



GUIDE TOWARDS THE REASONED INCLUSION OF  
**AUTISTIC CHILDREN**  
 IN SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT



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The Guide is available on the **Ireams** project's site:  
<http://www.ireams.eu/en> as well as on the sites of the family associations and institutions that participate in the project:

#### **BELGIUM :**

*Antenne 110*

>>> <https://www.antenne110.be>

*Association de familles La Main à l'Oreille*

>>> <https://www.facebook.com/La-Main-a-loreille-Belgique-110771669534823/>

*Le Courtil*

>>> <http://www.courtil.be>

#### **BULGARIA :**

*Association "Child and Space"*

>>> <https://childandspace.com>

#### **SPAIN:**

*Asociación de familias TEAdir-Aragón*

>>> [http://www.teadiraragon.com/teadir\\_aragon/](http://www.teadiraragon.com/teadir_aragon/)

*Centro de Educación Infantil Patinete*

>>> <https://patinetezaragoza.com>

*Espacio Torreón*

>>> <https://espacioeltorreon.com>

*Fundación Atención Temprana*

>>> <https://atenciontemprana.org>

#### **FRANCE:**

*Association de familles La Main à l'Oreille*

>>> <https://www.lamainaloreille.com>

*Centre Hospitalier de Cadillac*

>>> <https://www.ch-cadillac.fr>

*Centre Thérapeutique et de Recherche de Nonette*

>>> <https://www.centre-therapeutique-nonette.fr>

*Établissement Public de Santé (EPS) Ville-Evrard*

>>> <http://www.eps-ville-evrard.fr>

*Université de Bordeaux*

>>> <https://www.inspe-bordeaux.fr>

*Université de Rennes 2*

>>> <https://www.univ-rennes2.fr>

#### **ITALY:**

*Fondazione Martin Egge Onlus*

>>> <https://www.fondazionemartineggeonlus.org>

## **IREAMS EUROPEAN PROJECT**

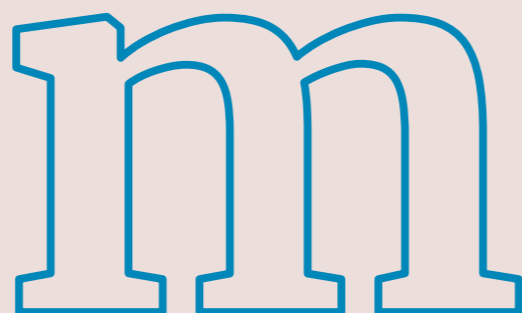
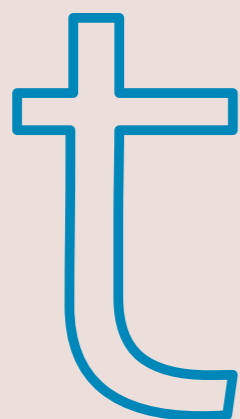
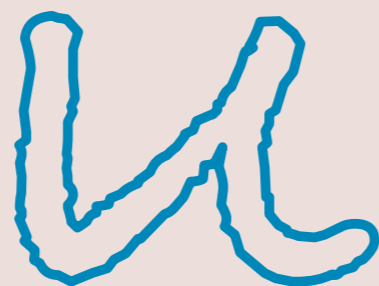
*The present Guide has been written as part of a European Union Erasmus+ Project, the IREAMS project: "Towards a reasoned inclusion of children with autism in school". The Guide is not intended to be a typical handbook but rather to provide a respectful introduction to the complexity of autism, oriented transversally by the different methodologies used in each school or social centre. It is built upon the ample experience of various professionals working in different fields with ASD children, adolescents and adults, with the contribution of the families and the autistic people themselves.*

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*The drawings for "Mario's story" as well as those on the cover and the back cover of the Guide have been made by young Mattia Dian, at the artistic workshop of the Fondazione Martin Egge Onlus in Venice.*

*The Guide has been reviewed by professionals from different educational fields and teachers of the arts, as well as by families and autistic persons.*





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# Preliminary notes

# 01

The inclusion of autistic people in society is a fundamental orientation that every person must defend, so as to respect the democratic principles on which our societies are founded. **It is a matter of inclusion, not only a matter of integration.**

Integration requires allowing autistic people an inscription in our society, its institutions, its daily life, without having to resort to changing its foundations. This policy, applied for many years, has shown its limitations, as it doesn't sufficiently take into account the specificities, the singularities of those whom society wishes to foster. Inclusion, on the other hand, requires the consideration of said singularities so they are taken as riches, as apertures and not as obstacles to an assimilation into common discourse.

**Inclusion involves a modification of our ways of existing, of our way of being. It entails accepting, consenting to the fact that autistic people have something to teach us, something to transmit. The policies for inclusion proposed in the collectivity of our democratic societies, convoke us to make an unprecedented change in our habits**

**and prejudices.**

Let us acknowledge that those who spend time with and know autistic people of all ages, have taken a long time to discover and place at the heart of their practice this simple fact: knowledge does not only pertain to the teacher, the participants or the various specialists but also to the autistic persons.

What was soon noticed and emphasised was the interest that autistic children could have in specific activities, repeated insistently, which appeared to isolate them from their environment. Thus, it was considered best to limit or even forbid those activities as they contributed to their isolation. This also resulted in neglecting to register the interest that they might hold for them.

The publication in 1986 of Temple Grandin's biography, an essential testimony, led us to the discovery that her interest in the corral traps that she observed during her infancy which led to her construction of the "hug machine", was not just an eccentricity or a fixation but her way of construing a protection against the outside world. A way to draw the contours of a world where she could live in with her peers. Also, notably, she was able to transmit her experience and



testify to the effect of the affects that would sometimes invade her. She found a place in society by becoming one of the foremost experts in the production and fabrication of squeeze cattle chutes. Another thing she attested to is the support she received from her family to follow her own way, when her interests appeared to be senseless.

