Listening to children’s gazes
Challenges in audiovisual research with children

[Sequence 7 / pages 270-287, from PHD Thesis: School as a conversation with strangers: Researching with children through artistic languages, 2012]

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In this sequence I problematize the idea of doing visual research with children, attending to how children are engaged in these participatory research experiences. Firstly, I examine the predominant conceptions of “children’s voices” in current practices of collaborative research compiled in a book of reference in this field: Doing visual research with children and young people (THOMSON, 2008). Secondly, I use Jean Luc Nancy’s (2007) approach to the idea of listening to rethink what happens when we say that we are considering children’s voices in educational research. To articulate these reflections I also take into account my singular experience of researching with children and include some scenes written in cursive.

From the idea of ‘voice’ to the idea of ‘listening’

In order to explore the idea of listening in research with children, I will start by problematizing the current tendency of how children typically participate, which is not exempt from controversies. In contemporary research practices, researching with children rather than on children is an increasingly common tendency. Some authors explain this shift by considering many theoretical conceptions of childhood that have changed over time, shifting from an approach to children as ‘silenced objects’ to ‘subjects with legitimate voices’. Graham and Fitzgerald mention the emergence of childhood studies, socio-cultural theory and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as meaningful contributions in shaping an understanding of children as having the voice and status of citizens, and who are thus capable of participation in various aspects of social and political life (GRAHAM & FITZGERALD, 2010:344-345). Mannion (2007:408) is another researcher that also points out “the
emergence of governmental and non-governmental initiatives on children’s participation and listening to children (for example Blake & Francis, 2004; Children and Young People’s Unit, 2001)”, and he criticizes how these authors, and most others in this field, do not foreground any outcomes that specially consider the relations between children and adults. According to Mannion (2007) and my observation of three aspects of children’s participation, exposed by Graham and Fitzgerald (2010), I will point out some tensions related to the practice of this predominant discourse of doing research with children rather than on children.

I will first address the *enlightenment* rationale: the idea that children have something important to tell us and if we know what it is, it will ultimately benefit them (GRAHAM & FITZGERALD, 2010:346). Thomson shares this justification for children’s participation in research, referring to the insights they bring: “the perspectives of children and young people are of interest to contemporary social scientists precisely because they offer specific and unique insights – about their everyday lives at home and school and their view and hopes for their futures.” (THOMSON, 2008:1). In terms of this enlightenment rationale we can also include the affirmation of Grover: “the need for authentic social research with children given the fact that increasingly Duch research is being relied on to inform social policy which profoundly affects the lives of children” (GROVER, 2010: 81). But other authors contradict this idea; the enlightenment rationale becomes ambiguous in considering the gap between the theory and practice of participation, in which there is a lack of evidence of change for children in their everyday lives (Cashmore, 2003; David and Hill, 2006; Thomas and O’Kane 2000; Morgan,2005 in GRAHAM & FITZGERALD, 2010:344-345).

Secondly, children’s participation in research is justified as a *citizenship* rationale attending to “their ‘place’ in society which is located somewhere between their current and future status as citizens” (GRAHAM & FITZGERALD, 2010:346). In that sense, Thomson refers also to the insights of children in relation to their horizons and hopes for their futures which can easily slip below the horizons of older inquirers (THOMSON, 2008:1). In this regard, I observe a predominance of the idea of children as future citizens in current educational discourses, which portray childhood as a phase of preparation for tomorrow with a consequent negation of their present. This tendency sometimes has brought us, as researchers, to ask children questions related with their future without being aware of their complexity, questions that most of the time we could not answer either.
Thirdly, Graham and Fitzgerald refer to the promise of an *empowerment* model, a rights-based approach where children’s competence/capacity is acknowledged (GRAHAM & FITZGERALD, 2010:346). Thomson considers that in working *with* instead of *on* children’s voices researchers aim to transform the power relations embedded in their research and in the context in which the research takes place (THOMSON, 2008:7). Attending to the arguments of Thomson, it seems that participatory research is unquestionably good and capable of dissolving power relationships.

