes em contextos diferentes e distantes, no tempo e no espaço. A criança experimenta um lugar onde pode se sentir cuidada, amada e valorizada; graças ao seu

¹This article is the result of the collaboration of the two authors. For the paragraphs, these are attributed as follows: 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 to Chiara Minischetti, 1, 7, 8, 9 to Anna Aluffi Pentini

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protagonismo, à simplicidade dos contextos educacionais e à liberdade de explorar o ambiente, a criança é capaz de valorizar a beleza e se surpreender. A pedagogia centrada na criança confere à escola um valor social e humano, que se identifica no reconhecimento da dignidade da criança. O protagonismo da criança, o principal construto da abordagem emiliana, revela-se como a principal ferramenta de emancipação social, como Freire a entendia, e, portanto, parece particularmente conciliável com uma cultura pedagógica brasileira, que é o pano de fundo dos projetos de pedagogia social do Centro educacional analisado.

Resumen

Este artículo da cuenta de una experiencia de investigación en el Centro Nossa Senhora Aparecida, una escuela brasileña ubicada en la periferia de Salvador de Bahía, dirigida por la Fundação Betânia O.N.L.U.S. de la Fraternidad Franciscana de Betania. El Centro, de carácter gratuito, se encarga de la educación de los niños de 0 a 6 años que proceden de entornos sociales, económicos y familiares muy desfavorecidos. La investigación tuvo como objetivo indagar la aplicabilidad del Enfoque Reggio Emilia en el contexto de la provincia de Salvador de Bahía e indagar cómo el valor social de esta iniciativa es percibido por los protagonistas del Centro. Este artículo destaca una convergencia entre la educación europea y la brasileña; Los mismos principios pedagógicos son válidos y eficaces en contextos diferentes y distantes, en el tiempo y en el espacio. El niño experimenta un lugar donde puede sentirse cuidado, amado y apreciado; Gracias a su protagonismo, a la sencillez de los contextos educativos y a la libertad de explorar el entorno, el niño es capaz de realzar la belleza y sorprenderse. La pedagogía centrada en el niño confiere a la escuela un valor social y humano, que se identifica en el reconocimiento de la dignidad del niño. El protagonismo del niño, construcción principal del enfoque emiliano, se revela como la principal herramienta de emancipación social, tal como la entendía Freire, y por lo tanto aparece particularmente reconciliable con una cultura pedagógica brasileña, que es el trasfondo de los proyectos de pedagogía social del Centro educativo analizado.

Keywords: Early childhood education, Social Pedagogy, Reggio Emilia Approach

Palavras-chave: Educação infantil, Pedagogia social, Abordagem Reggio Emilia

Palabras clave: Educación de la primera infancia, Pedagogía social, Reggio Emilia Approach

1. Introduction

This article presents the research experience conducted in the Nossa Senhora Aparecida Centre, a Brazilian school located in the outskirts of Salvador de Bahia, for children from 6 months to 5 years and 11 months. The Nossa Senhora Aparecida Centre is part of the Brazil Project, one of the missionary projects of the Fundação Betânia O.N.L.U.S., belonging to the Franciscan Fraternity of Bethany³. The Centre recognises as its main function the act of caring for and educating in a perspective that ensures the possibility of integral personal development for the minor. Since 2014, the educational Centre has been active all day from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday to Friday. During the 2022 educational year, the Centre has hosted about 120 pupils, divided into 6

³ For further and more specific information on the Bethany O.N.L.U.S. Foundation and the Franciscan Fraternity of Bethany, please refer to the official website: <https://www.ffbetania.net>.

classes, one for each year of age. The educational Center is private, but its attendance is free.

The research was carried out for two reasons: the interest in Brazilian culture and the fact that the educational Centre uses an Italian pedagogical approach in a non-European country, within a context that presents significant socio-economic problems.

The research was carried out using participatory observation (Orefice, 2006), with a focus on the identification of the fundamental values that are present in the Reggio Emilia Approach and that the school aims to promote: the protagonism of the pupil in teaching and the care of children's rights and their well-being.