Families are frequent witnesses to these special interests that might seem to be useless, even harmful. **Temple Grandin's testimony and that of many other autistic persons have helped us understand that their activities, their interests, are one way of inhabiting their world and also a way of making contact with ours.**

An activity that appears isolating, reveals in fact an orientation towards the other, the person close by, to build a space where a dialogue is possible. To this end, it is enough that the other person also show an interest in that activity and in the manner in which it is deployed, transformed, enriched, simplified and even distilled.

It would appear that the faculty to build a world where it is possible to address others would be reserved for those known as high functioning autists. That is not so, it has been confirmed that the majority of autistic people can establish a basis for a common dialogue with other persons, as long as they don't desist in their desire for an encounter. **Many families have attested to this struggle to maintain a bond with their children and so find a way of listening to and communicating with them.**

Those activities, those interests, can refer to singular, specific realms of knowledge, that often mobilise an impressive amount of knowledge regarding that particular field. That knowledge which may appear to be limited, in fact allows the person to order the world they live in and to deal with eventual accidents. The subject may be cattle chutes, olympic games, carnivorous plants or video games, mythology, traffic signals, ...

Therefore, what matters is the manner in which that knowledge can be oriented, shared, transmitted, circulated, although the activities may not necessarily relate to acquiring or producing knowledge but to the fields of creation, painting, writing, drawing, music, language. This is apparent in the young girl who traces lines on a wall with her hands full of food, who then pursues this activity with paint on a canvas and who becomes the creator of an oeuvre when she punctuates the end of her work. Her paintings, exhibited in various places in Europe, always produce admiration and are witness to what she has been able to transmit about an experience which could appear to be ineffable. This demanding, tenacious, essential work has found someone to sustain it every time, be it a participant or a family member who collaborates in its realisation, while keeping the subject in charge.

**Special interests are to us and often to the families, what truly and genuinely allows the inclusion of their children in society. Not only are they to come to us but we are to go towards them, consenting to the manner in which they have**

**been able to find a balance between language, the body and the other.**

We must of course know that this balance is precarious, repeatedly compromised, that out presence by their side **must provide a sense of security and not be invasive but this is not the only thing to keep in mind.**

**The approach of following a special interest not only ensures the possibility of a dialogue, an exchange between worlds, it also furthers the building of a bond by putting any satisfaction they may obtain from it in the forefront.**

This satisfaction is shared with their companions, their family and frequently, with the persons who receive their testimony and with those who come across their work. They can all bear witness of the joy to be found in the showings of these works, shared with the different actors participating in the creative effort. This constitutes certain proof of the actual success of what is known as inclusion.



# 02

## Introduction

Working with autistic persons may well be considered “**working on encounters**”, precisely what they defend themselves from and avoid. Parents explain this when they come to us in anguish, profoundly hurt because their child does not look at them, does not answer when called. They say they go it alone, that they recoil from hugs and do not acknowledge signs of love addressed to them, leaving both the child and the parents in a profound solitude.

Our bet, precisely, is to “aim for an encounter”, which goes hand in hand with “aiming for the subject” behind the carapace that shields the child before us. To let the parents know that the infinite repetition of an action that isolates the child constitutes a singular response with which they defend themselves from a world in chaos. To single out small moments of responsiveness - even if unaccustomed or unexpected - which may go unnoticed in the family’s account and showcase their value as a subjective response. This allows the parents to discover “inventions” in both themselves and the child, that may serve to bolster any glimmer of a relationship. **We believe that our role with the parents is to serve as interlocutors for a discourse about their children**

**that not only includes the daily difficulties but also the “pearls”, the small moments that capture unexpected responses, and to give both - the difficulties and the findings - not so much a meaning but a logic that considers the subjective responses of the child.**

English language has one verb - “to be” - where Spanish has two: “**ser**” and “**estar**” (*ser* being used when describing permanent qualities or characteristics or naming who or what something or somebody is, and *estar* when referring to health and location or to a past state or a change of state). It would sometimes appear that we live in a society who expects autistic people to be (*estar*) well, in the sense of not showing themselves to be different but “normalised”. This vision emphasises the “appearance of being”, over what each person is (*ser*), not in their difference but in their singularity.

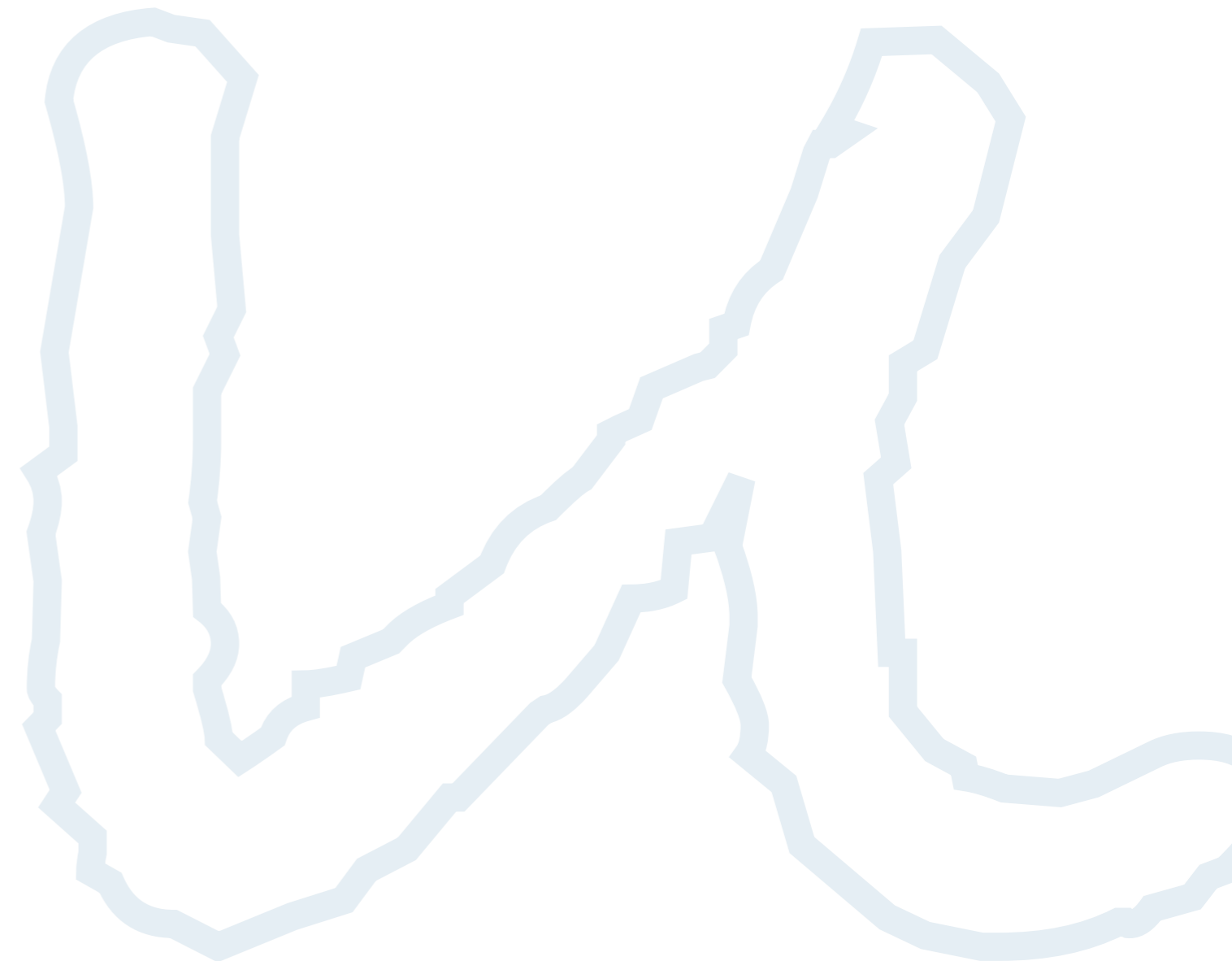
**Project IREAMS aims to create places where children and young people can “be as they are”, not in a fixed image of “normalisation” but in “their” singular normality.**