From my point of view this unproblematic assumption contradicts most of the cases compiled in Thomson’s book (2008) where the researcher teaches techniques in visual ethnography and the children reproduce the method in order to study a specific topic. The researchers conduct children’s gazes. Other authors share the same critique:

“while most participatory research with children is labelled as ‘empowering’, much is in fact highly managed by researchers, with children, for example, instructed on exactly how many photographs to take, and of what subjects. Other methods derive from institutionalized practices in schools (such as worksheets), relying on children’s ‘schooled docility’ for their participation. Much ‘innovative’ participatory research is simply a form or extension of the long-established traditions of ethnographic research” (HOLLAND, RENOLD, ROSS & HILLMAN, 2010:362).

The idea of ‘participation’ is frequently articulated by the notion of ‘voice’. For instance, Thomson refers to the notion of voice as the place of convergence of the children’s capacity to speak and their right to do so (THOMSON, 2008:2). It is also common to hear the expression “giving a voice” in research that considers the participants as “vulnerable” groups. In these cases, “giving a voice” to the vulnerable is seen as an act of empowerment because it is presented as an alternative against creating representations of those studied which are infused with the political and social agendas of the power elite (GROVER, 2010; THOMSON, 2008). However, as I have observed, the idea of participation is not an unproblematic alternative; the expression of “giving a voice” can include a compassionate tonality when we speak of ‘listening to the children, the neighbourhood, the world’, and so on (NANCY,2007:15). Graham and Fitzgerald point out “an increasing questioning of the wellintentioned but not unproblematic appropriation of ‘voice’ as the most effective framing of children’s participation (see Cook·Sather, 2007; James,
In that sense, I believe that notion of voice as applied when carrying out research with children is a concept that still needs to be rethought. In some research we can observe the use of voice referring to questions of social representation. There is a shift from the idea of a singular (oppressed) voice to diverse and multiple voices that makes researchers aware of not writing about a particular social group as if they spoke as one (Thomson, 2008:3; Christensen & James, 2000:4). In that sense, Andy Hargreaves (1996) refers specifically to the case of the teachers’ voices in research on education and suggests considering discordant voices and recommends paying attention to how these voices are related to particular contexts. Other authors emphasize the relation of voice with discursive and sociocontextualized practices:

“voice is very dependent on the social context in which it is located. Being able to say what you think, in the ways that you want, is highly dependent on what you are asked, by whom, about what, and what is expected of you. What is said in one setting to one person may not be the same as what is said on a different day to a different person. Power relations of class, gender, race, ethnicity, disability, sexuality and age all constrain social relations and may profoundly limit what can be said (Kramer-Dahl, 1996; Orner, 1992) –as well as how it is heard (Ellsworth, 1989).” (Thomson, 2008:6).

Despite these reflections, sometimes the researcher and researched are supposed to be on an equal footing. Children are considered co-researchers by romanticizing what they say instead of looking for complexity, partial truths and multiple subjectivities (Lather, 2007 in Thomson, 2008:3). A final consideration about the idea of voice is that “it can mean not only having a say, but also refers to the language, emotional components and non-verbal means used to express opinions. Undertaking research which attends to voice mean listening to things that are unsaid and/or not what we expect.” (Britzman, 1989 in Thomson, 2008:4).

