

# **From the top to words: conduction and transformation in a therapeutic group of children**

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## **Abstract**

In my experience with groups of children (beginning age 4-5 years old, children with an intellective level in the average and with development blocks more or less important: sometimes I also included a child with a psychotic personality structure) I noted that the conductors have different functions, according to the group's different moments, functions that I will try to illustrate through the history of this group.

I would like to specify that these functions, in a developmental spiral model, cross each other and overlap, allowing the group to pass and the integrate itself from a sensorial, motorial, corporeal communication modality of affects to verbal communication modalities, using, as a bridge, the transitionality of playing.

On a technical level in the expression they are free (playing, drawing, words, etc.) in a work trim in which the conductor himself can intervene in an active way, if the children ask his participation in playing and in moments in which introducing in the "field" functions of regulation and modulation of affects, seems necessary. The technical modality that we prefer is the one of a playful language (playing, stories, played interpretations) like an interactive and transformative instrument in a relational groupal context.

According to Winnicott's point of view we use the transitional area of playing like a mediator that allows to exteriorize, control at a certain distance, making tolerable, and introject, what is unknown to the Self, transformed.

**Key words:** children, group, play, sensorial, corporeal communication

In an international convention on childhood group psychotherapy in Milan (February 2001) the operators agreed on some considerations: the purpose of groups is the one of speaking about affects and therefore to increase the area of what is thinkable" (F. Sacco). These operators stressed that a basic condition for conducting child groups is due to the pleasure of regressing and, I think, of playing. Besides, "the group allows children to introject the organizer principle of the adult's experience in order to talk about emotions" (M. Bernabei). New themes of discussion and comparison aimed on the technical modalities of conduction emerged, characterized by one's own clinical-theoretical models, on personal modalities of relationship with children and on the group's psychopathological composition. How is the child's group transformation possible in a place where we talk about emotions? How can we face sensoriality, pre-verbal, action, the doing that dominates in a child's group, especially at the beginning? In fact children communicate sensorial, motorial and kinaesthetic and partially symbolic elements in a concrete way using their primitive body language.

From this we can deduct that the child's group therapist, directly invested by this unshaped mass of protoemotions often doesn't or has difficulty to "think" (mostly in the stormy moments or the ones which are emotionally full). Besides, when he manages to do it the rythms' speed and the many and overlapping children's kinetic acts disconcert his capabilities of finding the right combination between interpretation and game: how much, if, when, and how can he intervene? As I will show in the sessions' tranches of the child's group the conductor is often not allowed to interpret anything, sometimes he is distanced and excluded because identified as repository of words which are felt like a dangerous vehicle, other times he is only allowed to participate in the game with the purpose of making him concretely feel emotions and anxieties which are not containable. (1)

In the child's group "the state of intense attention... the perceptive state oriented to understand a great number of signs that differ for order and nature" requested, according to Neri (1997 p.155), to the therapist in an adults' group, is notably and uninterruptedly undermined by the concrete stimulus and actings that break the drafts of representations in the bud and the conductors' thoughts. Even if the therapist maintains a part of his mind ready for listening and for an analytic acceptance, often his only opportunity is the one of immersing himself and experiment what the group wants to make him feel. As Neri (1997, p.127) asserts "in the (small) group of adults we don't speak about the sea but we immerse in the sea, there is a first contact, then a possibility of knowledge". The therapist of a children's group has to practice remaining in chaos and, in Bion's terms tolerate the K-, that is the negative capability which permits him mostly to be in an indefinite not known and already anxious *per se* situation; he has to know how to immerse himself, in a fast way, from sensory-motorial levels to symbolic levels, and how Miglietta writes in her book "accept that thoughts get mixed up, that his body gets into play and that sometimes will go against the little patients". In this way the therapist experiments at various levels what the children live and feel inside themselves, and he can then find a way (verbal, verbal-played, played) to give them such sensations back, in order to increase the degree of what can be represented and what can be thought.