We cannot talk about “reasoned” inclusion if not case by case; conceiving



the creation of possible avenues and the adjustments the children will require as they evolve. There cannot be one form of education that encompasses “all autisms”, as is apparent in the different countries participating in the project. **Working with autistic children questions the “for all” of a universal standard that carries the risk of becoming a blind imperative. One that mindlessly compels not only autistic people but their families, teachers and institutions.**

Aside from the differences in educational programs, what we wish to convey is a valid orientation for any person working or in contact with these children or young persons. It is necessary to keep in mind that the horizon of inclusion does not only apply to the school but also to other treatment and leisure institutions, as well as to places in the city where different specific competencies can be developed. The wager we hereby propose requires working with a network that includes the families and contemplates and considers the totality of a person’s development.





# Reflections on autism



We will begin our reflections with the consideration that every speaking being is constituted as such in relation to an Other. What do we call the Other?

What we call Other, with a capital O, is a psychic figure first embodied by the the initial caregiver, who will later be relayed by other figures: the parents, the teachers, relevant persons in the child's story, institutions, ... But when we refer to an Other it is also in the sense of the world that surrounds the person, the culture, the laws and norms that regulate life in society, the objects in the world and language as well, because words come from the Other. **We can say that the Other is constituted as the atmosphere which a person inhabits.**

The autistic person is not excluded from the community of speaking beings because language affects them, whether or not they make use of it. However, the relationship to the Other is very complicated for them, because they present a massive defence against **the chaotic experience of the world as they perceive it.**

Every human being, before being a speaker, is spoken about. That is, before

birth, even before conception, words are said of this future being by relatives, friends, doctors, etc. Words that name desires, anxieties, fears, ideals, ... and which will shape the symbolic cradle that will hold them at their arrival into the world.

The newborn baby is in a state of utter helplessness, requiring somebody's care to satisfy the vital necessities that ensure its existence. But not only that. The nurturing is enveloped in words, words that incorporate presence in the voice, in the intonation, in the gaze of the caregiver, so that this Other becomes unique to the infant and the infant becomes singular, unique as well.

In the same way parents discover there is a moment in which their child "sees" them there is also a moment in which they realise that the baby, although still unaware of the meaning of words, reacts to them.

The baby, immersed in a world of language, will experience their crying becoming a call, when the Other responds to it and attributes meaning to it. The baby will then modulate their cries, which will become differentiated and become subject to the interpretation

and responses of the Other. The baby will distinguish in that caregiving Other a particular way of speaking to them, of looking at them, which will be of the greatest importance when making sense of their body's image reflected in the mirror and recognising it as their own. This inaugurates the construction of a psychic place from which to locate their own position in space, in time and in relation to their own body and that of others. Sounds and words will begin to emerge and their body will react especially to some sayings which will become a part of their destiny.

**In autism, the relationship to the Other is short-circuited. Words, the gaze, the voice, food, the gesture of a hug, everything that comes from the Other, from the world the person inhabits, seems to produce a completely invasive effect. In defence, autistic people establish different forms of protection that conform an "autistic shell". Words affect them, so they sometimes cover their ears; the world seems chaotic and they attempt to isolate from all that comes at them producing incomprehensible sensations, and are left immersed in their autistic solitude.**

Parents of autistic children frequently tell us about difficulties that appeared at a very early age. From "very good" children who did not cry, who stayed in their cribs seemingly calm, who did not complain,... to children who cried inconsolably, incessantly and were impossible to appease. Children who rejected food - one of the first things that comes from

the Other - children who could not stand their diaper or their clothes being changed: "as if I was tearing his skin off", a mother says. Children who showed no sign of affection, inexpressive before the Other's caresses, or who would fasten themselves to the adult in a strange way when carried in their arms, or remain rigid in their embrace.

**As opposed to an understanding of autism as a deficiency in relation to a supposed developmental norm, our position is that the autistic person is confronted to an excess that makes the world strange and difficult to live in. It would therefore be a matter of accompanying them to find reference points so they can impose an order of their own on the world, a place from which to make themselves heard, aiming for new horizons of openness. If we pay attention, they will provide us with the clues to find this path themselves.**

Not pretending to be exhaustive, we will introduce a few areas where the difficulties, the autistic defence mechanisms, the solutions found are discernible, and provide indications for our interventions.