In my exploration into listening to children’s voices in an audiovisual research with children, I will depart from a similar approach to the idea of ‘voice’ exposed by Britzman, who takes into account how we experience the voice. Therefore, we go from ‘voice’, as a noun or attribute, to ‘listening’ as an infinitive, as an action linked to the complexity of the human experience of attending to each other. In that sense, I don’t share the current tendency noted by many authors (Holland, et al., 2010: 362) who
theorize voice, agency and power as attributes that children can ‘have’ and that are ‘given’ by the ‘adult researcher’. In my way of attending, the question ‘what is that?’, which reflects an analytical truth, is substituted by the question ‘what happens to us?’ according to an ontology of the present. As Jódar (2007:20) mentions, the first question refers to an answer related to the truth of an object, that can be answered and simplified with a definition of what ‘children’s voice’ is. On the contrary, the second question tries to explore the historical, constructed, and therefore, changeable nature of our educational experience. In this light, I ask:

*What happens to us when we explore ways of listening in an audiovisual research with children?*

**Exploring ways of listening in audiovisual research with children**

Following the last question I will attend to the current tendencies of using video in research with children, exploring how video mediates the possibilities of listening to each other.

It is well documented how that the use of video in the social sciences is increasing (Banks, 1995, 2001; Pink, 2001; Prosser, 1992,1998; Rose, 2001; Voithofer, 2005 in THOMSON, 2008:193) and there are many reasons given to justify the use of the video in collaborative research. Firstly, it is offered that, because visual research with children is still a young field, there is not a lot of work done and published yet, so, the use of video for researching is seen as a potential field to explore. Moreover, children’s participation implies new methodological challenges and some authors consider that, to meet these challenges, an innovative and varied approach to data collection is required, a situation that increasingly has come to involve the use of video (THOMSON, 2008:192). Another reason refers to children’s motivation in using video during the research process, which makes their involvement easier. Many authors point out the advantages of articulating a voice through a visual rather than written text: images allow at the same time aesthetic, emotional and intellectual responses (Freedman, 2003; Leitch & Mitchell, 2007 in THOMSON, 2008:11) and give an alternative means of expression for children who have difficulty with words (Moss, Deppeler, Astely, Pattison, 2007 in THOMSON, 2008:11).
Despite all these advantages so often mentioned when talking about visual research, I want to explore, as a counterpoint, some difficulties and challenges that arise when using video in research, specially in relation to the idea of listening to the children’s voices. I will take into account some scenes of our research experience:

[ When we (researcher, teacher, children) watch together the films children have done in our research experience, children express more surprise in hearing their voices that in seeing themselves in images. The tone, the sound of their voices, comes back to them as a difference while their bodies are sometimes exposed in fixed representations of our conversations, captured by the camera in the corner of the classroom. In spite of the intent to experiment with the camera and invite children to film, in the selection of the images that constituted the final films (that we created as part of the research) there is a lack of images recorded by the children that involve movement, dirtiness, unexpectedness. Why? I did a similar experience in another educational institution for children at risk of social exclusion, during the summer school session, and the final films included all these features that have been avoided in the later school ]

Like other researchers (Weber & Mitchell, 1995; Burke, 2008:33 in THOMSON, 2008), I have struggled with the difficulties of combining the philosophy of the research project with the constraints of time, space and other features of the hierarchical institution of school. In this particular case, to come back to the selection of the images in the films we created, I note how difficult it is to break the frame that the school imposes, to make something intelligible, images that we can control, that we can understand, instead of opening our eyes to what appears as new when children film.

[ From the beginning the teacher and the school headmaster supported the research project mainly because it implied the use of “new technologies”, one of the competences supported by the national primary education curriculum. They were interested in children ’becoming skilled in using the camera’ and when they watched some unclear images it was associated with a lack of technical ability; I felt they expected me to teach the children how to film in a correct way ]

