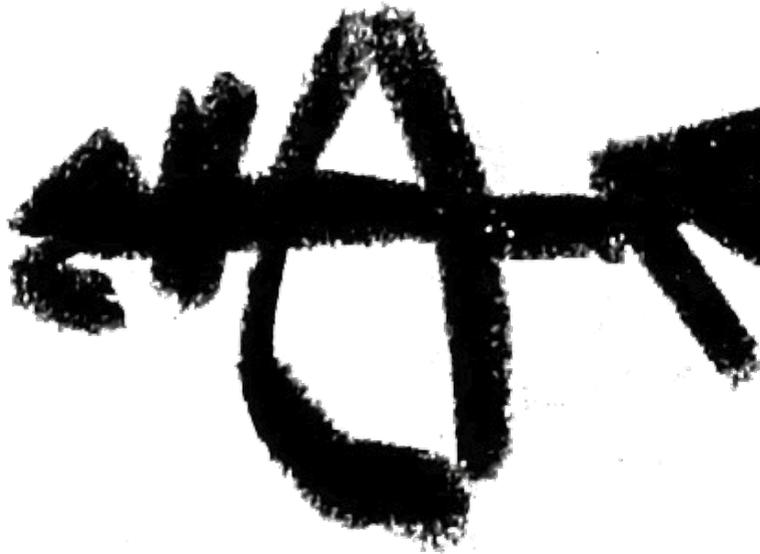## *Discovering an Outsider*

Observing *consciousness hybridity* and *empowerment* building
a new pedagogical practice, for an outsider creative practitioner
who enters the school environment.

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Introduction

The thesis is based on the experiences I had working in a kindergarten in Italy. As a graphic designer and illustrator, I was asked to give a workshop as a guest inside the school system, guiding the children in doing illustrations for books.
During this time, I noticed how many children were limited in expressing themselves through drawing, especially by the teacher's recommendations and ways of pointing out what was the "right" or "wrong" manner of visually representing something.

At that moment, I felt the urgency of liberating children's creativity and visual communication, which apparently were -for the teachers- just a tool for designing an end product to be shown in school; but I also felt the lack of pedagogical tools in my hands to act, and "liberate" the children's drawing potential and to communicate the importance of free and more effective drawing activities for children. And with *effective*, I mean a deeper view on drawing activities, like a real "tool of the mind" (Bodrova and Leong, 2007).

The aim of the research is not only to investigate how an *outsider* (an artist or a designer who comes inside the school context) can be part of a pre-school environment (by being engaged in a deep dialogue with teachers and children) but the purpose of the study is also to try to investigate if this new presence can stimulate compelling drawing activities. A positive outcome of my research and project would be that children are more interested in drawing as an act of expressing themselves, and that they feel free, and are satisfied and happy by participating in these activities.

The first idea was to give a pedagogical toolkit to artists and graphic designers (the *outsiders*) to face the kindergarten environment, because it was what was felt urgent at the time I was there. Having an outsider who can bring new insights and who can try to give back the importance of drawing resulted to be the key of the research; more important than the realization of the toolkit itself. Some of the notions used in investigating the presence of an outsider come from some pedagogical experiences such as the Reggio Emilia *Atelierista* (Vecchi, 2010) and the project of the Signature Pedagogies (Thomson, Hall, Jones, & Sefton-Green, 2012).

The major question that needs to be answered in the research is "*How can a creative outsider collaborate with teachers in creating more compelling, stimulating and playful drawing activities for young children?*". The theory of the Thesis and practice of the Educational Project help to answer the inquiry, and they both lead to the creation of more focused sub-questions like "*What outsider am I?*". To be answered, this question needs the analysis of my own practice in the context of the Educational Project.

In investigating how and what an outsider can do inside the pre-school context, the research focuses in particular on the fun and playful aspects involved in drawing, that come directly from my own practice and approach. Questions to answer in conducting the research are "*How can the game (and its implications: reversing roles, play, etc.) be implied in these activities?*"; "*How are these activities perceived by toddlers, regarding their feelings of having a new visual language that can make the world more concrete?*"

The importance of drawing for the development of toddlers is widely recognized; even if it varies according to the context. The idea to give workshops (as an outsider) to pre-school teachers, comes at first from the need to underline once again the important role of drawing activities. Therefore, the workshops with teachers are a tool and a chance to reflect again together (outsider and teachers) on the significance of the free drawing language as a basic primitive manner for toddlers to express themselves.

The outsider figure is investigated not only for the interactions with children, but, firstly, in the dialogue and relationship with kindergarten teachers. The Thesis aims to investigate, with an inquisitive eye, whether an outsider can collaborate with teachers in creating more compelling and playful drawing activities. Furthermore, to inquire if this approach is satisfactory in giving enough importance to visual communication in kindergartens, and to liberate children in discovering their own languages and manners of having fun while drawing.

The Educational Project takes place inside the pre-school; where designers and artists are seen as collaborators (Vecchi, 2010) and they engage in a deep dialogue with teachers, to be able to use the creative channel of an open minded toddler's development for drawing and designing activities (Thomson, Hall, Jones, Sefton-Green, 2012). Regarding the dialogue needed in the project, the focus of the thesis and project are in particular on *"How to create a meaningful dialogue between teachers and outsiders?"* and *"To what level can this dialogue create awareness and ideas for creative activities in teachers' practice?".* The thesis is also focused on the "game and free play", that is seen as a basic element in toddlers' age; since not only the game allows to create new rules, (Huizinga, 1955) being the key to switch roles and review them, but it also creates the "wow" moments and accidental learning experiences (Kraftl, 2013).

The documentation -the use of pictures and videos- also has its roots in the Reggio Emilia method and mode of documenting, and results important in the work, since it is a fundamental tool in the discussion and feedback with teachers, and it is a way of making things visible, highlighting those in-action and in-process moments.

1. Theoretical framework

As Howard Gardner[1] puts it, it's always difficult (if not impossible) to take an educational approach and just put it into another "soil", as a flower, but this *"doesn't mean at all that [we] can't learn a tremendous amount from it"* (Gardner, 1997).
The theories and approaches presented here are not taken and put in the context of the Educational Project, (just like a flower put into another soil) but are exactly used to learn and inform the research.
The Thesis and the Educational Project are deeply intertwined, informed by each other by theory and practice.
From the Reggio Emilia method -that is inspiring for the untraditional approach with children-, to the reflections on the importance of game and free play undertook by Huizinga[2] and Peter Kraftl[3], until the new definitions of creative practitioners as outsiders inside schools in the concept of the Signature Pedagogies (Thomson, Hall, Jones, & Sefton-Green, 2012).
 What is already seen as an outsider, and the trial itself of being one, are leading to a new peculiar and personal definition of the term.
By portraying the Signature Pedagogies project -the signature that each creative practitioner has and unavoidably brings into school (Thomson, Hall, Jones, & Sefton-Green, 2012)- it's then drawn and disclosed the signature that it's brought inside the context by myself and that, being the researcher too, I had to investigate and discover during the Project itself.

1.1 Reggio Emilia: idealism, freedom, responsibilities

Context
After the World War II, Loris Malaguzzi -an Italian teacher in pre-school and primary education- felt the urgency of

implementing and changing the educational philosophy together with the parents of the toddlers and children living in Reggio Emilia (Italy). After the War, Loris Malaguzzi's strong idealism on the importance of educating new generations, created this new approach, that presents the key point of the value of children's cooperative work, the need of appreciation and interpretation of children ideas by adults, the strong adults' sense of responsibility in making choices concerning children. The major condition required to let this happen is that adults -as educators- *"must be convinced that children are born with the tools and the will to do and think actively."* (International Study group – April 2016 | Reggio Children, 2016).

The approach is based on the strong conviction of trying to improve the world and the humanity already in the early stage of the children education. This frames the Reggio Emilia method as a strong idealistic method that aims to give autonomy and responsibilities to the children, to empower them and let them choose freely. *"Children are seen as creative and intelligent"* and the Reggio Emilia educators look forward for *"the freedom and the fully realization of their potential."* (Edwards, 2002, p.5).

Adults, educators

In the Reggio Emilia approach, the value given to the pedagogical ideas informs the whole practice. One main pillar of the pedagogy is the high respect and consideration of children, that consequently gives to the educators' responsibilities in learning how to understand them.

Reggio Emilia educators focus on structuring learning experiences for children in a conscious way, in order to let the children experimenting in a free and safe environment. To be able to achieve a new level of consciousness and freedom in designing the activities for this specific research project, the dialogue with teachers results to be the first big step. In this research, for instance, the fact of being someone who arrives from the outside of the school without knowing the children and their habits so deep as the teachers, requires to establish a dialogue, as first thing.

Dialogue

The importance given to dialogue and interaction between teachers and children in Reggio Emilia is indeed a core value, and *"together with the help of parents too, it seeks the realization of a new different education"* (Edwards, 2002, p.5). This idea of dialogue is translated in the Reggio practice in a lot of meetings (mostly informal) between parents and teachers, and in the use of a mature and serious vocabulary while speaking with children.

Loris Malaguzzi designed his project on Piaget, Dewey and Vygotsky's visions on *social constructivism*[4], thus an *"education based on relationships"* (Edwards, 2002) is a strong main point, together with a curriculum that focuses on progress, not on goals.