### **The relationship to the body**

We noted earlier the importance of incorporating the mirrored image and the role of the Other, fundamental to the embodiment of that image, in the process of subjectifying the body. The gaze of the Other, accompanied by their voice producing words of acknowledgement before the image in the mirror, is the basis for the recognition of one's own image.

If our initial premise is that autism produces a short-circuit in the relationship with the Other, then the subjective appropriation of the image is not achieved or may be very fragile.

*A girl in front of a mirror says: "Look, the picture, look how it sees you", which shows that although she recognises something in what she sees, the image in the mirror has not been incorporated as her own.*

*Another boy is suddenly terrified to look at himself in the mirror. The mother wonders at this, which didn't happen before. She finds the answer by herself: she realises that it coincides with a change in the product used to clean the mirror, which leaves a light veil that to us is nearly imperceptible but produces an unbearable distortion for the boy. When the cleaning product is eliminated, he can look at himself in the mirror again.*

**The reflection in the mirror returns a unified image of the body, creating a psychic image with which to circulate in the world; to which words can be referred to, as well as one's own name and which locates the gaze and the voice as exterior to the self. This psychic image - originated outside, in the mirror - introduces a point of perspective from which to locate oneself in space - articulating interior / exterior, here / there - and in time.**

In autism, on the other hand, we very frequently find phenomena linked to dispersion, to a body that is not unified.

*A teacher relates that a girl goes into a crisis when playing ring around the rosie, something she usually enjoyed. When asked to give us further details about that moment, she realises the crisis began when she said to the girl: "give me your hand". We have there an example of literal interpretation in autism - "give me your hand", as if it were a separable part of the body - that also refers to the experience of the demand manifested in the imperative "give me" and to the experience of a body that is not unified and is therefore fragmented.*

*One other boy found great difficulty in bringing a morsel of food into his mouth. Another engaged in different contortions before being able to sit on a chair. Sometimes a difficulty with writing can be observed, for example in the uniting of lines.*

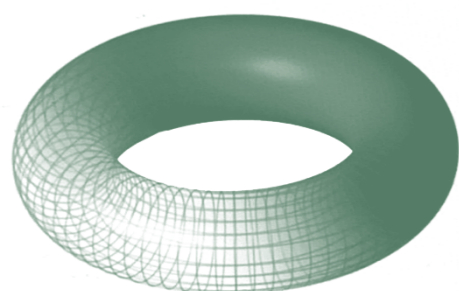
Many families describe how their children do not seem to experience pain. A boy dislocates an arm, a girl bites her flesh producing wounds, with no expression of pain. Paradoxically, others react as if wounded by a tear in their trousers. Families sometimes tell about the odyssey of cutting the hair or the nails of their children or about the terror they experience when they evacuate, all of which can be read in terms of something falling or detaching itself from the body.



In some cases, the limits of the body appear ill-defined, as if the clothes or the shoes functioned as skin. These cases require a particular care when changing diapers or clothes, accompanied by words to name and make the body secure. In this regard, psychomotricians note the pertinence of and the reassurance provided by games that involve wraps, pressures or pulls.

### Autistic space

In autism, subjective space is not constituted in an interior-exterior dialectic, but rather, interior and exterior form a continuity. A topological figure useful to illustrate this is called the torus, which can be familiarly represented as a doughnut. Its interior hole presents a continuity with the exterior.



Topological figure "torus"

How does this manifest itself? Let us take the example of a boy who howls in terror. The logic of the doughnut allows us to understand that what he shouts is also what he hears; what he hears within the meaningless din that is his experience of language. **Without a point of reference to locate sounds and their proximity or distance, they become confused, and the boy also becomes confused, lost in them.** Donna Williams, a high functioning autistic, expresses it strikingly when she says: "The screaming voice doesn't even belong to you". (1)

Additional examples of spatial difficulties: a girl on top of a table daringly advances a foot towards the void but is paralysed before a line drawn on the floor, as if unable to cross it to the other side.

Another boy panics before the immensity of the hole that a door opening seems to evoke. Yet another boy is insistently occupied with plugging all the orifices of his toys with plasticine.

**Sometimes these children need to follow specific itineraries, always the same, to reach a place and any modification may lead to a crisis. The sameness of these routes establishes points of reference, providing security if they remain unchanged. Without these points of reference, the world staggers for them.**

It is not rare that they may need to carry an object with them as they go through a threshold, when they change classes or when they exit their home. These are solutions they find for reassurance against the anguish produced by such a crossing or change of place.

### Time in autism

In autism, time is also altered. The autistic person often answers too soon -echoes rather than answers- or too late, introducing a lapse between question and answer that produces an effect of disconnection between the two.

It is very frequent to hear teachers say that an autistic child pushes another child without any apparent explanation. But on many occasions they come to realise that this occurs in response to something that happened hours before.

Time is also the time of the Other: the Other understood as the world we live in, made of rhythms, regularities, of words that index time, even the time of the clock. Autism shows that this is not something acquired "naturally".

Given the opportunity to permit and to accompany the wanderings of an autistic child in an institution, it will be observed that the senseless wandering soon becomes an orderly itinerary in which time and space are organised in a peculiar and complex manner. The wandering has first allowed them to find points of reference that let them "know" simultaneously what occurs in each place.

**Despite the idea that the autistic child requires activities to be presented very simply, with guidance at every step, on many occasions we encounter children with very complex thought processes that are inconceivable to us. This must be taken into account in each case: their particular style of learning.**

A boy can immediately tell the day of the week that a randomly chosen date on a given year falls on. A girl answers a math problem directly,

without going through the steps usually required when learning the subject.

**Time is not guaranteed for an autistic person. The fact that something occurs each day does not ensure that it will happen again the next day.** This calls Hegel to mind when he suggests that the answer to "what is the now?" can be for example: "now is the night", when it is in fact night. He proposes noting this truth down in writing to prove the veracity of its empirical certainty; but if that written truth is reread at midday we will have to say it has decayed.