This situation allows me to talk about two aspects. On the one hand, I realize that images are discursive; the concrete context in which research takes place determines the possibilities of working in many ways with images. Therefore, images per se are not better than other kinds of languages for researching; what is more relevant is how we
put the images into play and how we attend to the singularities of the visual language in relation to the people involved in the research, which can have different interests and approaches. Instead of considering that as a difficulty for the intervention of an academic in school communities, I encourage creating spaces of conversation with the teachers to discuss how we are using the images with the children, and why. The second aspect, the ‘why’, demands the responsibility and the rigour of the researcher in exploring an appropriate methodology in accordance with the focus of the research. I wanted to explore with children how and what can we learn from what happens between us in school, experimenting different ways of attending to this in-between space, mostly labelled and constricted by fixed roles: the pupil, the researcher, the teacher, the cook, the cleaning woman… But, beyond our expected behaviours regulated by the school norms, daily life situations also allow us to encounter the other in a non-predetermined way. I wanted to use the camera to explore this unexpected space, to alter our gaze into the familiar. In that sense, my intention was to experiment with language in order to listen differently to the daily school experience. Therefore, it was not necessary to concretely instruct on how to use the camera, because that aspect was one of the questions that I wanted to research with the children.

Here the use of the images was not for understanding, but for listening in the sense exposed by Jean Luc Nancy: “to listen is to be straining toward a possible meaning, and consequently one that is not immediately accessible […] perhaps it is necessary that sense not be content to make sense (or to be logos), but that it want also to resound” (NANCY, 2007:6).

How can researchers listen to the children's gazes in terms of resonance?

Attending to the languages of the experience, Nancy points out the current predominance of a visual culture over the acoustic: “why and how is it that something of perceived meaning has privileged a model, or a referent in visual presence rather than in acoustic penetration?” (NANCY, 2007:3); he distinguishes the possibilities of resonance in each language: “The visual persists until its disappearance; the sonorous appears and fades away into its permanence” (NANCY, 2007: 2, 3). Nancy suggests that the capacity of resonance, as something that returns as a difference or that escapes from a frame, is closer to sound rather than to image, specially when considering the occidental uses of
images as representations of something to identify. On the contrary, he suggests exploring the image as a presence, as a force, referencing the cinematic work of Abbas Kiarostami, for instance (NANCY, 2008:124).

*In the use of images by researchers what restricts the potential of the visual to alter our gazes?*

Until now I have mentioned some limitations related to the dynamics of the school context, but we can’t forget to look at the academic context that shapes our background, our conceptions and our languages as researchers. In that sense, I have explored the intersection of artistic/creative behaviour and qualitative methodology. In developing a theoretical framework for this kind of research practices, I have observed that a common discourse discusses the potential of the arts as a form of representation that can enrich our understanding of meaning construction (SUOMINEN, 2006:142). When one looks closely at particular cases of Image Based Research or Arts Based Research, it becomes apparent that mostly the introduction of the arts is a question of representation more than experimentation: during the process, researchers use traditional, qualitative methods and at the end they represent the information in a more artistic way. That is one of the critiques developed by the a/r/tographical approach, a singular branch within the Arts Based Research perspective, which demands an artistic approach during the research and not only as a matter of final representation to improve the dissemination of research results (IRWIN, 2010).

This general lack of experimentation and awareness of attending to the singularities of the visual language for researching is firstly reflected in the ways children are encouraged to collect images. Pat Thomson considers that “it cannot be assumed that children and young people are technically competent with any given visual medium just because it is readily available. If researchers involve children and young people in visual research, they must now consider what they have to do in order to teach them about the equipment and its capacities and limitations” (THOMSON, 2008:13). However, this consideration sometimes leads to a very instructive approach when giving a camera to children, a kind of pedagogical ‘show and tell’ as I have read in some of the cases compiled in Thomson’s book, like the case “Teaching children to use visual research
methods” where explicitly children are motivated to imitated the techniques they have learned during an ethnographic research workshop” (THOMSON, 2008:80).

An alternative to this approach could be attending to the concrete grammar that children already have in relation to audiovisual language, which could give us some clues about children’s uses and practices with the camera, for example. The fast evolution of the technologies offers many hybrids of mediums for filming, not only the digital camera. As Ian Christie (2008) suggests we can also think about cameraphones, for instance, and in considering this singular medium we could observe a particular grammar in its daily use: I phone / I text / I send / I store / I upload / I fix / I insert / I lose / I copy... ; a grammar that we can learn from the children. Today the traditional blackboard coexists with the screen and the projector in the classroom; at the beginning of our research the children taught me how to use the projector to watch our films.