Environment

Another concrete pedagogical aspect is the one of the environment and its settings, which is translated -in practice- in the presence of an *atelier* inside the pre-school. Since in Loris Malaguzzi's vision, children are strong and rich, *"the environment in which they need to be educated has to follow the free state of children and has to give inputs for the growth and the experiments with their many languages"* (Edwards, Gandini, Forman, 2011).

The collaborative accent in the Reggio Emilia practice is really strong and visible and taken into practice with the decision of having additional teachers trained in visual arts. This key point is the main link to the figure of the outsider that is going to be investigated and (re)created in the Thesis.

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[4] *In Sociology, Social constructivism is a theory that refers to the human development as something that happens in a social environment, in contact with people. Social constructivism foresees knowledge as constructed through interaction with others. From here, the importance of dialogue and exchange with others.*

1.2 Reggio Emilia: focus on the Atelierista figure

The presence of the *atelier* in Reggio Emilia schools is a generator of new inputs, new tools of thought and complexity and allows more combinations and possibilities of improving children languages.

The hundred languages of children

The Reggio Emilia approach and theory sees the importance of expressiveness, creativity and imagination and tries to let them come out and be expressed in different manners, in the different languages that children want and can and are comfortable to use. The use of gestures, drawings, scribbling or sculpturing with hands are languages that children can use, and that children need to use.

To encourage the development of the different children languages, Reggio Emilia teachers are in constant collaboration and dialogue with the figure of the *atelierista*, in the *atelier*.

The atelierista

The concept of the atelierista consists in a figure involved in school, and involved in a deep dialogue with teachers and traditional educational figures. In Reggio Emilia pre-schools, this space called atelier and this figure of a teacher with an arts background is present since the late '60s, and these allow *"the expressive and poetic languages became part of the process by which knowledge is built."* (Katz & Cesarone, 1994).

Malaguzzi considered the presence of an atelierista a key practical element for translating the theory and for bringing inside the school the motivation and the new strategies: new materials, new inputs and -above all- the atelierista is capable of helping children in translating images and meanings in different media.

It can be seen as an outsider (architects, pedagogists, physicists, engineers, biologists, dancers, musicians, physicians, and so on) who covers a facilitator role.

An example

Depicted in this strong case study I have found reported in Giordana Rabitti's paper *"An Integrated Art Approach in a Pre-school"* (Katz & Cesarone, 1994), Rabitti observed a workshop in an atelier with four-year-old children. The topic was brought on by a child during a conversation about an activity conducted at the gym. The children had to blow some balloons on a specific line. After the activity, one of them proposed to invent a wind machine for not blowing only with the mouth. After the conversation had been transcribed and displayed in the classroom (with children drawings besides), the teachers and the atelierista talked about the idea of actually building the "wind machine", and then the action in the atelier took place, with a long process that included different stages such as the children drawings based on the conversations and their analysis, sharing of the project with the families, and then the research for the materials and the actual building of the wind machine (Katz & Cesarone, 1994, p. 64).

Importance of drawing

From this example, this testimony, it emerges how the way of being inside the kindergarten is imprinted in the Reggio Emilia: taking into account what children say between each other or to the teachers, and having a facilitator figure that can let the children see how some necessities and imaginations can be made in reality. And, in drawings, giving them the opportunities to experiment with what they may not have thought it would be possible. Also because, as visible in the observation, everything needs to start with drawings.

The atelierista and the space

As said, an atelierista works inside the school in an atelier: a space where to let children experimenting. These spaces *"are constructed in partnership with other professionals of various competencies."* (Katz & Cesarone, 1994, p. 62) and they are carefully built and curated to enable creative thinking and to focus on the quality of processes.

The atelier is not only the actual practical translation of a carefully created and maintained space, but it's also important as the ambient where to freely work with children. It can be seen as a tryout of what and how an outsider could engage with children and could create a "*new magic space*", well described with the words of Vea Vecchi[5]: "*because the atelierista often has sensitive antennae for contemporary issues, it is her task to receive and bring these interesting cultural flows into school and, where possible, rework them in appropriate ways so that they light up areas which can be used for experimentation with children.*" (Vecchi, 2010).

The visual language used as the core practice of the atelierista: *"like all languages, visual language is learned through using it, especially in a cultured way"* (Vecchi, 2010). The atelierista provides the chance to do it, to experiment the visual language, on a steady base, inside school, in the atelier, that works as a curiosity catalyst, *"the place of research, invention, and empathy, expressed by means of "100 languages", which extend beyond childhood to include adulthood up to advanced age."* (Katz & Cesarone, 1994, p. 62) and *"promotes an idea of knowledge as a process in which different languages interweave."* (ibidem). For these reasons, the research and in the Educational Project try to bring the atelier and atelierista concepts also outside the Reggio Emilia schools, to merge them this "outsider/insider" figure with others, like the artists and creative practitioners of the Signature Pedagogies project.

1.3 Signature Pedagogies

The Signature Pedagogies consists in a series of research projects carried out in schools to respond to the creativity agenda developed between 2002 and 2011 within English education policy. This policy gave schools resources for innovation and experimentation and allowed them to make changes in curriculum and pedagogy. These changes were studied by the authors Thomson, Hall, Jones and Sefton-Green, and in their research and report they focus on the new practices developed in primary and secondary schools where artists and creative practitioners had the opportunity to influence the classrooms, and they were observed while bringing their distinctive pedagogies inside schools. The project[6] seeks to find an explore these distinctive pedagogical approaches, called *signatures*, that the artists themselves shaped during the project, by bringing the understandings and capabilities of their artistic practices to pupils.

Project
In the Reggio Emilia lexicon, the word *art* is never used in referring to the activities, so as not to have a narrow perspective. Instead, the phrase "*project work*" (Katz & Cesarone, 1994) is used. This terminology results very appropriately in my view of what it means to design and engage in creative projects with children. I personally see an outsider as someone who comes into school for shaking things up, with -exactly- a project. Even if the use of the word "project" can suggest something more temporary than something carried on a steady base (like we saw with the atelierista and the atelier), it's really connected to the other important example of the Signature Pedagogies Project.

The research project of Signature Pedagogies (Thomson, Hall, Jones, Sefton-Green, 2012) is an insight and view on pedagogy and a distinctive practice that does not only concentrate on knowledge, but on habits and ways of operating as creative practitioners in schools. Here, artists and outsiders from the school context were invited for a collaboration experience inside schools: being called then more generally creative practitioners, which can sometimes be seen as artists in residence and integral to the school program (Thomson et al, 2012).

Signature of a creative

The creative practitioners (Thomson et al, 2012) are seen as artists/teachers for what concerns the implications for pedagogical practice. Their presence -even if not on regular basis, but for smaller projects- inside school helped to shape distinctive and peculiar pedagogies, seen as the signature. By going inside the school environment in the Educational Project, I couldn't help but bring my own signature. The signature is -in the new outsider figure I am proposing- the more inner and personal characteristics (less idealistic than the atelierista's) of every outsider.

Differences and similarities, first part

While the atelierista's practice is well embedded in the Reggio Emilia theoretical and professional framework, the artists of the Signature Pedagogies project "*bring with them from their practice outside the school particular frames of reference and purposes. As they and teachers work together, they are able to create new practices.*" (Thomson et al, 2012). These particular frames of references are what I consider the more inner and personal characteristics, which are used to bring not only new media experimentations but new knowledge too.

The use of the term "new" knowledge implies the dichotomy between the "*default pedagogies*" (term used in Thomson et al, 2012) and the arts-related signature pedagogies, which highlights more the figure of the outsider as someone more external from the school environment than the atelierista, who embraces the Reggio Emilia method in their practice, to "serve" it.

Thus there are differences from the traditional pedagogical view in the perspective of creative practitioners: they are not focusing on "*the standard agenda that defines excellence in terms of progress against a limited set of measurable indicators*" (Thomson et al, 2012), and they are not seeing the classroom as an assimilation of techniques, as said, differently from the media and languages explorations of the atelierista.

What more links the creative practitioners to the atelierista figure, is the deep engagement in collaborative and the cooperative dialogues with teachers; and the way they take into consideration relationships, conversations, learning environments, rules, norms, and culture.

The atelierista figure, affected by some idealistic connotations from the Reggio Emilia method, well meets some idealistic components founded in the artists of the signature: the concept of inclusion, choice and agency, scale and ambition, are some aspects occurred in the case studies reported by Thomson, Hall, Jones and Sefton-Green, in their final report on The Signature Pedagogies Project. These topics are seen more as afterward results than as ideas on which the project was built. In the case of this Educational Project and in this research I carried out, some of these points were already part of my signature, and I was aware of them, as a researcher. The concept of inclusion was present already in designing the project, and some more idealistic goals such as the freedom and agency in working with children. Some other topics emerged at the end of the project, like the hybridity of the figure of a creative practitioner inside school, a topic that I deeply investigated and affected my practice, or the negotiation that occurs in being in dialogue with the teachers.

Differences and similarities, an example

A lot of similarities occur between the artists of the Signature Pedagogies, the atelierista, and what occurred in my own Educational Project; concerning ways of dealing with situations or designing the activities to propose. In particular, in this excerpt from a case study of the Signature Pedagogies are visible some patterns present in the vision of the outsider that is building in this research.