### **Containing function: or of Holding or maternal *From chaos to playing (through representation)***

It's a group composed by six children: Giorgia came for alimentary disturbs, Alessio for inhibition and elective mutism, Luca for enuresis and mutism, Stefano for encopresis and inhibition (psychotic child), Cinzia for alopecia, hyper alternate adaptability to regressive behaviour, Daniele, the smallest one (the others were in the last year of Primary School) for language disturbs. Also Giulia was part of the group, she came for inhibition and has been brought away by her parents after a few sessions. (a)

In the first therapy months, an explicative representation of this group, in a game, was “a very full group-ship, with the consequent need, expressed by the children, of a bigger wheel.” In fact at that time I had a feeling of big difficulty and heaviness conducting this group because I felt tossed here and there, like imprisoned in an undertow from which it was very hard and impossible to get out: the sessions often appeared a chaos were everyone did something of his own and didn’t share it with the others; the sensorial and kinaesthetic levels constantly invaded the drafts and trials of my representations which tried to understand a minimum affective-symbolic meaning; at the same time there wasn’t any possibility of defending a space, a game, an individual argument because it was regularly attacked and destroyed; the anxiety of being absorbed in a fusional choking relationship was luckily explicated and represented in a repetitive way in some games in which we (the conductors) had to become the figures and characters of their anxious fantasies: quicksand, crocodiles of shit, the rubbish-shit...games that anyway allowed them to experiment being absorbed and the possibility of re-emerging. Corbella (1996) points out how “the group is felt by its members like a maternal absorbing body, like a whole in which the individual risks to loose himself and abase itself, with fusion and fragmentation anxieties”. I asked myself if the children didn’t want us to feel, through the conductors’ counter-transferencial fatigue, their situation of impotence and heaviness exiting from a relational undifferentiation-differentiation situation, that the group made them face them again.

These first therapy months offer the cue to underline that the group, mostly at the beginning of its constitution, canalizing the phantasmic representations of its members, is a cause of excitement, anxiety, confusion for each child and, as a new and unknown space, is immediately perceived like full of traps and dangers. One of my initial interventions, with children’s groups, consists in recognizing and actively gathering the sensorial-kinetic aspects which are connected to the anxiety of finding themselves together, through the fact of giving voice with simple, but at the same time complex, affective representations to the emotional sates that circulate in the room and to the connected fantasies (of absorbment, fusion, devourment etc.) characteristics of that group and of that moment.

Besides it often seems essential putting the persecutive personifications on the conductors, with the purpose of avoiding the excess of actings, thus as A. Baruzzi (1990, p.8) asserts “that the group becomes the place of explosive events reaching the deadlock in a chronic trim of destructive battles in which omnipotence increases more and more, together with anxiety”. By this point of view my work is near to what a mother that tries to sooth the corporeal sensations which are confused and intolerable and so evacuated, through cry and corporeity of her own child, does in a simple and spontaneous way with her contact, her corporal closeness, her words full of affective resonance, and she does it canalizing on herself the components which are felt in a persecutive way as aggressive (reverie). Therefore we verbalize that we

have put them in a place full of dangers represented, according to what is seen, heard, lived in the room, by traps, rockfall, bombs, volcanoes, earthquakes, snakes, wolves, spiders, sharks, greedy and angry and furious crocodiles etc. we give them back their fear, their stress and, the consequent need to find and build something that is protective: in fact caves, anfractuosities, ships, houses, almost before being used are destroyed; the mountains, were they can shelter, fall down and the trees on which they climb are knocked down. So we take the responsibility of having them placed in this situation. The conductor's role in this phase is the one of "making the group", even against themselves in order to favour "the groupal illusion", a reaction to an anxiety and total disorientation, but a necessary condition of birth and development. In fact conveying aggression towards the conductors through games allows to make the persecutive and hostile images reach the surface, experimenting their danger, but also slowly recreating their personal modalities of facing them, realizing the groundless fear of being destroyed by them.

I agree with Privat (1996, p.91) that a "silent, pseudo-analytic behaviour on one side ... doesn't have anything to do with a children's group formation... the adult will have to participate to the arrangement of the groupal container". Therefore the group can live and structure itself only if the conductor has an active part and only in a subsequent phase, when there is a belonging feeling towards the group, the children themselves will have the responsibility of preserving the groupal space from their destroying attacks. As D. Vallino asserts (1998, p.50) the psychotherapist's task is to "give meaning" through a representation to "fear and happiness", transform the sensorial-kinetic and the non-verbal elements in representable ones, that are thinkable; or as Neri (1997, p.130) states "passions in affects". The conductor has to present himself "like a transformative object" (Bollas, 1987).