Coming back to the last question: In the use of images by researchers what restricts the potential of the visual to alter our gazes? I have mentioned the instructive way of presenting the camera instead of listening to children’s relationships with visual language and its concrete mediums. But what about the grammar and the visual knowledge of the researcher? In general terms, there are few researchers with consolidated abilities in visual language and even then it is considered that “these methods are therefore best undertaken by those researchers who have strong emphatic and interpersonal understanding, and who have been exposed themselves to the use of the arts” (THOMSON, 2008:55). I agree with this kind of involvement by the researcher but I can also perceive reticence in experimenting with the language and the medium while being with the children, when it is claimed that a specialist research guidance is needed to conduct this type of research (THOMSON, 2008:55). This perception draws a figure of a researcher who already knows, previous to doing the fieldwork; someone who controls what is going to happen. In that sense, and as an alternative, for the teaching of film production Alain Bergala suggests that is always better to have a teacher with little knowledge, but who can approach cinema openly, rather than a teacher who dominates the visual language and starts defining the camera movements and the kind of frames, because it restricts the possibilities of exploring while filming (BERGALA, 2007:125), which is the purpose of our research. This approach can be related to the idea of
listening, coined by Jean Luc Nancy (2007), as being opened to resonances, to the non-sense, instead of listening to understand.

“The true filmmaker is 'bothered' by a question that his/her film constructs in turn. S/he is someone for whom filming is not a translation into images of the ideas which one is sure about, but someone who searches and thinks during the very act of making a film. Filmmakers that already have the answer – and for those whom the film does not need to be produced, merely translate a pre-existing message – instrumentalise film” (BERGALA, 2007: 52).

We should keep in mind Bergala’s words when we are going to develop a visual research with children. However, the limitations of this openness are not only related to the collection and creation of images, but also with their analysis. Due to the extensive use of children’s drawings in the clinical and diagnostic research tradition of psychology and psychotherapy, the power of such visual methods to represent ‘pure’ perspective is often overstated, portrayed as offering unproblematic and unmediated windows into children’s worlds (THOMSON, 2008:177). Against this position in which the researcher interprets the image as giving access into the child’s mind, some researchers complement the information derived from a collection of images by combining different methods, interviewing the children, or using the images to evoke a storytelling (THOMSON, 2008). However, in these cases one must be wary of the tendency of fitting the data into pre-existing adult categorization schemes (Barron, 2000 in GROVER, 2010: 89) which can constrict, again, the possibilities of listening to the unexpected.

**Discovering the classroom as a resonance box**

To finish I will use three metaphors to rethink how the researcher can put herself into play when she tries to listen, with all her being, in a research with children. I Hill recuperate some of the questions posed above to go into the topic of listening in depth, drawing from the approach of Jean Luc Nancy (2007) and taking into account scenes of the lived experience in our research.
Ways of inhabiting

A common feature in collaborative research is the space in-between, a space of simultaneity, where people share the experience of being together. From an ontology of the in-between, Jean Luc Nancy (2006) suggests that before Being we should consider Being Together as primordial, and being in-between others as a necessary human state. We already have this space of coexistence; however, how can we convert personal relationships into a fertile terrain for education and educational research? I wish to consider personal relationships in all their complexity, which implies listening as a strategy for confronting the normative in-between that predominates the current relationships between teachers, researchers and children. Most of the time, from these untouchable positions or fixed roles nothing happens between us. Instead of engaging, we can easily just anticipate what is going to take place due to the tendency using of instructive patterns in research. That kind of in-between distance corresponds to an instrumental logic that prevents newness, and it culminates in a contradiction if we understand the task of an educator as being responsible for preserving newness and the task of researcher as being engaged with exploring ways to rethink education. When I say ‘newness’ I am not referring to ‘innovation’, a word so often used nowadays as a parameter of entrepreneur culture. Here I mention ‘newness’ in relation to attending to what can appear when somebody relates with other people. In that sense, through shared experience, the methodology emerges from the researcher's relationship with the children, from being with them; attending to the knowledge that emerges from thinking while doing with others.