**Consequently, we can understand a change in their habitual routine may have a devastating effect on the autistic child, because the order of the world is dismantled. This is the reason for the insistence on anticipating foreseen activities as well as any minor change.**

Josef Schovanec, autistic author of "Yo pienso diferente", (2) writes about the great anxiety unforeseen changes produce in an autistic person. As translated from the Spanish edition, he says: "If they tell you that the class ends at 10:00, the fact that the professor is still talking at 10:02 produces enormous anxiety. Also, one finds oneself conflicted between two rules: on the one hand they have told you that you must go, you must leave at 10:00 and on the other, there is the authority of a professor telling you, even indirectly, to stay.



How will you be able to know at what time he will finally stop talking? The other students may perhaps guess that the end is coming based on the turn of the phrases. If one is not advised of that, the fact that he is talking at 10:02 and stops doing so at 10:03 or continues until 10:45 makes no difference from a psychological point of view."

### Emotions

As Temple Grandin notes, some people think autistic people lack emotions but that is not true; they experience them with a different intensity but they are definitely present.

Dona Williams, who is also autistic, impressively describes what she calls **the Big Black Nothingness** in her book "Somebody somewhere": "The walls went up and my ears hurt. I had to get out. I had to get out -out of the room, out of this thing stuck upon me, suffocating me inside a shell of flesh. A scream rose in my throat. My four-year-old legs ran from one side of the room to the other moving ever and ever faster, my body hitting the wall like a sparrow flying at a window. My body was shaking. Here it was. Death was here. Don't want to die, I don't want to die, don't want to die - the repetition of the words blended into a pattern with only one word still standing out: the word "die". My knees went to the floor. My hand ran down the mirror. My eyes looked frantically searched the eyes looking back, looking for some meaning, for something to connect. No one, nothing, nowhere. Silent screaming rose in my

throat. My head seemed to explode. My chest heaved with each final breath at the gates of death. Dizziness and exhaustion began to overtake terror. It was amazing how many times a day I could be "dying" and still be alive." And she adds: "After twenty-six years I had learned that this was not death coming but emotions". (3)

The mother of an 11-year-old boy with a very good academic record, observes that when school begins at the end of the holidays or the night before an exam, her son complains, frightened, that his heart hurts. Once medical causes have been ruled out, she arrives at the interpretation that this is the way he expresses his anguish when faced with changes and the further exigences they involve.

We also find an echo of what Donna Williams describes in something said by the mother of a 9-year-old boy. His class receives a questionnaire related to emotions: they are requested to check a box but this boy also adds some annotations. Thus, in answer to the question: "Can you express your emotions with words?", he checks the box "sometimes" and writes: "An earthquake happens".

It is very important to keep this in mind when working on a subject that is currently very present in schools. Emotions are not "learnt" linearly, articulating the gesture of an image to an emotion. **Instead, we need to put words to that which we**

**interpret is happening to the child at a given moment, tying the word not to a gesture but to an experience.**

### The gaze

A sign that both families and professionals highlight is gaze avoidance. This can go from those children who direct their eyes at us but seem to not see us, to pass through us as if through a crystal vase; to those who avoid a direct gaze or do so in subtler ways.

With the identification to the specular image, one of the things that happens is the location of the gaze in the eyes. Contrary to appearances, it is far from a natural occurrence. In autism, the gaze has a special weight. They sometimes describe that they feel looked at in an unspecified manner by the world they perceive and at the same time feel compelled to look, dissolving themselves in the vast amount of details that surround them. The words of an autistic young girl can help us understand this: "I am gaze", revealing how she both experiences herself as gazed by the vastness of the world and is also driven to exercise that gaze.

As an example of this, a girl of unstoppable verbosity and movements says "look, the little bottle, see how it looks at you", "look, the fan, see how it looks at you", "look, the little onion, see how it looks at you ...", and before the mirror: "look, the photograph, see how it looks at you". Before such a display of this "look", the participant says - not addressing her directly and pretending anger,

not against her but against the imperative to "look" - that that is enough looking and closes her eyes. After a few moments, the girl silently moves closer and touches her softly at which the participant opens her eyes.

In silence, the girl then takes her pen and the toy onion - an element that stands out in her choices - and paints on it what she says are "closed eyes". Then, she takes a paper from the table and starts painting. On other occasions she draws a sort of circle-spiral on the page; this time she draws eyes within it and adds further elements of the face.

From that moment, which marks a certain localisation of the gaze in the eyes, eyes that can be opened or shut, that is, eyes that can stop looking; an appeasement of her mobility and verbosity can be observed.

The participant has offered her body as a field of operations and through words, silence and a gesture, has introduced an alleviation of the voice and the gaze, by accompanying the girl while at the same time saying "no" to the excess that invades her.

Sometimes teachers are surprised to find that when they explain something and the child seems to be looking elsewhere, apparently deaf to the explanation, they then find by their doings that the child had been paying attention.



Let us take the words of Naoki Higashida, the autistic author of “The reason I jump”: “To me, making eye contact with someone I’m talking to feels a bit creepy, so I tend to avoid it.

Then, where exactly am I looking? You might well suppose that we’re just looking down, or at the general background. But you’d be wrong. What we’re actually looking at is the other person’s voice. Voices may not be visible things, but we’re trying to listen to the other person with all of our sense organs. When we’re fully focused on working out what the heck it is you’re saying, our sense of sight sort of zones out. If you can’t make out what it is you’re seeing, it’s the same as not seeing anything at all.

What’s bothered me for a long time is this idea people have, that so long as we’re keeping eye contact while they’re talking to us, that alone means we’re taking in every word. Ha! If only that was all it took, my disability would have been cured a long, long time ago ...” (4)

**Because the gaze, as well as the voice, is one of the main signs that manifests our presence, our subjectivity, and this can be completely invasive to the autistic person.** Telling an autistic person to look at us when we speak to them is a violence to be avoided and even more so, taking hold of their face and turning it towards us. Nevertheless, recognising that if they avoid our gaze they have reasons to do so, that it is difficult for them, will lead us to take charge of this difficulty, lending our body to this end: by, for example, reducing the intensity of our gaze, directing it not towards the person but to their object of interest, occupying our eyes on another

thing, trying to lessen the weight of the gaze. With the continuity of this work, it often leads to their consenting to calmly direct their gaze at us.