In order to outline this I shall introduce a first clinical flash:

Top. In a session before the summer holidays the six children were running around the room, with a vortical movement. After a while I tried to offer them a figure (representation) of their movement (action-sensoriality) re-proposing them a game of some sessions before: the one of the train. They accepted my proposal for a minute and then they immediately abandoned it and they re-started running even more messily pushing themselves. Seeking for the construction of an image for the group, I tried to tell them that the children seemed carriages without rails and I offered them my help to make the rails. The children continued to run ignoring my proposal. Reflecting on what was happening in the room I thought that the children communicated on two levels: on a symbolic level they represented their being carriages without the guide of a rail (the group's continuity interrupted by the vacations); at a more primitive level, sensorial, a state of anxious tension, shifted in a motorial way, as a response to a deep feeling of an interrupted continuity. And I felt that this one was the level in which an approach towards the group had to take place in order to have the possibility of constructing a bridge to integrate the two communication levels. I thought to the possibility of offering the group the game of

the train's run interruption that had been regular till then, but I had the feeling, from the group itself, that it was a too near image, a too strong light in that session's moment. I waited with anxiety, concretely caused by the fact that the children, running into each other, risked to fight. I could feel a state of tension in the air that could soon or later explode through actings.

In the meanwhile my attention had been attracted by the rythmic and fast pace of the children's movements that ran around themselves and around the room: I tried to say that I would of done the top since the group moved just like if they were all children-tops and I placed myself in the middle of the group for turning on myself. The children stopped immediately and having fun, shouting, came around me to make me turn like a top. I had given the group the possibility to give a sense (one of many) to a movement, trough an unanimated object, that, animated by a game, became a vehicle for communicating deep feelings which were not yet thought but only felt. (2) So I said what I felt, as a top, and the children started to interact with me, even with words. The group finally found, through the top representation, a shared kind of communication that could be a bridge between sensoriality and emotions. Alessio proposed that the top could become a merry-go-round and he auto nominated himself merry go round operator that that could therefore manoeuvre me making me turn in an increasing vortical way. I said that my head turned so much that I wasn't able to stand up anymore and I laid down on the floor. They gave me a few seconds and then Alessio pushed the control of the merry-go-round once more making me turn again but in a less vortical way. After few sequences they asked me to do the merry go round operator part: they told me that I could make the merry-go-round start, but they could also stop it or slow it down when it went to fast "so our heads wouldn't turn so much". First making me feel the experience directly and concretely then, also through the use of a verbal communication, they would inform me not to go so fast, to be more delicate in the conduction of those affects' knowledge which the imminent separation evoked inside them, even if they recognized my adult role on which they could rely on (recognizing the positive role of dependence). While doing the top's part I animated the toy, I gave it a voice not only making it move, creating a communicative game that placed itself at an acceptable level in the group's particular moment. The group has been able, in the same session, afterwards, to accede to the most representative game, first being overwhelmed but then they re-emerged from the holiday-waves. It has so been possible to understand and transform the children's anxieties: the one of feeling unanimated objects (tops), the one of being manoeuvred from adults that are not thoughtful about their separation anxieties, and the one of being objects which are totally dependent ( like all animated objects are) that are not vital if not manoeuvred by an adult.

"The child becomes the object and at the same time he assumes its quality" as Neri writes (1997, p. 126). I would add that the conductor tries to assume this quality through the experimentation of himself as an object, verbalizing and communicating with various languages (kinetic, visual, auditive, scenic, kinaesthetic, verbal) the

sensations experimented trying to favour in children the integration of the various sensorialities with affects. Becoming a top (like also becoming rails that made them derail) permits to experiment all the sensations, emotions, fantasies that still are unshaped, that the top's configuration permits to specify. In this way giving voice and representing the sensations that are not well known by them, we permit the children to "see" in scene, through the conductors' mirror, at a reassuring distance, something that now can be less terrific. In fact the transformation of these forces, of actions in representations and in characters transforms something that before was dangerous in a sensorial way, in something that is playable and that can be faced , and what is unknown can have a shape.

The train, the top, the waves-holidays appear three of a thousand modalities of representing emotions and sensations expressed also in a sensorial way that take shape and become symbolic of the group's degree of affectivity.

Then the narrative game can have birth.