[ In our research, we used digital cameras to record part of our conversations. The camera has a little screen where you can see what you are filming. In watching this filmed material I realize that when I had the camera in my hands, sometimes I looked through the little screen and sometimes I didn’t look at what I was filming and I just watched directly with my eyes, away from the screen, because I needed to have a general view of what was happening there with the children. This need of a wider frame reminds me of an unconscious need to know and control all the things that are taking place in the classroom. A kind of omnipresent gaze that, in the tradicional ethnographies, was resolved by situating the camera in a corner (ERICKSON & WILSON,1982). Children’s gazes are multiple and singular for each boy and girl, but they strangely share the mentioned feature of an omnipresent gaze. On the contrary, in their recordings I can appreciate how they follow attentively what they are focused on, which implies
sudden camera movements, zooms, quietness… a grammar range that is reinvented in each shoot.]

By considering some particularities of the children’s gazes in relation to the researcher's gazes, I realize that their involvement in filming allows them to produce images that contain a kind of noise. I relate this to what Jean Luc Nancy calls “visual sound” (NANCY, 2007:3) in reference to images for which we can apply the criteria of ‘accent, tone, timbre, resonance and sound’, rather than ‘form, idea, painting, representation, aspect, composition…’. Filmmakers like Wim Wenders refers to children’s gazes as having no need for an immediate opinion or to extract conclusions; Wenders talks about how the capacity of openness in children’s gazes is what a filmmaker aspires to (LARROSA, ASSUNÇAO & DE SOUSA, 2007). Many researchers consider that children’s style of communication may be different, to a certain degree, than adult's, in particular the manner in which they tell both fictional and non-fictional stories, and the poetic nature of child storytelling and language (GROVER, 2010:90,91). Jódar refers also to the children’s gazes as faltering, eager gazes; and he points out that “one cannot learn to read and write without becoming a child, a stranger in your own language” (JÓDAR, 2007:269).

On the contrary, we often find a disciplined and normative gaze in the adult, incapable of seeing newness; Larrosa calls this “concluding gazes and images”, when everything we look at appears covered in explanations (LARROSA, et al., 2007: 23). This way of looking makes us more attentive to the message and less to the sonority. “What secret is at stake when one truly listens, that is, when one tries to capture or surprise the sonority rather than the message?” (NANCY, 2007:5).

Inhabiting with the children, exploring visual language with them, instead of expecting a concrete answer or a correct way of filming, is a way of approaching the sonority rather than the message. This can allow us to rethink, to look differently at what is happening in the school. Moreover, it reclaims, at the same time, the researcher's predisposition for the kind of listening suggested by Jean Luc Nancy: “What does it mean for a being to be immersed entirely in listening, formed by listening or in listening, listening with all his being?” (NANCY, 2007:4). According to Lacan, it demands exploring the alterity of what is said; which corresponds to his notion of voice:
“what, in the saying, is other than what is said, in a sense the non-said or silence, but still the saying itself, and even that telling silence like the space in which ‘I hear myself’ when I grasp significations, when I hear them coming from the other or from my thoughts (which is the same thing). I can hear them, in fact, only if I listen to them resound ‘in me’” (Lacan in NANCY, 2007:29).

From this idea of resonance, Nancy imagines the human being as a ‘diapason subject’ where the ‘self’ is the resonance of a return. When the subject sounds (because it is generating the sound or because it receives the sound produced by another) the vibrations both return it to itself and place it outside itself. Each subject is a different, tuned diapason, tuned to self but without a known frequency (NANCY, 2007). Therefore, listening with all our being implies:

“to enter into tension and to be on the lookout for a relation to self: not, it should be emphasized, a relationship to ‘me’ (the supposedly given subject), or to the ‘self’ of the other (the speaker, the musician, also supposedly given, with his subjectivity) but to the relationship in self.” (NANCY, 2007:12).