One of the experiences of the project is the one of the artist Tunde: he describes himself as an author, storyteller and illustrator who works with education. He held three sessions in the school, all the

three of them similar for contents and styles, but one of the common aspects to all the sessions was "*the emphasis on 'doing your best' and 'practising'*" that even became a regular refrain during the sessions. This "refraining" and repeating some key sentences to motivate and highlight the approach used in doing the activities, is something present in my Educational Project too. Repeating (almost as a "mantra") some encouraging or "magic" words and sentences, create in children *"the pleasure in recognizing the words and felt free to join in (...)"* (Thomson et al, 2012) exactly as reported in Tunde's experience.

His project is interesting for the aspect of collaboration too: it was involving children and their parents in the work. *"Each session opened with Stanley reviewing the previous week, going through images on his laptop and encouraging parents to comment on the children's learning and their progresses. (...)"* (Thomson et al, 2012). The way of showing what happened to parents and teachers, to involve them in giving feedback, is an aspect present in the Reggio Emilia approach too. In the experience of this research and Educational Project, I was asking for feedback from the teachers at the end of every activity, showing the outcomes and describing the process too.

Game and play
Firstly, the artist gave importance to the documentation part too, as in the Reggio Emilia approach, by having the teachers and parents make notes on the language and pictures produced, and by discussing the materials afterward. This aspect of maintaining focus on what the language was and which visual material was produced during the activities, is common to the project I carried out too. To make what happened visible is one of the tasks an outsider takes care of.

Furthermore, in the reported experience, the artist Tunde focused in the aspect of play too, *"in the use, experimentation and manipulation of materials and, the structures that were built."* (Thomson et al, 2012), but also in the way of transmitting information and invitations.

The importance of the play in this example of signature is something I found in my practice too. Since I find the play a way to rethink dynamics that occurs in activities, or roles that seem to be fixed but can be shaken by playing, merging the aspect of play and games with drawing activities can be a first step to rethink those activities with children, and with teachers too. Imagination, commitment to a cause, and freedom, are some of the main points present in play and games. I deeply investigated some theoretical roots, to be able to explain and propose the importance of play in the first step of the educational project: during the teachers workshop.

1.4 The free play: games and roles

In particular, to try to make the act of drawing more fun, to liberate children in doing it, a notion of playing is needed: in terms of giving children the opportunity to go back to free play. In seeing drawing as a moment of free play, children realize that is not a task, that they can decide how long they want to "play/draw", they are autonomous and they can discover new things.

Free play
The free play allows fun, empowers children to decide in which direction to go, or not to go, as in the words of the historian Huizinga *"in all these doings they plainly experience tremendous fun and enjoyment."* (Huizinga, 1955).

The knowledge that arises from the chaos of the free play (Kraftl, 2013) are helping me in structuring my approach too. To create a safe place for children, it means to consider the mess and chaos that children need to feel free. Moments of great playful times are, in fact, those that can lead teachers and children to liberate and play and discover (Kraftl, 2013).

In the Educational Project, the approach of thinking the drawing activities as games, highlighted other two important aspects of my practice as an outsider: the one of the respect for chaos and mess, and the one of the respect of the time children needed (or they didn't need).

Enjoyment and freedom

The enjoyment of play allows to reach some aspects of freedom, and this is recognized in my practice, since I have always considered the game as a way to reach some topics from a different perspective, and to reach freedom too. Not only Kraftl sees the free play as an important method to engage with children, but Huizinga asserts it too: *"Child and animal play because they enjoy playing, and therein precisely lies their freedom."* (Huizinga, 1955).

This freedom is the key to investigate and discover (or just to enact) different roles, to give space to imaginative situation.

So: play is not only freedom, but the second characteristic of play is the ability of rethinking the dynamics, the roles. In fact, *"play is not "ordinary" or "real" life. It is rather a stepping out of "real" life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own. Every child knows perfectly well that he is "only pretending", or that it was "only for fun."* (Huizinga, 1955).

Dynamics

Seeing the game as the catalyst to reflect on dynamics and to change them while experimenting with actions and reactions

and role-play, I used it as a point of departure for the project in the preschool, by talking about games rules and dynamics with teachers, and by trying to imagine how to merge games and drawing activities, and which inputs to give to children at first.

The inputs that are normally given in games and while playing are rules, but in the project it was attempted to overcome and revolution them, in a conscious (for teachers) and sometimes unconscious (for children) way, and to give children the possibility of saying no to some rules, in the spirit of empowerment and inclusion.

Play and design thinking

In the project, play is not only the subject of discussion (with the teachers when designing the activities together in the workshop), but it is also a way to approach the moment of the designing itself.

In this, Resnick adds an extra layer to the importance of playing, by contextualizing it in the design-thinking and by suggesting a wider use of the typical *"kindergarten way"* of acting and transmitting knowledge, that I find very interesting as a position, and very inspiring as a challenge. In explaining his *"kindergarten approach to learning – characterized by a spiraling cycle of Imagine, Create, Play, Share, Reflect, and back to Imagine"* (Resnick, 2007) he theorizes a process that somehow results similar to the Reggio Emilia approach, in which children imagine what they want to do and they try out their creations by sharing them with others too, to reflect on the experiences. This approach allows children to *"learn to develop their own ideas, try them out, test the boundaries, experiment with alternatives, get input from others – and, perhaps most significantly, generate new ideas based on their experiences."* (Resnick, 2007).

In the Educational Project, this method of testing out is mostly used not only with children but in the way the teachers and I designed the activities. It's embedded in my practice and way to approach things.

The reasons why game and play don't have to be dismissed and forgotten in education and especially in kindergarten and pre-school, is perfectly described in the passage from Resnick: *"Piaget famously proclaimed that "Play is the work of children."* (Resnick, 2007).

By growing, the notion of game is sometimes reduced as "just play", taking away from it all the serious implications and outcomes. But the importance of play is really linked to important pedagogies keys, since it *"involves a process of experimentation, exploration, and testing the boundaries"* (Resnick, 2007).

2. Research questions and Methodologies

2.1 Ethnographic research methods; Action research; Naturalistic inquiry; Naturalist and participant observations in the research

The research methods used to develop this project derive all from the questions that need to be answered.

The starting point of the inquiry is to investigate myself how can an outsider be part of a pre-school context, by involving her/himself into a deep dialogue with teachers too.

The aim is to try out this external presence myself, with the action research method that goes from diagnosis, to action, to reflections at the end guiding the Educational Project and the thesis too.

The first part was observing the already existing situation; to decide the action to take afterward. Documentation with pictures and field notes are the main tools. Interviews occurred after every action: like the workshop with the teachers and the activities with children.

The experimenting participatory action research is what this thesis and educational project are, since they both consist in the

small-scale interventions in the real world to address practitioners' own issues. The educational project is in fact an intervention in the already existing kindergarten education world, and it's "addressing" the teachers in their practice. The close examination of the effects of such an intervention are the final reflections on the collected data; with the use of case studies too. Focusing on case studies from the data are for explanatory and descriptive aim, and to have a deeper analysis and reflections on what happened and can happen with such intervention.

Lastly, the critical and reflective approach to the thesis and educational project are part of the participatory research, where the aspects of accountability and self-evaluation are at the core.

2.2 The outsider or outsiders

To investigate the figure of the outsider I needed to actively become an outsider using the Ethnographic research methods. From observations in the field (in the kindergarten where the Educational Project is based) at first, together with literature research, I started questioning and documenting the already existing practice of drawing activities in kindergartens. To understand which kind of outsider I am, I needed to reflect on what happened in the project, and to draw theory from there too.

The research draws me to conclude that there are apparently two different notions of an outsider. The first, being the outsider/researcher: an outsider focused on the dynamics as a creative outsider who works together with the teachers, who wants to study this relationship and who is an involved action researcher. And the second, being the creative practitioner who brings in new knowledge and who is the subject of the research too. Covering these two roles, I tried to take distances in describing the whole Educational Project, and to be critical too.

2.3 The dialogue

Other important research questions are about what kind of dialogue -if meaningful or not, if deep enough- and about the level of consciousness that the dialogic intervention of the research can arise. *How to create a meaningful dialogue between teachers and outsiders?* and *To what level can this dialogue create awareness and ideas for creative activities in teachers' practice?* These questions are both answered by the praxis and the participatory reflections, besides the observations and final interviews with teachers too.

2.4 The activities

Regarding the third topic of the research questions, they are centered on the activities, so they are about the actual way of conducting the intervention of the Educational Project. Coming already from ideas and literature *How can the game (and its implications: reversing roles, play, etc.) be implied in these activities?* and *How are these activities perceived by toddlers, regarding their feelings of having a new visual language that can make the world more concrete?* are answered by the participatory practice and by case studies from the interventions and data collected in the action research. But they are also answered by praxis and interviews with teachers and children as for the dialogue question. The observations and reflections afterward are here, in particular, the key elements.

2.5 The documentation

After having researched the approach to documentation in the Reggio Emilia method, I decided to incorporate some aspects in my research methodology.

The Reggio roots
In the Reggio Emilia way of documenting the pictures, the dialogues, the videos and all the products of the documentation are observed and discussed together with the atelierista, the teachers and sometimes the parents too. This view on the documentation -and the use that is done of it- seeks not only to show the processes, that are the bases and really important, but it is also used to collect and show the memories of children's personal and collective work.