### **Tansitional function**

*From playing a game to words: playing as a "vehicle" of exteriorization, distanced control and emotions' introjection*

After the first summer holidays we are surprised by the group's change: the atmosphere is less chaotic. Finally there are "the first differentiations" accepted by the group. The children represent themselves in the games like different animals, sometimes biologically far (dragons, dogs, lions, bats...) even if there is still an extreme anxiety of loosing this fragile differentiation: often there is still the need of us assuming the role of absorbing mothers through the personification of oral persecutive figures, for reassuring themselves through the game's function, that in the group it's possible existing like singles. Slowly gender differentiations appear and, with them, the expression of an emotive nearness, the human characters: the two girls are busy with the house, they cook, they watch children; the boys play soccer etc..

After a year and a half of its existing, after the second summer holidays, the group is deprived of its female conductor, substituted after two months of wait.

I shall illustrate some sessions at the end of the second year that are explicative of this children's need to transit continuously from words to playing, modality that allows them to make the verbal communication tolerable in some moments felt as too direct.

After an absence of four weeks that I made for illness, the children propose to play at "the shit crocodile". Naturally they make us play the role of the crocodiles and I give voice to the hungry crocodile after many days of fast, connecting this to the many days that I didn't see them. While playing some of them show a pleasure mixed to excitement-fear in being captured and eaten. In fact they arrange to be captured and recaptured...(3) Daniele and Giorgia instead take the role of turtles that are "difficult to eat": they sheltered under the table, surrounded by ropes, saying that we couldn't

take them because they were inside the shell. It's like if a part of the group represented the pleasure-need of re-attacking themselves, Daniele and Giorgia maybe the more burned part, don't have faith and fear to be wounded again. I give voice to the hungry animal, that isn't able to satisfy his hunger, because the turtles disappear in the shell, I can't see them, dramatizing a certain impatience. At this point the children become hungry lions and angry at me. They attack me and I am forced, like Giorgia and Daniele before, to put myself under the table, underlining that I "shelter inside the jeep", like in another game before my absence. All the lions come around me; some of them in front of the windscreen, some in front of the door, some on the roof: they are really angry. I give voice to their rage, for the fear of having been abandoned. I tell them that maybe they were worried that I didn't come anymore, just like it happened with Giulia, or like months before with the woman-conductor. They don't answer in a verbal way, the words are now only concrete objects to expel like the balls-bombs tossed against us from Daniele, to make us feel how one feels being abandoned and feeling bombarded, invaded by something which is explosive and violent (like my words have been felt) (4).

Afterwards, playing, they make some cubs (furry toy animals) appear which are needful of cares and they also build two houses: one for the two girls, that look after the cubs, another one for Luca the "lame lion", that got hurt during the day.

The other two children (Daniele and Stefano) play soccer. They specify that Luca can't play, that Alessio isn't here and they ask me to play. I ask myself if the request of my participation at the game expresses the need of happily savouring my presence again, together with the need, after so much pain, to rest, take a breath, temporarily avoiding -because too painful and too hot- the feelings connected with the absences. I accept the invite dramatizing the pleasure of playing with them after so much time, but at the same time, I reface, with caution, through playing, the theme of lacks (Alessio's actual one and the past one, my own). Daniel says with violence "that he feared I didn't come back anymore" (5) and screaming he throws the ball in the girls' house. I verbalize the presence of a danger, something which is too heavy for the group that can destroy this new cub's house.

It seems that the group still fragile and cub (represented by Luca, wounded cub), just constituted like a whole of individualities, (the boys that play soccer, the girls that do the mommies) can't stand, tolerate something that is now felt as strongly full of a destroying aggression, connected to feelings of loss. We feel that it has to be protected and the children confirm it by deciding to build a new house, unique and more steady. This function is assumed by the girls that don't tolerate the entrance of balls in the house. Daniel seems to express the cub for the group, fragile and wounded (Luca), these emotions and feelings so strong, primitive and confused (hunger, rage, pain) at the moment need protection and containment (the girls).

In the next session everyone is present. Cinzia asks Alessio why he didn't come. Also today the boys seem to feel the group as a place of pain and they unburden themselves, using their playing against us. Then they constitute two sub-groups and