### **The voice**

Naoki Higashida writes: “There are certain noises you don’t notice, but that really get to us. The problem here is that you don’t understand how these noises affect us. It’s not quite that the noises grate on our nerves. It’s more to do with a fear that if we keep listening, we’ll lose all sense of where we are. At times like these, it feels as if the ground is shaking and the landscape around us starts coming to get us, and it’s absolutely terrifying. So cupping our ears is a measure we take to protect ourselves, and get back our grip on where we are.

The noises that get to people with autism vary from person to person. I don’t know how we’d cope if we couldn’t cup our ears.” (5)

**The voice is something beyond words. It also includes the sound of words dislocated from place or meaning, the startling and disquieting noises of the world. And they try to find inventions with which to defend themselves from them.**

A young man ambles from one place to another holding a radio close to his ear, listening to the sound of interferences rather than a radio station. When a participant addresses him with words, he goes into a crisis or shuts the door in his

face. The participants refer having tried everything, to no avail. That is, until one of them comes up with the idea of learning from what is there for them to see: the solution the young man has found is in the invention of those interferences. They begin to speak in whispers when they are near him, imitating those interferences, whether they are speaking between themselves or addressing him. The young man then consents to listen to them, his way of taking part in the institution becomes more pacified and on “open day” it is he who guides the parents who visit it.

**We can distinguish two levels: that of the statement and that of the enunciation. The statement is what is said but the enunciation carries with it the subjectivity of the speaker, trailing their presence behind it. In this sense, it is always recommendable to at first address the child in a neutral tone or to address the class in general, trusting that they will also be listening.**

An example that shows the distinction between statement and enunciation: a young man with a very hermetic form of autism who only emits some noises and few words, always uses the same formula to say goodbye, the phrase “Happy holidays” said in a monochord tone of voice. The participant usually answers “Happy holidays” in the same monochord

tone of voice. One day, precisely the last one before the summer vacations, the young man says goodbye with his usual “Happy holidays”. In this occasion the participant answers with the same formula only in this case, given his expectation of his holidays, he introduces a certain emphasis. The statement is enlivened by the perspective of the holidays despite maintaining the same phrasing, and this triggers a crisis in the young man.

Statements can be “learned” by repetition but desubjectified, pronounced in a robotic manner or echoed. Speech also implies another level beyond that of the mere statement, which is that of the enunciation that can be defined as the presence of subjectivity in speech. To let go of the voice and make oneself present within it is something extremely difficult for the autistic person, achievable only when something in the experience of the voice has been pacified.

A young man who is habitually very silent is invited to participate in a radio program in an institution where he attends various workshops. He speaks at length before the microphone about Disney movies - his special interest - reproducing the intonation and voices of the characters. When he is invited to say goodbye, he says: “I don’t want to speak with my voice” and waves his hand goodbye.



Many autists have a perfect pitch, that is, the ability to identify and reproduce the musical notes of various instruments playing at the same time. Extrapolating this to everyday life, we could say that they hear different sound registers simultaneously, without the filter that generally directs our attention to certain sounds and ignoring the rest, and without the perspective that enables us to locate their provenance in space. Without this filter, without this perspective, everything sounds like an unbearable cacophony in which the self is lost. This leads to any number of manifestations of a crisis, the howl being but one of them.

Talking requires a separation and a veiling between hearing and listening. This can be observed clearly on those occasions when a strange mechanism on the phone produces a lag that brings back our voice as an echo, making it difficult to both talk and listen to ourselves at the same time. We then need to make an adjustment, erasing our own voice, deafening our ear to it, to continue talking.

### Language, the demand

We are in the field of autism. Speaking is not an easy matter. We speak and therefore it seems “natural”. That is not so and autistic persons show this to us every day.

**Speaking implies a direction towards another person, a will to say something. There are many ways of doing so: with the voice, in writing, with a gesture, through artistic creations, ...**

On the other hand, in language words do not always refer to one meaning, so we must wait for the end of the phrase and pay attention to the context in which they are said, to understand it. Therefore, language implies the possibility of misunderstandings and ambiguity. Let us consider everyday use of metaphors or the double meaning in jokes.

**For the autistic person, ambiguity and metaphors produce chaos, a difficulty to place what words refer to. The literalness of their reaction to language is frequently on display.**

A mother tells us that her son, a very good student, brings home a note from the teacher saying she gave him a 0 because he left his exam paper blank. When the mother asks her son about it, he answers that he obeyed the teacher's instruction to the class to “be still!”.

In this case, a small movement from the teacher might perhaps have been enough. She might have approached the child to show an interest in the blank page and knowing that he knew the subject, encourage him to answer the test.

A teacher shares her perplexity regarding an exercise paper containing this phrase: “Write the following numbers as they are read: “440” to which the student answers “four hundred and forty”. The next question is: “And now the reverse. Write the number 220” and the boy

writes -indeed in reverse- “022”. It is of course up to the teacher whether she determines the answer to be correct or not, but to the boy the answer is undoubtedly the one requested.

Following a concert, a mother observes that her son moves his fingers on top of a cushion as if playing piano. She decides to sign him up for piano lessons which the boy attends happily and where, to the teacher's surprise, he promptly grasps what she teaches him. Nonetheless, one day he is upset as he leaves the class. His mother asks him about this and he says the teacher kept telling him “Don't hurry” and, he says: “I was sitting down Mom, I wasn't hurrying!”.

Another mother describes the following: The family is eating around the table. The boy finishes before the others and goes to his room. He calls his mother from there: “Mom, come!”. The mother, whose first language is not Spanish, simplifies her answer and -meaning she is eating - says: “Como” (I eat). The boy answers: “Get up from the chair and come”. The mother again says “Como” (I eat) and the boy says crossly: “Don't ask me that again, you know how, get up from the chair and walk with your feet!”. We so-called “normal people” are guilty of the same literality that we attribute to the rigidity of autistic

people, in relation to them. This “Get up from the chair and come”, if considered only from a behavioural point of view, can be interpreted as a show of despotism from the child and a sign of a deficient education from the parents. If, however, we know of his literal interpretation of words, we can hear in that “Como” (I eat) pronounced by the mother, the “¿Cómo?” (How?) that the boy hears and to which he responds in its literality: “Get up from the chair and walk with your feet”.