My specific method
In my research, I firstly observed the existing situation of drawing activities and how they were conducted in the pre-school I was working. The pictures and notes produced during the observations were a starting point in the workshop with teachers. By having the documentation at hand, the existing situation was more clear, and the teachers and I could talk and discuss with a concrete grip on the drawing activities situation.

The use of the documentation, for the Reggio Emilia manner and for me, resulted then different, since for me it was used more, at first, as an excuse to start a conversation and, at last, was used to make visible what happened. Stating that my use of the documentation results here more supportive than analytical, now (after the research in school was concluded) the pictures taken during the project are part of the school documentation, and the pictures of the workshops and activities are showned with the final artwork, the big drawing. The added value to the pictures of the documentation -which were

asked to be exposed in school by the teachers themselves- is that the teachers know what are the images are talking about, and they are able to describe them, since the teachers know what those pictures represent, what and how was happening while those pictures were taken, because of their presence during the activities.

3. Me & The Roles: definitions, responsibilities, connections

3.1 The Designer and The Artist

As a designer or as an artist invited into a pre-school, and based on previous experiences, I felt that the responsibilities (when being involved in projects inside schools) are often limited. I felt my presence as the presence of a guest, or of the one of a *"star"*.

As a an external guest, I gained new insights in the classroom, even only by my presence, but with a lot of limitations. I didn't feel engaged with the school, with the teachers, with the problems or the strong points of the school.

The Designer inside the school, is an aspect of the figure of the outsider that often verifies at first: when the dialogue is not yet built, when the intentions are not yet made clear to both the sides (teachers and outsider).

At first, at this stage of being a guest designer, the awareness of what it means of having to deal with children wasn't there for me; neither the collaborative notions of deep dialogue with teachers.

Being a graphic designer in particular, the project-driven mind and way of approaching projects, led me to have only a final goal to reach, in mind. This definition of involvement in school can end up in "using" the school, the children, and the activities only for the goal assigned, leaving out the importance of the processes and the pedagogical implications. The skills of artists and designers are what remain important for the outsider too, but the mind approach is different.

3.2 The Outsider

The new outsider notion, even if it still has the nuance of going inside school from another environment, has the implications of the theoretical framework and need and will of being involved in deep dialogue, consciousness and pedagogical notions.

In my particular case, the hybridity (Thomson, Hall, Jones, Sefton-Green, 2012) is the key: different roles in one person, an hybrid figure that can be part of an education environment, without losing the peculiar characteristics of my own practice. The awareness and consciousness on the acts I do, and the self-reflective eye with which I conduct the drawing activities, are also parts integrated to this new notion. Other important approaches emerged from the report of the educational project, which are actually connected to the Signature Pedagogies are the ones of: permeability, mobility, time flexibility. And also inclusion, choice and agency, scale and ambition, (Thomson, Hall, Jones, Sefton-Green, 2012, p.14). And, from the Reggio Emilia experiences, the notions of carefully and neatly preparing the environment (Katz & Cesarone, 1994, p. 73). The importance to carefully listen to the children, to listen to their ideas and to facilitate their implementation.

The knowing how to collaborate with teachers, together.
"The creativity and skills are important, but they are activated in mutually exchange" (Katz & Cesarone, 1994, p. 73), and, at the same time, the outsider knows a lot about materials and skills and knows how to present them to children. The flexibility and organization in carrying out the work.

4. The Educational Project, an Introduction

The paths of the content of the Educational Project are deeply related to the thesis.

The importance of liberating children in their approach to drawing, the presence of an outsider and the dialogue which occurs with the teachers and the outsider. The dynamics and dialogues that arise between the figures of teachers and outsider are the first steps of the project; besides the outsider facing the kindergarten environment and trying to shake it.

The main tool chosen to shake things up in the school was at first, for example, to focus on the dynamics of drawing and of playing, and trying to merge them together. But at the end, with the possibility of an atelier as an art and drawing free space, the outcomes of giving the possibility to children to be free or to create new rules, (Huizinga, 1955) happened to be the key to switch roles and review them. And to create "wow moments" and accidental learning experiences too (Kraftl, 2013).

4.1 The Educational Project

The Educational Project consists in multiple interventions inside a kindergarten in Italy, and itself subsists in the biggest and most important source of data for the reflections on the outsider figure of the thesis.

The need of being an outsider myself inside the school environment is what brought me as a researcher to design the Educational Project *(Scheme 1).*

0. observations on the drawing activities inside the kindergarten

↓

1. meeting/ workshop with the teachers

↓

2. try out the new activities

↓

3. feedback with children and teachers

Scheme 1

The design of the project aims to answer the Research Questions, so it starts with the need of creating a dialogue with the teachers (*point 1* in the scheme). To be able to build a meaningful dialogue with teachers and to be prepared (and prepare) the workshop with them, I needed few days of observations of what it was already existing and happening in the school (*point 0*). The observations were the basis on which I could build the first dialogue and make concrete connections between the theories I wanted to inform the teachers

about in the first meeting.

In the workshop with teachers, the decisions about how to organize and drive the later activities were made. The workshop aim is to investigate with the teachers some aspects on drawing activities, and to later conduct and observe the activities in a different manner than usual (this is why the observations are really important).

The first idea was that the new activities could be conducted with the outsider together with the teachers, to also see the interchange between the figures while the action was on, and could eventually be taken off by the teachers, to continue to try them out (***point 2***).

The main core was to gain feedback after every session of activities (conducted during normal daytime at school) from teachers and children, to adjust the later activities that were to take place (***point 3***). These feedback sessions led to important changes in the activities with unexpected results.

The Educational Project is really connected to the context in which it takes place.

4.2 The school

The context of the Educational Project is peculiar and important, the core. A preliminary clarification is needed to understand the environment and what is going to be described.

The school where the project was conducted is a non-Reggio Emilia kindergarten, so a more traditional and common *"Scuola dell'infanzia"*. In Italy, kindergarten is a sort of pre-school where children aged from 3 until 6 years old go before starting elementary school. In the city of Fano -located in the center of Italy- there are a lot of public kindergartens: some are funded by the Italian Ministry of Education, and some are run by the local Municipality. The one of our

context, called Scuola dell'infanzia *"La scatola magica"*, is a Municipal one. There are ten teachers for eighty-six children. It has a big garden and the structure is relatively big: with five classrooms and a big open space. The way the "Scatola Magica" is organized is to have around twenty-eight children per "classroom" (or "section"), with around three teachers each.

They have an annual programme to follow and, in particular, this year, the programme is focused on art too. For this reason they accepted my proposal to collaborate in the project.

The school routine (***Scheme 2***) foresees morning activities in the classes, that start at around ten in the morning, and they last until not even midday, for the lunch.

In the afternoon, after lunch, the activities are less structured and there is the free play moment, except for children who have to finish some activities from the morning, or the older children that are doing exercises in preparation to start the elementary school.

Scheme 2

08:00 a.m. - 09:30 a.m.: Children arrival with parents. While waiting for all the children to arrive, time for free play in classrooms or in the shared spaces.

09:30 a.m.: Everyone goes in the classrooms for the *routine* moments: teachers and children together check the present/absent children, the weather, and which day of the week is it. A break to eat fruits that is served every day by two different chosen children ("waiters"/"waitresses" of the day). Turns to the toilet.

10:30 a.m.: Start of the activities.

11.45 a.m.: Tiding up. The children who eat at school start to get ready for the lunch (like turns to the toilet and setting the table).

12.00 a.m.: The children who are not eating at school are picked up by parents.

12.10 p.m. - 13:00 p.m.: Lunch.

01.00 p.m.: Going back to the classrooms. Until 14:15 p.m. parents can pick up children after lunch and before the afternoon activities. Free play in the garden or in the classroom.

02.30 p.m.: Afternoon activities (in particular time for the activities which have to be finished from the morning).

03:30 p.m.- 04:00 p.m.: School exit.

4.3 The children and the teachers

The eighty-six children were all aged between three and five years old, and they were in mixed age groups in the sections. The decision was taken in order to have the older children helping the younger with some routine practical tasks (like washing hands or going to the toilet); but also for helping each other in growing and -as teachers say- *"So the biggers help the youngers"* in other tasks too.

The ten teachers (all women) were all with former experiences in that one or in other kindergartens. They collaborated a lot together as a group, having their weekly meeting every Tuesday afternoon. Even if they didn't operate with the Reggio Emilia method, they took a lot of care about the documentation of the works happening in the kindergarten.

4.4 The report

The Educational Project consisted in two weeks inside the kindergarten, without counting the week during which I went sporadically to observe and get acquainted with the context.

The first week: the teachers workshop
The first week started with the meeting/workshop with teachers.

What was designed (or "The objective voice")
After the observations, I could design some forms to give out in the workshop, on which I could work and take notes with the teachers, and with which I could help myself introducing and explaining some theoretical concepts, like the free play one.

The forms: the first is a reflection on the dynamics of drawing, the second on the techniques, the third on the themes and the fourth with some final questions to reflect on, after the drawing activities occur.