begin the war game in order to have the territorial supremacy: the soccer players (Daniele and Luca) and the Pokemon. In the war Luca dies and everyone surrounds him: the group seems to stop for reflecting on the loss of one of them. First they think that he will wake up again (like when someone disappears he will come back soon), then they begin to get angry, mostly Daniele, because he won't wake up again. They try to shake him, wake him up in every way (rage and desperation appears increasingly, like when the other one doesn't appear anymore). Then they tell him to "fuck-off" and they bury him taking revenge on him for the feelings he made them feel: in fact they jump on the tomb yelling "you made us suffer!". We connect their rages to the recent fears of loosing someone of the group (me, Alessio): the fear that we wouldn't come back anymore...Giorgia asks if the old (woman) doctor is still here, if she works in the hospital. And Cinzia asks "and Giulia?". We talk about the people of the group that we lost on our way, about the need of discovering were the disappeared people are, reassuring ourselves that they are still here, for the fear that something happened to them. At this point only Daniele remains on the tomb, he appears scared, for the fear that something happened to them, he says that there is too much light, we wants the shutters to be rolled down. He seems asking to modulate the gradient and the tolerability of affects. In the dark the group proposes the game of Zombies, they are very persecutive and revengeful. The session is ending and there is the need of bringing them back to reality, thinking ourselves of how much the session has been intense and heavy. We tell them that when people disappear in our head many sensations, emotions and thoughts continue to exist, among all the one that, in some way, we could have been a bit responsible of such disappearances, but reality is that the old (woman) doctor had a child and Giulia instead is somewhere else.

As V. Bianchi Ranci asserts (1996, p.116) "changes are felt like a menace of the group's continuity". Being able to re-evoke the group's history, exhuming the feelings of abandonment and loss inside the *hic et nunc*, acts like a container, because it permits, like a sewing act, to maintain the feeling of the group's community. Besides sharing and re-living the group's members' painful experiences creates and builds, through a mixed thread of game and words, that containing spider-web that is the affective memory. "Not only the actual members are part of the group's history, but also the ones that were there and left it (p.117) and that in the beginning like phantasms and after the mourning working-through like memories, will always be part of the group.

From these two sessions it's clear that in this group's phase the conductor finds himself in contact with the emotions that are present in the groupal field, that are painfully dangerous and menacing. He feels the necessity to find the right modulation between word presentation (too direct) and thing presentation, between an overflowing interpretation and an intermediate one (played), he feels the difficulty to provide sharing also through the comprehension and translation of the game and the

present sensoriality, he feels the fatigue of being “a strong conductor of strong emotions” (Bernabei, 1996, p.103).

Till what point, when, how if are we supposed to use words for making more visible and transparent in the hic et nunc something already represented in scene through the game (and so already a product of a group’s mental work? (6). How much do our mental verbal interpretations often appear like our interpretations-actings, like a product of the difficulty to keep inside the counter-transferencial emotions that are linked the group’s projective identifications?

I think that the conductor has to understand and accept the need of the affect’s modulation through “actively entering in the child’s play, accepting the parts given to him, making himself use and place by the child where he wants, sometimes satisfying his requests, other times canalizing the conflict’s playful representation in the direction of a possible solution.” (Lanza, 1997, p. 597-8).

In fact in the two sessions the playing appears to be the modality used by the group so that “the contact between the subject and reality (inner world and external reality) occurs at small doses”.

As Winnicott asserts “the way in which the child (group) sees the object is subjective and the mother is ready to portray for him as real, what he is ready to discover”. Like shown in the sessions the playing becomes a therapy’s instrument. Playing is not a therapy, what is therapeutic is the affective relationship (transference) that occurs between individual and group, between individuals of the group, and between individual-group and conductors. Even if acceding to a symbolic game and to a game played together is already being able to use inside one self that transitional area that allows each individual to transform and control what is inside himself but also what is outside.

In fact playing in group appears like a shared transitional inter-subjective area, that allows, through making experience of oneself (with others), thinking on oneself (through the others) something that is affective and emotional that before wasn’t approachable by thought. (7)

Besides, through the repetition of games, the group transforms “what is unpleasurable in itself in a an object susceptible of being memorized and psychically worked-through.” (Freud, 1920, 9, p.203).

The therapist has to favour the formation of a involucrum or container that has “a function.... of inter-exchange between the inside and the outside, constituting a real transitional space that will make a space of thought possible.” (Privat, 1996, p.87)

This instead is a session of some months later; in the meanwhile the co-conductor, for business reasons, had to leave the group and has been substituted by a new co-conductor.