If we draw a figure of the researcher as a ‘diapason subject’, it implies being open to what the other provokes in you. That is a way of listening to children’s gazes in terms of resonance, in which we “reverse the direction of the gaze: we approach to the image of the other not as the picture that we look at, but as the image that looks at us and questions us” (LARROSA & DE LARA; 1997:8). Therefore, the researcher as a subject of the listening is always still yet to come. In that sense, Graham and Fitzgerald speak of placing our own experience at risk when we listen to the children: “placing our own experience at risk requires us to acknowledge our prejudices and pre-understandings, many of which are hidden from view or so deeply embedded in our assumptions and behaviours that we may not readily recognize them” (GRAHAM & FITZGERALD; 2010:354).

But, we can explore these hidden prejudices through listening to the resonances we perceive, by attending to what returns to us as a difference. In doing so, the researchers go from looking at the participation of children regulated by institutional norms, to paying attention to our capacity to generate new understandings with children.
Ways of attending

One of the features that help researchers listen to resonances is the capacity of attending without intention, without knowing what is going to happen. According to Masschelein (Masschelein & Simons, 2006), this is a kind of attention that allows experience, that releases the gaze through the authority of the present. It is a way of looking at what is there and, at the same time, being looked at and affected by that. In this sense, we think of ‘attending’, like in French attendre, waiting; because we are exposed but we need time to be touched; this is the time of the experience during which the subject becomes resonance.

[ (the sun is shining)
- Noemí: Shall we go outside to have our first conversation?
( the four children that constitute one research team look at me, and cross some gazes between them. They seem surprised by this idea)
- Children: Yes! Yes! Let’s go outside!
(we sit down on the floor of the playground. It is windy, so, we need to set the camera close to us to capture the sound)
- Noemí: How could we fix the camera?
( one of the children runs to a corner and comes back with a box. He manages to install it. I Stara introducing the purpose of the encounter)
- Noemí: To recapitulate, months ago I gave you these notebooks inviting you to write what you could observe that relates to the focus of the research. You have already seen some research dynamics from other groups…
- Child: Yes, I liked the second group. They took what we do with Saint Nicolas and they researched what happens between us when we lie to each other.
(we check our notebooks in order to explore familiar stories that they have observed and written, but their notebooks are mostly empty)
- Noemí: Ok. So, how can we start the research?
- Chile: Can you give us the topic?
- Noemí: Me?
- Child: Yes, what are we going to research ?! ]
Here, I could just answer, immediately proposing a topic, but instead we spent one hour attending to the emptiness together allowing the unexpected through the conversation. The research had already started.

*Normally, who fills the silence in the school?*

[ I’m picking up all my things from the table close to the blackboard, while I look at the children out of the corner of my eye. They are also leaving for their houses to have lunch. This has been our last session, after one year researching together. I am touched; I feel that I will miss them. I realize that A. stands up near to me.

- *Noemi*: Hi A.! What's going on? What's up?
- *A.*: Nothing!
- *Noemi*: Tell me, what do you want?
- *A.*: Aish! Nothing!

I continue picking up my staff, I am disappointed because I think he wants to say something to me… and I don’t know how I can attend to it. But he just says ‘nothing’, so, I don’t insist again, I continue gathering my stuff. After some minutes he is still there. Suddenly, he comes close to me.

- *A.*: I will tell you a secret; don’t tell anyone! ]

This boy allowed me to reflect on the ways we can be invasive with children. Sometimes, behind this current idea of ‘giving voice’ to the children, teachers and researchers interrogate them, trying to extract something, to know, to understand the child. That is a common exercise in the schools, using the most varied strategies.