1. Dinamiche   15 MINUTI

Quali dinamiche si presentano tra i bambini quando disegnano?
Possiamo giocarci e *shackerarle* e sperimentare? Vedere che accade?
Quanto e quando scegliamo di intervenire?

esperienza del gioco durante il compleanno in cui un bambino si sente in autorità di suggerire all'altro cosa fare
movimenti
scambio fogli, si gira il disegno: collaborazione
scambio punti di riferimento e guide
maestra o compagno interviene al fischio di possono solo parlare con il vicino, o solo con la A o con la E o mugugnando e chiedere al compagno cosa disegnare e il compagno da le direttive mugugnando
telefono senza fili del disegno
cadavere exquisit

concetto in Arte della performance, della performativity!

2. Tecniche   15 MINUTI

Ci sono tecniche che possono incuriosire di più i bambini?
Che li possano sorprendere?
Osserviamo i loro gesti più comuni, possiamo pensare a tecniche su misura "per le loro mani"?

ripassano mille volte il foglio, gestualità

fogli grandi (gorsso foglio, dimensioni diverse, gestualità diverse?)
materiali
un lungo foglio

dipendono dalle dinamiche e dal gioco e dalle tempistiche

3. Tematiche 15 MINUTI

Cosa può stimolare la scoperta, il gioco, il dialogo tra bambini e la sperimentazione?

il freddo
il caldo
il vuoto, il niente
il tutto, il tanto

tecniche e tematiche sono molto collegate,
possiamo fluidamente cambiarle

– Carboncino

4. Alla fine? 15 MINUTI

Cosa diciamo ai bambini al termine di un'attività di disegno o creativa?
Cosa chiediamo loro? Come valutiamo se è stata un'attività *efficace*?

Sei soddisfatto?

È stato difficile?

Ti piace?

Ti sei divertito?

Cosa diciamo?
Ti piace il risultato?
Possiamo usare i feedback de
bambini per capire le prossir
attività, o per prenderli com
spunto per nuove attività
creative.
Perché nel gioco i bambini
si sentono a proprio agio nel
suggerrire e far sentire la
loro voce e voler cambiare le
regole, per divertirsi di più

Possiamo riprendere questi 4 punti e rifletterci
e costruire nuove attività ogni volta, come un
toolkit o cassetta degli attrezzi!

GRAZIE!!!!

The forms were inviting do build a dialogue with some points of discussion and questions:

1. DYNAMICS: What dynamics occur among children when they draw? Can we play with those dynamics and shake them? Do we want to experiment and see what happens? When and how much do we choose to intervene?

2. TECHNIQUES: Are there techniques that can make children more curious or that can make them surprise or willing to experiment? Let's observe their most common gestures, can we think about new techniques made for their hands?

3. THEMES: What can stimulate the discovery, the game, the dialogue between children and experimentation?

4. AT THE END?: What do we usually say tho children at the end of a creative or drawing activity? What do we ask them? How do we evaluate if an activity was effective?

Those forms were prepared beforehand by me, taking into account the most important aspects I wanted the teachers to reflect on, with me. And inviting them to design the activities to propose, while answering these questions. The questions were informed by the theoretical views that I assimilated, and the **sensitivity** that those theoretical concepts created in my view.

All the steps presented in the forms were discussed and taken into account, apart from the "step 0". The workshop with teachers started in fact with the invite to do a warming up activity (which I designed beforehand). They were encouraged to think about a situation where drawing occurs, at home or at school (in the kindergarten), and to enact the environment, the tools, the dialogues,

and everything that happens, in their opinions and perspectives, when a child draws either at home or in the kindergarten. This "step 0" of the workshop happened to be discussed immediately by the participants.

The teachers, in fact, asked to discuss the two different drawing situations, but they didn't want to enact them.

What happened (or "The answer to the design")

The conversation brought up all the topics that needed to be addressed from what I could see from the observations, and to connect those remarks with the new activities that needed to be designed.

One of the teachers affirmed, for example, how much the autonomy in drawing was missing in her opinion, by stating that the children often asked the help of the teachers to draw a *beautiful* drawing,

"(...) It often happens that a child during a free drawing activity comes to me and asks me "I don't know how to do it, can you show me how to do it?"."

or judge their own drawings *ugly* by looking and comparing them with their friends' works.

"They come to the teachers saying: "My drawing isn't good. He told me that my drawing sucks." This happens, and it happens that the child feels frustrated."

The autonomy seemed missed and the teachers agreed on that, in particular because of the lacking of collaboration between the toddlers themselves, who mostly preferred to call out the teachers for help, instead of asking their friends.

"(...) They call out and say 'I can't do it, I can't do it'. We try to reinforce the self-esteem and the trust by telling the child to sit beside us and draw."

A teacher

How to build up this collaboration was a question that arose and I tried to answer with teachers, by also giving the example of the games and the ways of playing, which was actually a fertile comparison. Teachers could relate themselves and their experiences in observing and reflecting on children free play.

Following the given paper forms (which -for the teachers- were with any written directions but questions, pictures and blank spaces for notes) the meeting worked quite organically, and the group habit of meeting and talking together was visible. We could decide what to do in the next days, and I was writing down on the sheets I prepared all the things we were going to do and we were deciding at that moment.

What the outsider sees (or "The subjective voice")

As the outsider, at a first glance, the attempt and the experience of building a deep **dialogue** with teachers didn't seem too hard. But, by re-looking at the videotaped documentation, I could see how much effort and **energy** I was putting into the dialogue: by listening, by replying, by trying to find a balance between not **leading** the conversation too much. Some of them were aware of some practices concerning creative activities, while others told me later that the dialogue was useful to let them reflect and create awareness.

The decisional process of what to do in the next days, was one tricky part. Even if the decisions were made together, some teachers asked me a few times what my needs in the research were. This aspect of the dialogue, this continuous **questioning**, and the exigency of clarifying my **position**, was the toughest part of the workshop.

From the notebook

"It isn't easy, I think some of these things we decided together have been already done before. It's difficult to follow the steps from the toolkit I have prepared (meaning the forms). *The workshop was around one hour and a half, I think it can be done in less time and having it faster and less boring."*

When asking for a feedback about the meeting/workshop, teachers said it was like having these meetings called *"Corsi di aggiornamento"* (*"Updating classes"* or *"courses"*), with professionals of some fields. One teacher added that the dialogue was useful for bringing up discussion topics that they normally wouldn't talk about or dive deep into, especially about drawing activities.

The first week: The activities with children

After the workshop, we arrived at the days of action and activities having decided to carry on two different activities with the children, in relation to their age. One activity for the children aged from 4 until 6 years old, and one for the youngest (3 years old).

The activities were focused on the **dynamics** of drawing, and on how to shake them, combining them with games in which playfulness and changing roles could be helpful in changing the view of drawing activities as they were usually seen and conducted.

What was designed (or "The objective voice")

The first activity was the *"Chinese whisper"*: in group of maximum eight, the children aged 4, 5 and 6 years old were asked to stay in a circle, with one A3 sheet of paper in the middle of the circle and some markers. As teachers suggested and planned, the given markers were different from the markers the toddlers normally used in the kindergarten, so they could be intrigued by them too. The first child of the circle had to start to whisper a word to the second one,

who had to repeat it in the ear of the third one, adding one other word (it could have been an adjective, another noun, or whatever), and so it went on. What word would come at the end to the last child's ear? The group had to discover it by seeing what the last child would draw at the end, on the sheet in the middle of the circle. So they would have discovered if the word whispered at the start made it through the circle or not, or if it changed, or if something was added or not. And a layer of excitement was added to the act of drawing.

What happened (or "The answer to the design")

This first game turned out to be not that well-known from the children, which needed a lot of time to really go deep into it and understanding the dynamics and have fun. We repeated it several times in the days, and teachers were happy to re-propose it by themselves, without me around, just to try it out more and to test out if the toddlers would like it and become more comfortable with it.

For this first game, everything was set and decided the day before in collaboration with the teachers, which were ready to do it and to lead it. They knew the rules and the variations, but it was interesting to see how they **took over** the game and **adapted** it to their own group of children. In fact, every teacher decided to take care of one group of children, and it happened often that some of the teachers came to me to report some changes in the rules, or the outcomes of some updated variants in the game.

It felt like a collective activity that was going on in every kindergarten classroom, but not everywhere in the same way.

The ways: the first activity of the "Chinese whisper" was adapted autonomously by the teachers for each group of children they were doing it with. Some teachers decided to let all the children collectively draw the final word that would come out of the game, since the children were impatient to draw; some other teachers remained more traditional with the children sitting in a circle and only the last one drawing; another group was sitting in line instead of in circle.

What the outsider sees (or "The subjective voice")

As the outsider, during this activity I felt myself of more as a mediator for the teachers. A **mediator** between the games we decided on and how in reality we needed to change some rules, to adapt them to children, moods and moments, capabilities, and difficulties too. We (or they, the teachers) saw some dynamics that were difficult and needed to be changed. I was taking charge of some changes and suggesting them to teachers, but mostly I was called by teachers to ask me how and if to modify; or just to let me know that in some specific case it was decided to change a rule and it worked out well.

I was happy to see the teachers involved and focused and motivated, taking charge and wanting to try out as much and as better they could.

But I ultimately became more passive than active, as the drawing activity went on. On the other hand, the freedom of the teachers to adapt the activity to different situations and the outcome to have them feel more free was from and in my opinion a good goal.

The **empowerment** was more visible in the teachers than in the children themselves, and this was the big question mark I had in mind when it came to asking for feedback from teachers.

The **documentation** of the works was also taken over by the teachers, who decided (for their needs and the needs of the school) that all the children had to make at least one drawing. Teachers made clear they needed these records to document the activities for every child, and they were writing the small notes and captions in the finished drawings.