After the Christmas holidays, Cinzia, showing her happiness of seeing each other again, underlines with regret, that they are only four, that Alessio and Luca are missing. Daniele, together with Stefano, begins to throw pillows and the ball first to

the (woman) doctor then also to the doctor, saying that they are bombs. We make them notice that the beginning of war matched with Cinzia's words and Daniele yells at us saying to shut up. We say that the bombs depart from the mouth and we propose the game of the words-bombs, heavy, explosive, shot like pillows from our mouths. We ask them to give a name to the bomb-words and they suggest: vacation, holidays, rest, group, group's heart, Alessio, Luca. We add the name of the two (women) doctors that left us. While playing they show us that they can bear such bombs, and we comment that a little training has been done; then Giorgia suggests a secret word that makes the battle stop and that at the end she will tell us as well: shit. It seems that collecting together the need of putting the emotions re-lived with the vacations into the field (the loses, the lacks, the rages, the dirty, stinky things) allows the group to jump: finally they begin digesting and we can get rid of the things we don't need (shit). Laying down they begin talking about the summer holidays and then they gather secretly, excluding us from the group. Giorgia speaking us about Summer Camps invites Stefano to trust her, to follow her suggestions, to go in the swimming-pool "anyway he touches", and to not being afraid. Daniele says that at the summer camp someone robbed the game-boy's disk. We say that they ask themselves if they can trust other people at the summer camp or not, who they can trust. We also added that here they seem to trust themselves but not us, so that we are excluded. Daniele opens the door and throws a marker outside. Giorgia talks about her boyfriend, she broke up with him because "he is gossipy, he told their things to his mother". I connect this with the monthly encounters with the parents and to the fear that as gossipy we can spill out what happens here. Like Daniele, that wanted to tell us that some things go out of here with the marker or like Stefano that, commenting Giorgia's drawing in which I was represented like a monstrous being, expresses the group's fear that "he trusts me but he is afraid". For all the session they continue chatting and exchanging their experiences: for the first time they talk about themselves, were they live, what animals they have, the class etc. Giorgia would like to continue chatting even the next time, the others seem a bit confused as it happens when a new modality of relate is born, the words' birth.

From a place of conflict and play the group became a place of meeting and exchange through the interpretation played and communicated by the words-bombs. The words, from vehicles full of explosive tension, transform themselves in vehicles of shareable experiences' exchange.

### **Verbal or paternal function**

*Agression in the group: from PS to PD. Silence as a thinking space against game like an act of non thinking*

In this session there are Giorgia, Cinzia, Luca and Daniele.

Cinzia brings a blue and red hard rubber ball, it is called "crazy ball" and she doesn't give it to anyone, she keeps it for herself and sits on the table. We see that Giorgia and Cinzia say something to each other. Daniele is sitting on the floor and he writes on the board: "Matteo", "Davide", and then adds "Boatti is a bastard" then "Renato". We talk about Daniele's rage which, in school, discovered that Renato, his class mate, "comes to Doctor Boatti", last time we talked about that same rage, connecting it to the unpleasure of dividing the doctors with other groups of children. In the meanwhile he reveals us that "Matteo is his best friend" and that also "Davide is his friend", "Renato isn't..." then he adds "he is a bit". We remark the pain for dividing a best friend, also for the fear that in the other one's heart there is less space for them and I remember that Cinzia criticized me during the session because "I didn't remember their birthday dates", as a possible affective disinvestment sign from their group. In the meanwhile Cinzia shyly erases "bastard" from the board. The group then invents a game where the co-conductor and I become the group's adversary team for capturing a sponge ball, that we alternatively call "doctor Boatti's heart" or "Matteo's heart", assuming Renato's or Matteo's role and dramatizing the connected feelings. We finish the game all sweated and tired we lay down.

Giorgia that was absent the last time, maybe captured by a strong emotion evoked by the game, tries to re-activate the group proposing a new-old game: "the murders' house". It seems that Giorgia can't tolerate any silence or pauses because they are source of un-pleasurable and uncontrollable thoughts and emotions, and they need to find a communication modality. Action, through movement-play, appears like another defensive attempt to avoid the birth of a new way of facing an intra-groupal thematic that has to do with aggression (dividing the doctors with brothers). Till then aggression could only be negated in the group and displaced or projected outside: on the conductors (the murderers), on Stefano (the handicapped group member or not wanted ambassador or their inadequate and fragile but also needful and dependent parts: "he's attached, he's spoiled" they say about him with an angry tone) or on Renato (the children of other groups). We are in front of a passage PS-PD. It's a delicate moment for the group and for who conduct's it because for the therapists it's indispensabile maintaining a high attention towards the present emotive atmosphere in order to decide if the group still needs playing, like a bridge that favours the connection between affects and representations, or if it can go on with out it. Anyway nobody stands up to build the house, even we don't do it, although Giorgia's insistences that asks the others and us to do it; particularly she addresses to Cinzia accusing her of "idleness". Cinzia and Giorgia begin annoying one another. I ask Giorgia why is she angry with Cinzia. She doesn't answer to me and a fight starts between them which ends with Giorgia crying for a little push. Cinzia yells at her: "I'm happy that you didn't come last time". We point out Giorgia's rage towards Cinzia because she didn't feel accepted after an absence, but also Cinzia's rage because in the session before she has been the only girl and maybe she felt betrayed from Giorgia. They still talk about best friends and Giorgia asks Cinzia if she has a