Another boy, about 6 years old, arrives home and asks for a paper and pencil. The teacher has asked them to do sums. He writes:  $1+1=2$   
 $+2=4+4=8+8=16+16=32+32=64...$

The mother stops him because she thinks it is too complicated and suggests  $25+25$ . The boy agrees, does the sum and goes on to write:  $25+25=50+50=100+100=200+200=400+400=800+800=1600+1600=3200...$

She tells him it is enough, that he has already done many sums, and the boy can then stop.

This example leads us to the subject of infinity in numbers, which never end. It is one of the difficulties present in autism, the difficulty in concluding, in finding a point of reference that signals a stopping point.



For example, this boy finds that limit in the reality of the sheet of paper. The mother notes this: if she had not accompanied her son in stopping, he would have continued writing up until the edge of the sheet.

We think this is important and we tell the mother to tell the teacher this short sequence of events. It will surely be enough in this case for the teacher to indicate the number of sums that the children, or this boy, have to do at home.

**It is not usually apparent to us that language is mostly imperative: in itself implying both a demand and a call for an answer.** An everyday example: when we meet someone on the street, it is not infrequent to greet them with a "How is it going?". We may receive a simple "Fine" in answer or a narrative of the other person's life.

There are many occasions in which we unwittingly use verbs in their imperative form, even when referring to pleasant things. The autistic child is very sensitive to that imperative and resists its implicit demand, as in the example above, where the teacher's "Give me your hand", provokes a crisis in the girl. Or when the phrase "Have a sweet" produces a violent reaction to the imperative "Have!" in a boy.

A teacher describes how, when she tells a boy his homework is wrong or crosses something out, he becomes very upset and has a crisis as if the

crossing out impacted his entire being. She finds a solution that quite surprises her: she tells him his work is "tatty" - a word that sounds fun and lightens the weight of "it is wrong" - the boy shows no difficulty in repeating the task.

### **Peer relationships**

We frequently come across teachers, especially those working with very young autistic children, who tell that for these children, others seem not to exist as such - that they run them over or push them aside as if they were obstacles - or avoid them, striving to maintain a distance from them. Our orientation is to first work on making ourselves exist for these children, so we may establish a form of accompaniment that is useful to them and conducive to establishing a relationship. With the teacher or participant acting as facilitator, the relationship with the other children will begin to emerge.

**In this sense, a teacher is a privileged "resource" for enabling inclusion. In turn, one of the privileged resources of the teacher is precisely to accommodate the special interest of the autistic child, integrating it as much as possible with activities that include the rest of the class.** Also, the manner in which the teacher interprets and "translates" behaviours which may seem strange to the other children will help them be accepted and integrated in daily life. Let us note that this way of proceeding not only benefits the autistic child but also extends to the rest of the class.

For example, a first grade teacher relates that she has a big panel in class where every day she puts the photos and names of the children who have stood out for some special reason. But what is this special thing that makes a child deserving of a place on the board? In one case it will be that a boy who used to enter the class crying came in smiling that day; in another, that a girl who used to fight with a classmate has been playing with her; or that a boy has hung his coat in its place ... and so, each child has a place in that big special board.

A high school teacher notes that an autistic young man who speaks very little and doesn't relate to his classmates, has a special interest in her subject. Little by little, she highlights some of his answers to the tests and after some time, puts him in charge of projecting photographs of works of art. This role, offered by the teacher and accepted by the student, favours his wellbeing and his opening up to a possible relationship with his classmates.

Nevertheless, this same young man has problems in physical education class, because he finds changing his clothes for the class unbearable. This behaviour is taken by the teacher as a personal challenge, and so he doesn't permit any alternative solution like for example, allowing him to attend

class in his usual clothes or allowing him to write a paper instead. The consequence is not only that the young man fails the subject but that he faces great psychic suffering during every physical education class.

This is an appropriate time to emphasise **the importance of also minding the periods outside the classroom: at the cafeteria, the extracurricular activities at school and especially, the recess.** It is in fact there where most of the difficulties with the schoolmates occur - "I don't want to go to school because the children ignore me, they don't want to play with me even if I go near them", these are the words of an 11 year-old boy, that his mother relays with great anguish and impotence.

We must consider that the classroom is a structured space, which is not the case of the recess, where many children occupy an ample space, moving from one side to another in an untimely manner, their voices and shouts ringing out every which way.

Let us exemplify this with a 10 year-old boy who speaks nonstop and extremely correctly and follows the teachers' instructions in class literally: to not speak, to work, to pay attention to the explanations, to remain in one's place. He does very well academically. In his psychotherapy sessions, he transmits his rich inner life, creating hierarchical worlds and different defence systems to shield



himself from the possible attacks and dangers that he anticipates at every turn. He becomes very anxious during recess when children playing tag run in his direction, because he thinks he is being chased by them and responds by pushing them, creating further difficulties with his classmates. He knows the game exists but explains he is not able to distinguish if the children are playing the game or chasing him. He says: "if only they carried a badge ...!".

**Families frequently assert that the time outside class time is still part of the school day.** In fact, a great difference can be observed in those schools that "work the recess" - that is, where the adults "plan" the recess - organising games that implicate different groups of children or setting up "calm spaces" where the participants can busy themselves with their solitary games or reading, or sharing a chess match or various games with others, and where the presence of an adult facilitates the mediation between their interactions.

### **The relationship to objects**

We consider objects to be those elements that autistic children use for company and to which they give a particular treatment. Sometimes the object is singularised and must be a specific one, whereas at other times they are diverse elements that share certain characteristics.

More and more, in accordance with the contemporary extension of technical objects, the preferred choices are the screens of the different technological devices. But we also consider a special interest in numbers or letters to be objects, as well as the interest in a variety of areas in which they may attain a meticulous and expert knowledge.