We also wanted to explore the theme of the social value of the school, in light of the Reggio Emilia Approach (Malaguzzi, 1971), to understand how much the Nossa Senhora Aparecida Centre acts implicitly or explicitly in the direction of a community education attentive to the dimension of truth, beauty, justness and health (Aluffi Pentini, 2021) and which elements of Malaguzzi's message were given greater relevance. Finally, the aim was to evaluate the adaptability and effectiveness of the Emilian pedagogical approach in the context of the suburbs of Salvador de Bahia, and consequently to deepen the social value of the school perceived by teachers, families and pupils.

2. Methodology

We used the methodology of action research applied to the case study (Bortolotto, 2020). After an examination of the literature related to Malaguzzi's pedagogy (Edwards et al., 2012), action research (Barbier, 2008), participatory assessment, inclusive teaching (Guerini, 2023) and environmental study (Classe, 1964), the survey tools were built:

- the grids for the analysis of the project documentation of the Franciscan Fraternity of Bethany and of the Pedagogical Political Project (PPP)⁴ of the Centre, i.e. a document that brings the objectives and guidelines together and defines the pedagogical-philosophical perspective and the action plan of the school;
- the observation grids regarding the context;
- the outline of a semi-structured interview, to be submitted to the educational staff and a number of witnesses.

⁴ The PPP is formally required by the *Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional* (LDB), i.e. Law no. 9394/96, which has promoted various reforms within school systems, such as the compulsory nature of the master's degree in pedagogy in order to access teaching in the preschool age group (the text of the aforementioned law can be consulted, in the original language, on the official website: https://planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/Leis/L9394.htm). The PPP aims to promote the autonomy of the school in administrative and pedagogical management, through actions that adapt to the reality, identity, cultural and religious diversity of each educational institution. The PPP is different and unique in each educational institution, in fact the content can be flexible; however, it must follow the three fundamental pillars represented by the three 'P's': Project (a well-defined action plan), Political (the educational environment must be a tool that helps the student to develop critically as a citizen), Pedagogical (it must propose educational activities and actions that contribute to the learning process of children).

The research in the Brazilian educational Centre lasted two months. The analysis of the documentation and the PPP took place hand in hand with the participatory observation. Here, we will proceed with the extensive analysis of the following: the social context – the orientation of the Centre – the Nossa Senhora Aparecida Centre – the educational project – the pedagogy of the school – the in-depth interviews.

3. The social contexto

The Nossa Senhora Aparecida Centre is based in the city of Salvador de Bahia, in the northeast region of Brazil. The socio-economic context in which the school is located can be defined as highly underprivileged; the local Bahian society is characterized by extreme poverty and a high violence rate, both domestic and social, often generated by the massive presence of drug trafficking (Magoni, 2012). The level of crime is very high, the main problems are due to a high use and sale of drugs. According to data from the World Bank, Brazil ranked as the sixth country in the world with the most homicides⁵ in 2018.

In terms of social cohesion, it is good to say that society is permeated by a strong sense of religiosity. Like the rest of the State of Bahia, the suburb of São Cristóvão, where the Nossa Senhora Aparecida Centre is located, is characterized by a very strong, varied and diversified religious belief: there are evangelical churches, the Catholic church and even religious cults. In general, the Bahian culture is characterized by an anthropological and religious phenomenon that is the direct consequence of the forced coexistence of very different cultures, namely the tribal one of the African slaves brought to the New World, the indigenous one and the Christian one of the Portuguese conquerors (Barba, 2007). It is easy to understand how currently, in the city of Salvador de Bahia, the climate is outlined by an interesting religious and cultural syncretism, a phenomenon that has become part of Brazilian culture.

4. The orientation of the Centre

The management of the Nossa Senhora Aparecida Centre is characterized by the religious beliefs of those who manage it, namely the Franciscan Fraternity of Bethany, an institute of consecrated life that belongs to the Roman Catholic Apostolic Church of diocesan right. Founded in 1982 in Loreto by Father Pancrazio Nicola Gaudio, the Franciscan Fraternity of Bethany is made up of friars, both clerics and lay people, and nuns who consecrate themselves to God by making public vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. The consecration is achieved through the charism of the Fraternity, which is expressed in prayer and hospitality, distinctive elements of Evangelical Bethany⁶, lived in a profound atmosphere of fraternal life, sharing and simplicity typical of the Franciscan experience.