neighbor to play with and she expresses her disappointment because a class mate is going to move and she doesn't know where she is going to go. Besides she asserts, on our request, that the class mate and her, have been to each others house many times. I say that maybe Giorgia and Cinzia are telling each other that in the group they are best friends. Daniele intervenes and underlines that he came to the group instead of going to play soccer because it is a beautiful day. We point out that that Daniele made us a present, renouncing for us to a passion of his. At this point Cinzia exchanges, in a game, her crazy ball with Giorgia like if now, in the group, it is possible exchanging emotions of rage, jealousy, because cleared and bearable, instead they cement the relationship because they are representative of a strong intensity of positive affects inside the group. If the crazy ball is tossed with violence it can really break something, not like the sponge balls. Daniele's final game "snake", an animal that runs after the others and when he captures them he fakes to give Luca kicks for then holding him tight, seems to us as an image of this.

In the group we can see another advance towards emotions, to things of one's heart, to an integration between head and heart and as Neri (1997, p.130) asserts: "a dynamic connection between passions, knowledge and relationships". The conductor has to understand in a empathic way the moments in which playing can be left aside because it can assume a "defensive" function of not wanting to detach from an emotive secure position and so soothing, of not growing up that in our work can mean not wanting to think for not suffering.

And it becomes fundamental assuming a paternal function of not playing and instead supporting the group in the new capability of containment of emotions.

## Notes

- 1) The same chaos represented at the end of the session from the playing material spread out in the room, from the squiggles, muddles, bad words written on the boards or sometimes on the walls, force the conductors to "feel counter-transferrentially, in a concrete way", both the fatigue of finding an inner order for sensations-emotions sometimes overflowing and needful to be understood and accepted, and the need of experimenting the possibility of breaking, even violently, the world's adult order (the initial order of the room) for "creating a proper original order" (A. Baruzzi).
- 2) For Correale "it's important that the curing person has inside himself the potential draft or a tendency or a disposition towards the construction of a scenario ..... to suggest those coordinates that the patient (the group) needs" (Correale 1991, pg. 148).
- 3) I often ask myself how many of them had the opportunity of enjoying these games with their parents or grandparents.
- 4) The children are needful to communicate their affects but they also feel the are also fearful that playing or verbal language express a too harsh and distinct

photograph of their own emotive reality. The threat of a too intrusive and choking mother comes again through the conductor that leads the game or that uses words.

5) My absence has been due to a health problem, and for a series of unpredictable complications I couldn't foresee my getting well.

At that time Daniele suffered for his very sick grandfather that died 2-3 months later.

6) Being able to use words like vehicles of thought presumes a mental work of working-through, a mind that gradually learns the capability of bearing rage and pain. Even for us adults there are particular moments or such difficult situations to tolerate that its emotionality necessarily needs in first place to be expelled, evacuated from us. Ammaniti asserts that "human beings try to give meaning-representation to what of new happens in order to guarantee continuity. There are events so difficult to represent that are too strong for the human mind, like war."

7) Kaës (1999) underlines that "a certain number of pathologies and intense sufferings of psychic life and linked to serious breakdowns of the preconscious. These pathologies can be treated in a group psychoanalytical dispositive: the other person's preconscious work, more than another one, its figuration activity and its words presenting addressed to another creates the conditions of the symbolization activity's relaunch"

a) The co-conductors that followed one another are Doctor Stefania Bellora, Child Neuropsychiatrist and Psychotherapist of Alessandria's A.S.L; the Doctor Maria Grazia Pelizzari and the Doctor Alessandra Zappino, Psychotherapists Coirag-Sipsa.

A part of this work, partially changed has been presented in occasion of the 18° National Convention S.I.N.P.I.A. Villasimius, 6-10 of June 2001.

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