*Who decides the distances between people at school?*
[ We are in the school library, a space where we (four children and I) can be alone to start a conversation about what and how we are going to research. I just keep silent. They look at me as if they expected me to say something, but I don’t. I just look at them. One of them turns his eyes down, and starts touching his pencil case. Another boy looks at him, they laugh together. At the same time the girl observes the two boys, seriously. After a while, she looks at me. I keep silent, just attending to what happens between us. Nobody says anything. What am I waiting for? Time is going on and I realize that, unconsciously, I expected that some child would brake the silence, but it doesn’t happen. There is long time that we look each other in silence and I start to get nervous. My silence (‘my’ because in the beginning I felt I controlled it) it is not mine anymore. ]

According to Nancy, I consider that “silence in fact must here be understood [s’entendre, heard] not as a privation but as an arrangement of resonance: a little – or even exactly… as when in a perfect condition of silence you hear your own body resonate, your own breath, your heart and all its resounding cave” (NANCY, 2007:29).

Ways of walking

In some occasions throughout the research we have felt the space of the classroom as a resounding cave. Our ways of inhabiting and attending can turn the classroom into a resonance box where time becomes space. Nancy talks about the ‘sonorous present’: a space–time that is the very spreading out of its resonance, its reverberation; according to the sound’s property of penetration and ubiquity (NANCY, 2007:13). This idea of the sound’s capacity of expansion through obstacles let us think about a kind of openness farther along the assumed walls of any framed space (‘our’ body, ‘our’ home, ‘our’ school, ‘our’ filmed images...). In conceiving the subject as a diapason and the classroom as a resonance box we can approach other possible realities because we move, we experiment ways of walking new paths, without a prescribed ending.

[ To value the experience of our research, I invite the children to write letters addressed to university students from the College of Fine Arts, where I teach. The children explain some aspects of our research and give some advice to students interested in educational research. Both parts are excited about the exchange. Alter some weeks, I come back to the school with the
letters from the university students and it is amazing to observe the children’s faces reading them. At the end of the session, a girl comes near to me with a white paper and a pen:

- Girl: Noemi, we want you to write down the e-mails of the students, so we can keep in touch with them.

These encounters will continue without me, beyond the research context. The classroom, as a resonance box, becomes a space of presence and unexpected value, where educators and researchers can no longer succeed in capturing the sound of this experience. Therefore, learning from situations where we resonate is an experience that can’t be quantified or represented. It would be arrogant to try to reduce what is still unknown in the children; fortunately, it escapes of any aspiration of conquest. If we think about education as the place of the encounter with the other, we are not interested in mediums that represent, reduce, unify, and understand this phenomena. On the contrary, we want to explore mediums that make us more attentive and sensitive to this experience. By walking singular paths we learn to listen to the unpredictable nature of this encounter, and to improvise an appropriated gesture for each occasion. In that sense, in a visual research with children, I encourage them to explore ways of putting the camera into play as a medium of a ‘poor pedagogy’. This pedagogical approach, coined by Jan Maaschelein, suggests ways to be more attentive, disconnecting us from truth regimes, or from an orientation towards benefits: “...it is about poor, insufficient, defective methods lacking meaning (like walking or copying [or filming, I add]) methods that don't bring you to an end. As such, they are pure methods, clues that take you nowhere and that, for this reason, can take you anywhere: a type of passepartout” (MAASCHELEIN & SIMONS, 2006:28).

On the one hand, this way of walking requires the researcher to not to be afraid of getting lost, which can be uncomfortable; but, on the other hand, we can enjoy of the benefit (the only one) of the ‘poor pedagogy’: the time and the gaze of the experience. Along this sequence I have tried to draw a particular sense of listening to the children’s gazes, in which the question ‘Does the research work?’ it is no longer relevant, whereas the question ‘Has the research surprised me?’ becomes indispensable.
Bibliography