The documentation: the teachers decided to document in different ways. Some wrote the names of the child who started the game by saying the first word, and the name of the last child who heard and drew the word arrived; some others just wrote the first word and the last. But all of them wrote in the drawings the name of the child who drew them. (The first drawing says: Sand - Without breaks; *and the second says* (Natan) ... Fish ... Pear ... (Leo R.).
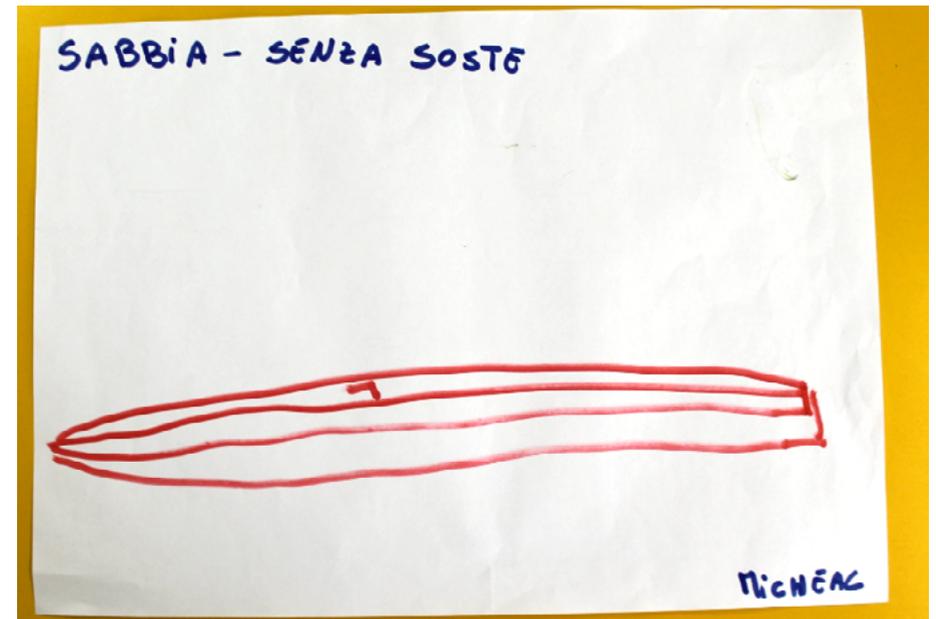
The feedback in the unstructured interviews with the children themselves revealed that they had fun, but that they also wanted to make the game more "their" game, and to play it with the friends they wanted to.

This revealed more about how the activity was perceived: still a structured drawing task they needed to do.

Child: I liked when we drew because we drew the things our friend told to the other and the other and the other.
Child: I liked the whisper game because we were saying the things to the other and because it was funny, we were saying the things from near and from sit down.
Child: I liked the whisper game, it was easy.
Child: I liked to play the game of the whisper because everyone was saying something to the nearest friend. I liked the colors too since they were golden.
Child: I like when I started to play to draw because I liked the game of the whisper. It means that I liked to draw the dog and do the whisper game.
Child: I didn't like to talk, but I liked to color
Children: I liked to talk in the ear and I would like to re-do it.
*Child: I like the game and to play it but I didn't remember but **I had to** draw.*

Taking into account the feedback of some children, I decided to repeat the game myself with three children, and one teacher with me.

It was visible how much **<u>time</u>** the children needed to get used to new games and rules they didn't know. We didn't have to rush and, moreover, the fun started with knowing the game and having the time to understand it. But, surely, the level of empowerment and **<u>fun</u>** wasn't the one I would have loved to reach.

Again, with the same children, a third activity came to my mind *The Wolf! The wolf!*.

"I liked everything to be truthful. I liked to draw after the game. I had to draw a sea star and a pearl and a red turtle and red eyes. The teacher was saying things to another child near to her and I could add something. So I added tooth to shark and seagull to big wave. I would like to play it with the friends I choose. I really had fun."

A child

What was designed (or "The objective voice")

After having made a story together, the children started to draw down the story on their sheets of paper. Every child had one, and the colors and markers were shared on the table.

When someone wanted to exchange their drawing or sheet, had only had to shout *"The wolf! The wolf! (AL lupo! Al lupo!)"* and decided with whom to exchange the paper. Everyone was supposed to draw on their sheet, but was asked to continue to draw on the paper from someone else too.

What happened (or "The answer to the design")

Children were at first reluctant to exchange their sheets, or shy to draw on someone else's drawing. I needed to intervene and start to exchange by asking only one child to exchange their drawing with me. It turned out that for most of the game I was the only one drawing and asking to exchange the drawings. Children then started to like the dynamics of exchanging the sheets more than the one of drawing on them. Some of them wanted to finish their own drawing before exchanging it. And they were surprised to see that something else could be added.

Sara (5 years old) didn't want to exchange her drawing and started to exchange it only when she thought it was finished. She wanted to exchange it with me, and she didn't expect something else (the brown hair on the wolf of the story) could be added. She claimed it back by using the "Wolf! Wolf!" formula, and she started to add some brown hair on the wolf too.

Sofia (4 years old) didn't know how to draw a wolf, she looked around and she discovered a shape to give to it. Later, in the moment of free drawing, she repeated the same wolf, meaning that she discovered a new visual formula that she was happy with, or that she just wants to repeat and experiment more, to make it her own.
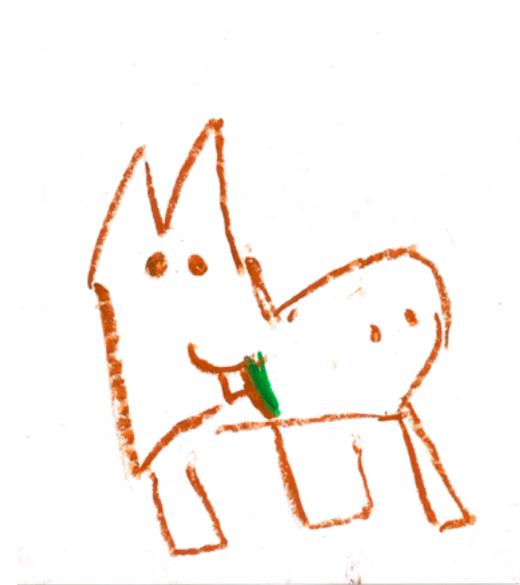
What the outsider sees (or "The subjective voice")

In this case I was without teachers, and I was being active and participating with the children. Being there allowed the rules to be modified so that the children could have fun with the game, and not see it as another drawing assignment. At the end, when they all started to exchange papers, they had a lot of fun, and I was nearer to understanding the importance of collaborating with teachers but not letting them take over too much.

In the days following, a new activity for 4, 5, and 6 years old was discussed and done: "*Regina reginella*" ("*The small big queen*").

What was designed (or "The objective voice")

During the observations in the previous weeks, I saw one game the children were playing a lot, a well-known one. With teachers, we turned it into a drawing game. And this showed that teachers could have already gained more habits in thinking about new drawing activities.

In this game, one child was entitled to be the king or the queen and to ask the rest of the children to walk in his/her direction (to conquer the castle and the title of queen or king) by some precise rules (like *"you can reach me by doing three steps as a tiger!"* or similar).

In this case, the king or queen was turned into an artist (by teachers' choice) who was asking his/her friends to draw something he/she wanted to have drawn (like *"if you all want to become an artist, you have to draw me some kangaroos!"*). The king or queen decided then which child could have his/her throne by deciding which the drawing they preferred. Then the second one who became the king or queen would nominate a new one, etc. since all the children from the group would each once be in charge of asking for a drawing.

What the outsider sees (or "The subjective voice")

Children showed a lot more confidence with drawings, since they didn't have to be focused on rules they didn't know yet, and they could have more fun. The outcomes from some drawings shows it:

Two drawings from "Regina Reginella" (children were asked by the queen or king child to draw a couple of kangaroos: a kangaroo mum with the baby kangaroo, or an owl)...Compared with few drawings from the former "Chinese whisper" (where words such biscuit, cat, tree, pear were said). The freedom and enjoyment and richness of topic was visible in the different outcomes of drawings and drawing topics (in "Regina Reginella" some other words were: The North Pole, an owl on a tree, and a mountain in a forest).

At the end of the first week, the focus on **dynamics** appeared really important, more than on techniques or topics of drawing, and this was particularly visible from the teachers' feedback.

Teacher: To merge the games with the dynamics and the drawing activities is a nice new thing, a news that works, with 5 year old children it works since they are proactive.
Teacher: really good idea you gave us, in the next months we are going to do more.

Teacher (who twice tried the "Chinese Whisper" game, once in the afternoon with a smaller group): to do the whisper game another time was useful. For them was it new and the experience too. Yesterday, to have two new things together, blew the children away, but today they already were more used to it.

*Teacher: they didn't know the game, it seemed to us really well known. Instead, **it revealed the difficulties and capacities of listening and speaking.** Moreover, children that are usually making chaos and used to do whatever they want to do, in the group game become really shy. Free moments are used to play with others and are used to not take care. In the group dynamics were shy and were blocked, and blocking the game too. The game highlighted the individualism.*

For me, as an outsider, it was important to focus on the dynamics, of what was happening in being with teachers as a creative practitioner, on the dynamics of: **collaboration**, **positions**, **energy,** **leading** or **letting go**, and **adapting**.