⁵ In 2018, Brazil had 27.38 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants. The World Bank is the leading international organization for developmental support and poverty reduction. Established in 1945, it is formally a specialized agency of the United Nations, with 189 member countries. It can be consulted on the official website <https://www.worldbank.org/en/home>.

⁶ It means the Bethany that is outlined in the Gospels, that is, the family of Martha, Mary and Lazarus. The three brothers form a family unit ready to welcome Jesus and his disciples as a refreshment from their apostolic labours (Gospel of Luke 10:38-42).

The Fraternity has twelve houses in the world, the mother house is located in Italy, in Terlizzi in the province of Bari; In some locations, missionary activities are carried out and various services are provided: soup kitchen, spiritual accompaniment in prisons and hospitals, listening centre, distribution of food and evangelisation.

In Salvador de Bahia, the founder of the Institute of consecrated life intended to create a reception and hospitality centre for children and adolescents who, in the favelas, live in serious situations of social, economic and cultural hardship. The main objective was to offer a service, in the light of the Gospel and the charism of the Franciscan Fraternity of Bethany, which would ensure that minors and their families have the possibility of personal growth, in the concrete exercise of their right to life, health, nutrition, education, sport, leisure, culture, dignity, respect, freedom and family – community life. All of this is also permeated by a spiritual dimension.

Thanks to an initiative of the founder of the religious institute, in 2007 the Fundação Betânia O.N.L.U.S., a non-profit institution, began its activity, operating in the houses of the Fraternity and giving support to the weakest and neediest part. The main purpose of the Foundation is to provide assistance and human and spiritual formation to young people in underprivileged situations. It deals with the following main activities:

- the creation of structures for the sustenance and for the cultural, professional and spiritual formation of people in need;
- the improvement of the health conditions of the young;
- the promotion of the Christian culture of gift and love, and the development of the Christian values of charity and solidarity;
- the promotion of charity and remote assistance.

The Fundação Betânia O.N.L.U.S. is created and promoted by the Fraternity itself; the two entities are, in fact, closely connected. The Foundation aims to support the solidarity activities and charitable works of the religious Institute, in all the places where it is present, both in Italy and abroad. In this sense, it is a partner of the Institute of Consecrated Life, supporting its projects. The Fundação Betânia O.N.L.U.S. is exclusively funded by voluntary donations, which can be implemented in different ways⁷.

The Nossa Senhora Aparecida Centre is part of the “*Brazil Project*”, which is currently the most important initiative of the Fundação Betânia O.N.L.U.S.. The project was born after a careful research on the living conditions of the inhabitants of the community of São Cristóvão (a neighbourhood located in the outskirts of Salvador de Bahia) and a mindful analysis of their needs. After a period of observation and research, the consecrated members of the Franciscan Fraternity of Bethany identified in the citizens of the neighbourhood the main need to have a welcoming space for the many families, which would accommodate their

⁷ There are various ways in which the works of the Fundação Betânia O.N.L.U.S. can be supported, namely through: the 5x1000 (share of personal income tax, which the taxpayer, according to the principles of fiscal subsidiarity, can allocate to non-profit entities registered in the list of beneficiaries and to the social initiatives of the municipalities); voluntary donations; companies or professionals, who can donate basic necessities or useful means, or even services, such as professional advice (legal, technical or administrative) or work services free of charge.

children full-time; a place that could take care of the child in a global way, with a view to transmitting social and spiritual values, for the common good, for life and for human dignity.

In recent years, the Fundação Betânia O.N.L.U.S. has forged the following buildings: the structure that accommodates both nursery and kindergarten, capable of hosting about 120 pupils and employing 15 members for the school staff; a football field; a multi-sports field.