"We don't usually stop at the end of the project, we don't stop to talk and to give feedback, but we need it. We need to have shared goals and to design together, always, a part from this workshop and these activities. We need to find a common thread and to have a final goal. To have an outsider who is not a pedagogical and didactic figure but who is someone who catches the attention."

A teacher

The second week

At the end of one teacher's feedback, there was a proposal for using a classroom that hadn't been used for a long time and was a spare free space.

"(...) We can make a magic room where paintings, brushes, and so on can be put. A new figure leads to some news. Atelier. With specific goals."

After having being talked about this idea with the rest of the group of teachers, my second week at the school had a completely different organization, with an atelier and a totally different kind of collaboration with teachers.

I was entitled to go in the classroom and ask children and teachers who wanted to come in the atelier to experiment.

This setup made things more free and open. Every child could say if he/she wanted to go inside the atelier or not, or children and teachers could step inside and decide whether to start or not to participate.

When entering the atelier, every child had to put a small drawn icon with a clothespin in their clothes, as a ritual to understand that he/she was entering the atelier and becoming an artist.

What was designed (or "The objective voice") and What happened (or "The answer to the design")

The project of this workshop was to draw on a big blank paper that I prepared. In this case, the focus was more on the gestures and techniques mostly, and not on the dynamics as in the former workshop. The big paper became the big drawing of the school, where every child had **freely** tried to draw and had fun in doing it, by concentrating on the gestures, this time. At the end of the project, the big drawing was then hung at school along with pictures describing how it was created, and it had a legend to navigate it, and to point out who made different parts of the big drawing.

Every day, for almost a week, the children knew I was going to be in the atelier, and they knew that something was happening in there.

I tried to experiment and give different colors and materials to different groups of children, who were working on a collaborative big drawing, in a way that I could somehow recognize the different parts that were made.

I was also asking the children who were going to start to work on the big "canvas" to look at it and imagine and see things, from abstract forms to more concrete forms, trying to decipher or just imagine what their friends did formerly.

It happened that some of them, right after having entered the room, observed the big drawing and pointed out a sleeping elephant (or a monster with teeth).

The abstract forms were mostly derived from the tools I proposed for the children to use: like a brush or a oil pastel attached to the top of a long wooden stick.

The gestures to use in order to draw with these new and sometimes difficult techniques took the toddlers a longer **time** to achieve or invent for themselves, but sometimes the results seemed surprising in terms of the approach and the ways of dealing with the situation.

On the first day I tried this activity with 6 children all aged 4 year old. I proposed them to connect the oil pastels to the long sticks and draw on the big canvas.

The second activity was with brushes connected to the sticks, and dark paint. Some colors like the brick brown and orange had been created by the children themselves. Aged 4 years old.

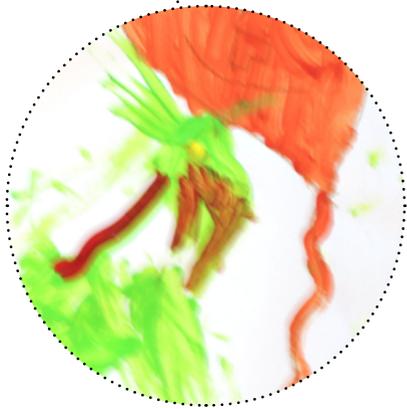Drawings

Gestures

Drawings

Gestures

The third group of children used brushes on sticks but with other colors: green, red and yellow and they were a group of 5 year old children.

Drawings

Gestures

The fourth activity was with two girls aged three years old that came into the atelier with the teacher, and they first started to talk about the big drawing with me and the teacher together, and then they started to paint autonomously and to create the color gold and brown by mixing yellow and red. The abilities of these two children and the fact that they didn't want to leave the atelier, but rather continue to mix colors and paint, was really surprising and pleasant.

Drawings

Gestures

After, other toddlers aged 3 years old came inside. One of them wasn't that convinced of staying and he told me that he was bored, he was free to leave the atelier, and he did it. The three children that remained used the color blue and didn't want to stop.

With a group of 4 year old children, we used chalk to draw on the big canvas, that was already quite full. They were asked to observe it a lot, and see where they wanted to go on top of some shapes with their chalks.

In this particular activity, the children were really involved in the dialogue between them and the work.

Drawings

Gestures

Drawings

Gestures

For the last activity a group of 5 year olds used solid watercolors, and the freedom they could use with this technique and in front of such a big drawing was visible, and situation completely taken over by the children, who were exploring the technique and organizing freely what they wanted to add and draw.

Gestures

Drawings

What the outsider sees (or "The subjective voice")

The atelier became the place of __freedom__ of experimenting and of playfulness and __satisfaction__ and __fun__. Children came inside the atelier and didn't want to leave.

I could observe children in their approach to drawings and paintings and artistic activities, in the way they wanted to approach them, freely.

Between the activities I could stop and reflect or write down the notes, and prepare the __space__ for the next group.

An example of notes from the notebook: *"Maybe it is better to repeat the activity with less children and give them some tips and directions in how and what to draw with the new tool (the brush + stick)."*

Sometimes teachers came inside the atelier too, and it was good to see they that they felt it was a different place, with different rules applied than in the classroom.

In the atelier the teachers didn't feel completely entitled to act and take charge of the situation, they mostly came to see, to observe, (and to help in case of need for some new colors or paper or tools, for example).

Having a big paper in front of them, made the children reflect on the tools and distance to keep from the wall to draw on.

Every one of them was really autonomous and asking questions to reach their personal goals. They couldn't wait to start, they were immersed in a situation that was thrilling them and intriguing so much that they couldn't wait to start.

Sometimes some children who chose to come inside the atelier, were then facing a new different place and were not convinced.

One episode for example can be of one child aged 4 who wasn't convinced of participating, but after the first step he saw, then, when I asked him if he changed his mind, he answered immediately yes, that he wanted to draw.

The activities were really free, which led the children to not want to leave the room. Only two of the 6 children aged 4 years old (the group working with chalk), at a certain point, decided for themselves that they were finished, and **autonomously** asked me if they could leave the atelier.

Being a free activity means that the result didn't have to be a beautiful drawing, it could be a messy thing. They created the colors and decided how and what to draw and paint.

One of the children was open to suggestions in the ways to use the tool we created and about some shapes she could try to draw. The children had the freedom to ask me -the outsider- for tips on what they wanted to achieve, in the time-span they needed to have for understanding the techniques, for having fun, and for making what they wanted to make.

For the first time, I was worried that some activities lasted too long. But I understood how important it was to give the amount of **time** children needed. They needed to understand how to move and follow the body movements, postures, and positions. It wasn't easy for them to draw with these new tools; but they tried with me.

One child (aged 5) had some difficulties in holding the tool and he was not afraid of showing and asking and saying that it was too difficult for him. So I asked him if he wanted to do some warming-up exercises consisting of making lines together.
He then decided that his brush was too long and started having fun with the shorter brush. He made a lot of dots and didn't want to

stop. At the end he said it was difficult and not difficult at the same time. He was the one who also decided to draw an eagle before he started. But he realized it was too difficult and had fun making dots.

One from the same group was a girl with a diagnosed low level of autism. She wanted to make a parrot and ended up doing it, focused on the goal and despite the difficulties in using the long brushes.

Another girl wanted to make stars and she did them well. Another child was really silent and started with lines, she wanted to make a dog. She ended up following the other friend in making stars.

Children aged 3: We liked it a lot and it wasn't difficult.
One 3 year old child: I liked to draw the roundabout and the robot. Another 3 years old child: I liked to draw the sun and the doll too!

When I asked the children to look at the big drawing, and to tell me what they saw, on top of the big drawings, I also asked what they had drawn, I had a lot of incredibly different answers: a fairy, a princess, and a potato, for example.

We did it together, the drawing
We colored
I see the moon
I did a ladybug
I did a Minion
It was easy
It was difficult
We had fun
I see Spiderman
I see a princess
I see the rocket
I see a fairy
I see a fairy too
We liked it
I like the turtle

I did the lift after he did the bottom
I didn't have the space for drawing
the sky so I didn't do it
It's beautiful
I like it all
I like only the turtle
What's that? A snake? Two snakes?
Three snakes?
A green hand of Hulk
I will put a turtle
I put the rainbow
I put all the colors
Snakes!
Dog hands!

5. Conclusions

During the project, I investigated my role of outsider by writing immediately the reflections on what happened as fieldnotes. In this way, my voice naturally came in, since I needed to reflect on my position and my actions as the outsider too. I analyzed the outcomes and in I trying to do so I was looking at the research data with three main different approaches: **What was designed (or "The objective voice")**; **What happened (or "The answer to the design")** and **What the outsider sees (or "The subjective voice")**. With the first two *voices* I was trying to be more "objective": I observed what happened in the activities in the more objective eye as I can, leaving out my voice. With the third more "subjective" voice, I observed what happened with my outsider point of view, wearing the "*outsider glasses*". I then left the voices to the children and teachers, by reporting their interviews.

At this point, I try to relate my practice to the main theoretical concepts, and to try to go back to theory and to connect what happened in the project with the theory I looked at, I will use some words and concepts that emerged and appeared. Those key concepts were a thread that emerged already in the research report with the keywords highlighted and underlined in **bold**. Those are fundamental links to the theory.