5. The Nossa Senhora Aparecida Centre

In the Nossa Senhora Aparecida Centre, early childhood education is understood as a permanent process of transmission and construction of values and attitudes, with the aim of knowledge appropriation. The educational Centre has developed its own pedagogical proposal, in which all school staff recognise themselves as co-responsible for the process of integral development of the child. The previously analysed contextual dimensions highlight the need and possibility for the educational Centre to implement a design that is centred on the adult and child exchange and on the exploration of the environment, through specific projects and activities.

The Nossa Senhora Aparecida Centre recognizes as its main function the act of caring for and educating in a perspective that ensures the possibility of integral personal development for the minor. As a result, it can be said that the Brazilian Centre performs its function excellently, that is, it guarantees children situations of care, play and learning oriented in an integrated way while preserving their physical well-being and stimulating the cognitive, emotional, social and cultural aspects. The Centre is committed to promoting the full development of the human being in his or her most diverse abilities, from the first months of life. The educational work begins precisely from perceiving the need to support and encourage the child's abilities, always respecting his or her individuality.

The intentions of the Nossa Senhora Aparecida Centre are the following:

- the offer of a service that ensures that minors and their families have the opportunity for personal development;
- the promotion of the cultural and vocational support and training of children and young people;
- the provision of education through care, play and learning situations.

The conviction and pedagogical practice of the Brazilian educational Centre are mainly based on the union of the epistemological principles formulated by Loris Malaguzzi (Malaguzzi, 1971, 1983, 1996) and Luigi Giussani (Giussani, 1977), and also by other authors who have contributed to the elaboration of the constructivist proposal, with a socio-interactionist feature (Vygotskij, 2006). In 2014, the Centre began to work following the socio-interactionist perspective, trying to highlight the creation of social relations through the interactions born between children, between adults and between children and adults (Larochele at al., 1998). Individuals of all ages, therefore, are understood not as passive, but as active in the creation of their social reality.

Since 2018, the educational team has been implementing a change in the pedagogical perspective, starting from the union of the directives of the Base Nacional Comum Curricular⁸, hereinafter BNCC (Brasil, 2017), and of the main constructs of the Reggio Emilia Approach. Since then, the teachers' staff has been working with a pedagogy that seeks to put children at the centre of the educational proposal and to enhance their protagonism in the activities.

6. The educational project

The educational project of the Nossa Senhora Aparecida Centre finds its theoretical foundations in the main constructs of the Reggio Emilia Approach and in the guidelines of the BNCC. The following are some key points of pedagogical practice, which well represent the study and educational work of the Centre's team:

- the importance assigned to the moment of play, no longer conceived as a break, but as part of the activity; in fact, any educational process that sees the child as the protagonist cannot ignore its intimate relationship with play (Sommerhalder; Alves, 2011);
- the enhancement of the aesthetic aspect, taking care of each activity (Edwards C. et al., 2012);
- a greater appreciation of one's own culture within daily activities;
- the importance assigned to everything that children build, meaning, therefore, the production of drawings and various objects as a testimony of the learning process generated by a given educational experience;
- the great importance attached to the role of teachers;
- the enrichment of both the moments of planning and organization of activities.

As an educational-pedagogical institution, the Nossa Senhora Aparecida Centre reveals itself as a privileged space, where children can fully and freely live their childhood. In fact, one of the characteristics of the Centre is the possibility of establishing good relationships between children, between adults, between children and adults and families; they find themselves living and sharing day-to-day educational times and spaces in a well-kept environment (Malaguzzi, 1993). In particular, the ultimate goal underlying all these interactions is the creation of a spirit of fraternity, through the promotion of relationships based on solidarity, mutual respect and understanding.

7. The pedagogy of the school: child's protagonism

The educational work of the Nossa Senhora Aparecida Centre is structured starting from the conception that, from birth, all children develop their

⁸ BNCC is the document proposed by the Ministério da Educação in 2017; it encompasses all the previous directives regarding education, introducing both a broader look and some changes. For each stage of the school cycle, in fact, the document defines the fields of experience, the correlated areas of learning and the development targets.

A pdf version is available on the official website:

http://basenacionalcomum.mec.gov.br/images/BNCC_EI_EF_110518_versaofinal_site.pdf.

own knowledge of the world by constructing their own patterns and structures of thought, which will then lead them to a greater and increasingly sophisticated ability to understand reality, to enjoy the opportunities it offers and to respond to the questions it poses. In childhood, children experience a natural period of self-centred thinking, in which they perceive the world as an extension of themselves. Therefore, in order to learn to live within society, they need to decentralize themselves, interacting with people and the environment and recognizing their potential ability to relate to others. The basis of human development has its fulfillment in social life, in the interaction of the subject with the environment and with other individuals (Erikson, 2008). Hence, cognitive development is understood by the Brazilian Centre not only from an intellectual point of view, but as a global and integral growth of the child.

The educational Centre intends to be a playful space for learning, to expand the possibility of experiences and to enhance the curiosity and initiative of the pupils. In fact, the school defines as its ultimate goal the formation of autonomous, creative, ethical, critical, reflective citizens who are aware of their responsibilities in building a more just, democratic and happy world (Malaguzzi, 1993).

The Nossa Senhora Aparecida Centre is characterized by the use of a participatory and active methodology. The proposed activities have as their central element the protagonism of the child; it is precisely through the direct sensory experience designed for the pupil that he arrives at the development of learning. The Brazilian Centre is used to working with educational contexts, within which the child can be curious and discover his or her own abilities; in fact, during the preparation of an activity, teachers are well aware that its context is already a source of learning (Edwards C. et al., 2012). For the reasons just mentioned, all the educational activities that take place in the Centre are carefully planned in order to encourage the children to process knowledge independently. This allows them to be actively involved and to be protagonists in the acquisition of knowledge. Teachers act as facilitators, creating a stimulating environment where children can express their curiosity, actively participate in the educational process, and contribute to their learning journey in an authentic and meaningful way.

8. The in-depth interviews

During the last weeks of the research period, interviews were conducted. The initially developed interview grid was reorganized based on the observations made in the classroom and in the neighbourhood.

In fact, according to the principle of action-research, the planned questions were adapted also thanks to the information that was obtained during the first phase of the research, which provided further material on the school community and on the applied pedagogical principles (the observation of the management of the Nossa Senhora Aparecida Centre, the analysis of the project documentation of the Franciscan Fraternity of Bethany and the PPP of the educational Centre).

The interviews are semi-structured, they were addressed both to the school staff, in particular to the headmistress and teachers⁹ of the nursery and

⁹ The interviewed teachers belonged to different classes: the former worked with group 1 (one-

kindergarten classes, and to the families of the children who attend the school. The aim of the interviews was to gather information about the main themes of the research, attempting to deepen the point of view of the protagonists who live the daily life of the Nossa Senhora Aparecida Centre. Specifically, the focus was to investigate parents' understanding of the educational methodology and their appreciation of the school.

All interviews were conducted in the interviewees' native language, Brazilian-Portuguese. They were recorded, transcribed and translated into Italian to ensure accurate understanding and faithful representation of the narrated experiences. The sessions took place in a pleasant and peaceful atmosphere, which contributed significantly to deepening the explored topics. The adaptability of the conversation flow played a key role, allowing for sincere openness on the part of the interviewees and facilitating a detailed insight into their stories. This empathetic and respectful way has made it possible to grasp significant nuances, to authentically issue their perspectives, and to substantially contribute to the completeness and richness of the collected information (Cadei, 2005).

The informal approaches with staff and parents and the interviews focused on the following themes: - the perception of the educational work - the expansion of the child's world – teachers' empowerment – parents' empowerment.

a) The perception of the educational work

The educational work is presented as exciting, but also challenging: «*It's not easy. It is not easy for the children of here, of São Cristóvão, of Bromélias, of Biribeira*¹⁰, to feel at the centre» (from the interview with the director of the Nossa Senhora Aparecida Centre). All pupils come from underprivileged family backgrounds and situations; as a result, the Centre¹¹ is the only place where children have the opportunity to feel cared for, loved, appreciated, where they can experience something beautiful that has been designed exclusively for them. In fact, the educators prepare many activities where the children can feel stimulated, taken into consideration and cherished. Considering the social, cultural and economic context in which the Centre is surrounded by, the educational and pedagogical work of the school is increasingly necessary and full of meaning.

b) The expansion of the child's world

The Nossa Senhora Aparecida Centre can be considered a space capable of expanding the child's social relationships outside the family environment. It becomes the first place where the child can learn to live with others, both his peers and adults. Taking into consideration what has just been mentioned, it would be impossible to establish an educational relationship if the Centre were not an example of socialization, that is, an environment where all people - students, teachers, coordinators, cooks and other professionals - relate to each

year-olds), the second with group 3 (three-year-olds) and the latter with group 4 (four-year-olds).