5.1 Results: two roles and characteristics

In the two different weeks my role as an outsider changed.
In the first week, the new role of the outsider was difficult to be negotiated with teachers, but beautiful to see how new (compared on what I read from the theories) and compelling it was to do that.

The second role seemed really more near to the Atelierista, and I felt lucky to have had the possibility to try out how much covering this role empowers the outsider figure in creating stimulating drawing activities that lead to freedom and fun times for children.

From the documentation, I could read my practice and observe my ways of behaving, and the most important key topics and highlighted words that came out. Some of these words popped up in my mind from the Signature Pedagogies Project, where they emerged in the *Analytic Framework* (Thomson, Hall, Jones, Sefton-Green, 2012, p.7), where all the important points of analysis of the research are disclosed and described already with some keywords.
In the Signature Pedagogies, *Introductory activities, Resources, Classroom discourse, Flow, Use of Space, Behaviour management, Teaching methods* and *Framing* are some made categorization. (Thomson et al., 2012, p.7)
I tried to re-create an Analytic Framework for this experience too, with the own words emerged, and keeping in mind the categorization already made with the Research Questions.

These first three themes are the most important focuses of the new figure of the outsider that emerged, from both theory and practice. These first three topics are best describing the vision of the outsider that emerged: a creative practitioner (a designer, an artists, etc.) who enters the school not for only one day, but with a longer engagement inside the pre-school, with the critical consciousness of what it means to be inside the school, to enter a space with its own dynamics, teachers, children. With the awareness of being a hybrid figure, more hybrid that an atelierista -a teacher also trained in the arts (Vea Vecchi, 2010)- who can anyway bring inside school a signature, a method of approaching things differently.
This aware presence, this new outsider, is inside the pre

school or school with the goal of empowering children in the creative activities, as I was trying to do with drawing activities.

Behaviour management
The rules, communication of rules, where the authority was
Big difference emerged in the way of communicating rules, how I was doing it was different than how teachers were doing it. The **sensitivity** to the children, the environment, and the deep conviction that entering a new space requires tact to achieve a good level of comprehension and trust.

In the firs week of the project, the rules and authority were still mostly in the hands of teachers, who communicated the rules to children (of being quiet and tidy) in their usual manner. With the second week, children were facing the **freedom** of not having to be necessarily tidy or silent, even if, when entering the space of the atelier, some rules of the space were made clear from the start, like the respect for the other children drawings. Asking and proposing to children was more important than imposing and claiming a final result from them. It was about the process, as in the Reggio Emilia approach.

The **taking over**, of the teachers, in the firs part, was both a critical point, both an important step for me to trigger them and to shake up more things in the second week. At this point, in fact, my signature came in, as it was visible in the approach to chaos, or in the fact that I don't always impose my authority and a general silence.

Teaching methods
Coaching
The ways of talking were really connected to the Reggio Emilia Atelierista ways of talking. The dialogue with children was the key

and the conversations were seriously taken into account, the children answered always in what they wanted to know. This needed **time**.

The **time** was decided by the children. I wanted to give them the time they needed to get acquainted with the atelier and with the new activities, which not time-framed in the Atelier. Part of my signature is the approach to time too.

The **dynamics** were double sided in my signature of the outsider. There were the dynamics between me and the teachers and the children, and the focus on the active drawing dynamics. The first nuance influenced the teaching method, since my way of coaching -even if personal- was affected by the exhisting structure, personalities and moods of action.

The **autonomy** of the children in the atelier, of leaving the place, or of staying longer was communicated in the coaching, by being fine with their autonomous decisions. Of deciding how to experiment and what to draw, and what to research, being aware of my presence as a facilitator. This part I find really near to the Atelierista too. Something that didn't happen in the firs part of the research, and that leads to the **freedom** and the opportunity for the children of enjoying the drawing activities, with their own way, time and approach.

Framing
The positions of teachers and outsider were taken into consideration in the dealing with the already existing **structure** of the school where I came in. Being sensitive to the already present structure means that the outsider doesn't enter the school with a perfect structure in his/her mind, but observes what is already there and tries to operate without revolutionising.

The outsider presence, my presence, was already useful to **question** the structure and the different positions in it, when coming to drawing activities.

In questioning the roles and repositioning myself, the **critical consciousness** needed to be a fundamental characteristic to have. To be able to reflect on my role, being conscious and critic resulted in being an aspect of the figure of the outsider which I am building.

An example is this assimilation of the teachers' dynamic which I critically reflected on afterward. During the project all the teachers wanted that every child could take part in few activities. Especially in the second week, this meant that a child who wanted to enter the atelier more than once, had to leave his/her place in the atelier for someone else, who maybe wasn't interested at the same level. This actually happened, and the critical consciousness of the outsider needs to be always really active.

The **hybridity** is the characteristic of being a guest in the school, but for a more long term. It means to have a strong will to conduct activities on a double level: with the teachers and with the children.

This vision of this hybrid figure can be found in the traditional character from traditional stories that in the provokes people to think; *the trickster.* I was, in fact, provoking the teachers, triggering them, and at the same time acting with them.

The **empowerment** that derived from the project concerns not only children and their manner of drawing, but teachers too. By giving them a workshop, by working with them and being in an open dialogue, views and ideas came out and they felt entitled in being outspoken with this outsider figure.

The other characteristics emerged are not big pillars as the three described before. They are:

Introductory activities
Dialogue with teachers in the workshop and meetings
-**Energy** (for the dialogue): as an outsider, I felt I had to invest a lot of energy in dialogue with teachers and children, in respect their views and in listening to their needs.

-Part of the energy were used for adapting my way of talking and approach reality with a theoretical background, to teachers who know the school and children and their own pedagogical practice.

Resources
During the whole project
-Theories given in the workshop with teachers
-Theories underlining my practice and approach with children
-Use of documentation and observations made beforehand
-Use of the "help sheets" created for teachers

Flow
The time
-The decisions about the time were for the first activities taken by teachers
-In the Atelier, the time was decided by children (empowerment), not by me, as said before.

Space
Used by me, teachers and children
-At first, teachers decided to use the classrooms and were comfortable
-Children didn't feel the novelty of the space, they didn't move from their comfort zone to another space

-The decision of having the Atelier, the Magic room, brought the ritual of moving out of the classroom and "entering another new dimension" were children felt could be free

-For my experience in particular, changing the physicality and the movements, in being small as children, in trying to be in the space without imposing my big physicality. This is one important part of my signature, becoming small.

5.2 Answering the Research Questions

The first sub-questions to answer are the one concerning drawing and games.

How can the game (and its implications: reversing roles, play, etc.) be implied in drawing activities?

Firstly, the game can be implied in drawing activities by proposing simple games which, in their simplicity, involve collaboration in drawing (like the *Chinese Whisper*) or that can stimulate the variety of topics to draw (like the *Regina Reginella*). The drawing games have to be often reviewed in terms of rules and answers from the children, and this implies the presence of the teachers or of the outsider, while playing.

How are these activities perceived by toddlers, regarding their feelings of having a new visual language that can make the world more concrete?

These activities (has emerged from the interviews) can be considered difficult if proposed within the framework of an unknown game. During the *Chinese Whisper,* children had difficulties with the dynamics of the game, and this led to poor or too simple subjects of drawing, or to frustration and not fun. With and already known game like the *Regina Reginella,* children tendency of remaining in

the comfort zone while drawing was ended. They knew already the rules of this familiar game, so they could have fun in drawing and propose to each others a broad variety of subjects. They could challenge themselves and reverse the role of drawing seen as a boring mandatory activity.

How to create a meaningful dialogue between teachers and outsiders?

The meaningful dialogue took place because of the way of being open to negotiating the roles and the collaboration with the teachers. Listening to their needs and to their advice helped having them open for feedback. A meaningful dialogue with teachers was possible with time, and it required patience and continue negotiation of roles and listening. In this, the workshop was fundamental to firstly create a dialogue, since it was immediately demanding for the collaboration in the process of deciding and designing together.

To what level can this dialogue create awareness and ideas for creative activities in teachers' practice?

The awareness was visible when the teachers demonstrated their elastic minds in re-arranging the activities (*Chinese Whisper*). Their involvement in the project and in the creative practices was shown in their proposal of the atelier too, and in their openness to observe the atelier space and time without intervening in the chaos and mess that were happening there, for example. The self-consciousness of teachers about drawing and dynamics and trying to enrich some aspects of the creative activities was visible from the interviews and feedback. I could observe some awareness in teachers' observations about the drawing activities and about the dynamics of the games.

What outsider am I?

The figure of outsider that emerged from the research seems somehow split in two different nuances: in the first week, the outsider who strictly collaborates with teachers; while the second nuance is an outsider that is a facilitator of activities inside the school, a mediator who brings back the notion of play as a serious tool. I am an outsider who -as said- goes inside the school to try to empower teachers and children by triggering them as a *trickster*; and who by doing so takes into account the structure where operates, to sensitively not imposing her presence, but to involve teachers and children in actively drawing and -for the teachers- in consciously be aware of the importance of drawing and how this activity can be reviewed.

By being this typology of outsider, the final main question *"How can a creative outsider collaborate with teachers in creating more compelling, stimulating and playful drawing activities for young children?"* can be answered affirmatively, as the project shows.

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