¹⁰ São Cristóvão, Bromélias and Biribeira are the names of some neighbourhoods in the outskirts of Salvador de Bahia, where the children and families of the Nossa Senhora Aparecida Center come from.

¹¹ One of the initial objectives of the Franciscan Fraternity of Bethany, according to the Project, was the construction of a school for the children from the favelas of Salvador de Bahia; a beautiful, clean, colorful, organized place where the little ones could recognize themselves as individuals full of dignity.

other seeking unity and fraternity. These values are pursued and lived among adults and they outline the relational climate - the environment within which the student experiences coexistence. All pupils are able to perceive this unity, especially by how adults (the educational team and the parents) act and by how they live community events.

c) Teachers' empowerment

The interviews showed that the emancipatory power and the pedagogical approach of the Centre were able to produce positive effects in the educators' lives as well. An interviewed teacher says that she has rediscovered her dignity as a woman in her job and in the independence that it allows her. Another educator declares that she feels blessed to have regained her professional dignity through autonomy, and states: «*Today I pay my university, I pay my bills, I pay for the place where I live, I don't need someone to pay for me and I don't need a husband. (...) A lot has changed in my life. (...) That's why today, when I think that I do all this without anyone's help, it's a strong pride for me, I feel very proud. The Centre has given me this dignity and happiness back, and I am infinitely grateful to all the people here*». Although the interviewed educators come from different life stories, the working experience and the social and empowerment path was a rebirth for them.

d) Parents' empowerment

Some parents and relatives of the pupils currently attending the Nossa Senhora Aparecida Centre were interviewed. They recognize that the Centre is a significant resource for their children's lives. In fact, they are aware that they are protagonists, as well as their children, of the empowerment process that arises from the educational work carried out by the team. The experience of an educator is particularly interesting; she initially attended the school as a mother. The teacher's life story provides valuable perspective: a mother of two children who was victim of violence was able to escape the violence of her partner, leave home, work in the Centre, become independent and enroll in the faculty of pedagogy. All this was possible thanks to the support of the Franciscan Fraternity of Bethany and the headmistress of the Centre. Her testimony can be considered a clear example of the strong bond that the educational Centre is able to establish with the children's families, to the point of helping not only the children's lives but their parents' as well. Therefore, the parents' testimonies confirm the presence of female subjectivity affirmation (Gelli, 2002) and of social empowerment stories (Aluffi Pentini, 2021) promoted by the community education of the Nossa Senhora Aparecida Centre.

Through the interviews, it was possible to enter into the concrete of the daily life of the protagonists of the Centre; from the life stories of the teachers, the coordinator and the parents, it emerged that:

- the educators of the Nossa Senhora Aparecida Centre have been an active part in the pedagogical transformation of the Centre, which in 2018 led to the study and application of Malaguzzi's pedagogical approach;
- teachers acknowledge that the change has led to an improvement in the quality of teaching;

- the teachers are aware of the emancipatory power of the constructs of the Reggio Emilia Approach, especially with regard to the protagonism of the child;
- the Emilian approach can be considered as a tool for social empowerment not only for pupils, but also for adults - educators and parents;
- both parents and teachers agree that the Nossa Senhora Aparecida Centre has an added social value compared to local schools;
- both the coordinator and the educators recognize the richness of the

Emilian pedagogical approach, i.e. the values of curiosity, beauty and dignity.

From the interviews emerges the deepest meaning of the work of social pedagogy carried out by the Nossa Senhora Aparecida Centre, both with children and with adults, parents or teachers. A pedagogical and social work that aims at the dignity of the person and the simplicity of gestures and relationships to which it is connected.

9. Conclusion

In the end, Malaguzzi's approach has proved to be valuable even in a context so different from the Italian-European one and the related pedagogical principles have proved valid and effective even in a different context - in culture and society - and in a distant scenario - in space and time. In particular, the protagonism of the child has proved to be compatible with Freire's themes of recognition and redemption of the person's dignity (Freire, 1971). Therefore, this research work represents a good starting point for future research concerning both the value of the child's protagonism in underprivileged socio-economic contexts, and the adaptability of the Reggio Emilia Approach pedagogical principles in new and further contexts.

Although the Nossa Senhora Aparecida Centre embraces some fundamental pedagogical principles of the Reggio Emilia Approach, it is good to consider the substantial social and cultural difference that distinguishes the two realities - the Emilian one after the Second World War and the current Brazilian one in the province of Salvador de Bahia. The Nossa Senhora Aparecida Centre educational team did not set itself the goal of transposing the principles of the Emilian pedagogue into its own context, rather it wanted to deepen those educational constructs that were well combined with the specific reality of the socio-cultural scenario of the suburbs of Salvador de Bahia. In fact, the principles are still suitable for local needs, both educational and social.

Applying the fundamental pedagogical principles of the Reggio Emilia Approach, it is thus evident how the Nossa Senhora Aparecida Centre has been able to adapt them and make them suitable for the Centre's goals and the local, social and educational needs.

In conclusion, following some reflections on the adaptability of the Reggio Emilia Approach (Katz, 1997), on its applicability in other and new contexts (Fullan M. et al., 1992) and on the construct of child's protagonism (Carson, 2020), the following can be stated:

- The Brazilian educational Centre, within a framework of Christian values, aims at the quality of relationships between children and adults, the involvement of parents, the appreciation of the rich and alert minds of children; the Reggio Emilia Approach has been and still is a stimulus for the educational

team, as it provides an education for children that is up to the current needs of children from the socio-cultural context of the suburbs of Salvador de Bahia (Katz, 1997).

- The change in pedagogical approach, which since 2018 has led teachers to adapt Malaguzzi's main constructs to the socio-cultural context of the Centre, has been applied locally, directly involving the people – the teachers – who put it into practice on a daily level. This makes it clear how much teachers' flexibility has generated and continues to generate learning (Fullan M. et al., 1992). In the application of the Reggio Emilia Approach, the need for certain adaptations makes evident some divergences between a pure Emilian approach and the educational work that takes place in the Nossa Senhora Aparecida Centre, especially because of the underprivileged socio-cultural context of the suburbs of Salvador de Bahia. However, the educational team's awareness of the need for continuous reflection on the replicability and applicability of the Reggio Emilia Approach's principles makes this difference from time to time surmountable.

- The application of some of Malaguzzi's main pedagogical constructs - the child's protagonism, the simplicity of the contexts and the freedom to explore the environment - makes the pupil able to recognize beauty, enhance it and be enchanted by it (Carson, 2020). In particular, thanks to the child's protagonism, the Centre is able to provide its students with a social and human value, which is identifiable in the redemption of their dignity (Freire, 1971). Even where children may be subject to poverty and violence in their daily lives, in the Nossa Senhora Aparecida Centre they meet loving people who work for them; they feel valued by the activities they carry out; they learn to recognize the beauty in the simplicity that surrounds them; they get curious; they experience a clean, colorful, calm and dignified space designed specifically for them; they eat heartily and sleep on their own cot (Edwards C. et al., 2012).

The Nossa Senhora Aparecida Centre is an educational institution for children who are engaged in a social pedagogical work, that aims to restore the dignity of children from their socio-cultural context. Malaguzzi's Reggio Emilia Approach, the spirit and organization of the Nossa Senhora Aparecida Centre constitute a synergy for the community on the outskirts of Salvador de Bahia, that allows us to broaden the reflection on the exportability of a quality method in a place so far from its origins. On the other hand, it could be interesting to broaden the research in the direction of extrapolating, from the distant experiences, economically and geographically elements useful to our European educational institutions.

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