These objects serve for them to locate a paradoxical satisfaction that far from being pleasant, comprises a discomfort that is boundless and difficult to treat. It surpasses them and they attempt to curb it with repetitive movements or alternations related to the object. **The problem is that the object which at times calms them can also lead to isolation, and that in the endless repetition of those movements, they suffer from the same excess they were attempting to soothe. Far from taking away this object to which they hold on to, as a person with reduced mobility might hold on to a crutch, our position is to include ourselves in this defence they have established so they are not alone and to help them escape from that extenuating circle of repetition.**

A boy finds moments of isolation from the rest of the world by spinning a bit of paper, his eyes engrossed by its movement. When the bit of paper is taken from him, he goes into big crises; but when left alone with it the spinning gives way to a stereotypy, his body mimicking the movement of the paper in an excess that agitates

him. The participant then decides to associate himself with the movement of the boy, making sure to direct his gaze at the bit of paper - not the boy - and marking every time the movement stops with his voice. The boy accepts this presence at his side and the stereotypy subsides. He will then accept to take an interest in other elements: following the spinning paper, he will begin to find an interest in circuits of balls that fall and also accept the discreet presence of the participant. Then, he will begin to build progressively more complicated circuits in which to roll plasticine balls that do not move flawlessly and therefore do not acquire a continuous movement. The boy must intervene for them to keep on moving, thus interrupting his own movements and extreme excitement. Following the circuits built by himself, he will move on to drawing labyrinthine routes and from there, to the beginnings of writing.

**A very important subject is related to knowledge. Beyond our professional know-how, there is a knowledge of a different order it is very important to respect: that of the child and we find it in their repetitions, in the things they need to do even if we don't know why.**

For example, a 2 year-old boy who is mute on his arrival to the consultation, chooses every time to take animals out of a box and place them in a row on the edge of the table. Grasping that this is important to him allows the participant to include herself in this action by naming the animals he chooses. After a series of repetitions, the boy now turns towards her in expectation of her words. Then he himself will issue the words, which will further expand to include other fields. This game will eventually become relegated to the beginning and end of the sessions and the time in between will be occupied with other materials, opening up to words, laughter, a relationship.

He begins school when he is 3 years old. Everyday, he plays with the little animals in his classroom and the teacher then invites him to participate in the class activities to which he usually consents. One day, he arrives later than usual and when he goes to the animals corner his teacher tells him it is not the time to play, that he must work with his classmates. This detonates a crisis and his discomfort lasts for the rest of the day. In conversation with the teacher, she realises that interrupting this little ritual that sets his entrance, has made everything else go awry.



## From special interests to special interest areas

### **From special interests ...**

We have highlighted the importance of acknowledging the special interests of autistic children as a door to a possible relationship with the adult. Also, as an element to facilitate inclusion among their peers, a way to establish a social bond. We also emphasise the importance of considering them in the development of an academic itinerary to care for their wellbeing.

Let us take the case of an 8 year girl, whose need to draw stands out. She represents her environment in images to give it a more comprehensible content than that afforded by elusive, volatile words. She begins therapy sessions when she is two and half years old. Back then, she liked to draw, she knew the letters of the alphabet and distinguished cars by their symbols.

Everything visual interests her very much and she now handles new technologies with ease and creativity. She likes to film shorts about her characters and her pet. She also likes to take selfies and transform the images with different applications, to produce combinations of photographs and superpositions of animal attributes such as mice ears, a cat's snout or princess' crowns.

She also likes to make comics with speech bubbles coming from the

mouths of the characters, inventing her own stories. But she uses drawing first and foremost as a means to express herself, to give meaning to and make her own story more understandable. If she tells the participant what she played at during recess, she first needs to draw her school with the different recreational spaces. If she retells a dream, she draws the character she remembers.

One day, her mother calls with a concern. Her parents have long understood and sustained the importance of drawing for their daughter but it is now problematic because she fills the margins of her exam papers with illustrations that represent the exam questions.

For example, in an English test she is asked to write a brief dialogue regarding the introduction of various persons. She draws characters who introduce themselves and speak through their speech bubbles. She does the same with math problems, drawing the basket of apples or the boy on a bicycle, according to the phrasing of the problem.

The result is that aside from the exam papers having a clumsy, untidy aspect, she spends too long on this task and cannot finish her exams on time, with the resulting effect on her grades.

A conversation between her

psychologist and her tutor had a calming effect upon the turbulences at school. The importance of drawing for this girl was talked about and reference was made to Temple Grandin's book *Thinking in pictures*. This slight shift in perspective brought about the proposal of a personalised adaptation. For a time, she will be allowed to bring a separate notebook to the exams, in which to continue drawing. As well as permitting a time extension - a little more time or a question less in the test - the counsellor, who considers this girl to have Asperger syndrome, will attempt to have the problem resolution process evaluated rather than only the result.

The intention was to highlight the girl's strategy, which may reflect a different thought process. This opens up a whole new and interesting field that is not marked by deficit.

### **... to special interest areas**

Let us note as well that the special interests of the autistic person have a very important subjective function. If we listen to them, we will find that these interests provide a secure retreat when they feel surpassed by the demands of their surroundings and help avoid a crisis.

A young man who has followed studies in electricity describes how in moments of social anxiety his resource is to observe the organisation of the electrical circuits of his location.

Once appeased by this abstraction, he can participate again in the social scene.

**We must not leave out the fact that on many occasions, special interests that emerge at a small age later become special areas of interest, veritable domains of specialisation that may lead to a professional development.** We find examples of this in books written by autistic authors, describing career paths in painting or music, mathematics, languages, science, technology, among other fields.

A few examples of our own:

The setting is a math class about the rule of three. The problem formulates the following: if a flat costs  $x$ , then how much will the buyer have to pay if he must advance  $x\%$ . The boy asks in which part of town the flat is located. The teacher answers him, choosing a street at random. The boy says the problem cannot be answered. The teacher, believing the student didn't understand the rule and cannot solve the problem, begins the explanation over. The boy interrupts her to say that the problem cannot be answered because in that part of town it is impossible to find a flat that will cost that amount, they are worth much more! The streets and characteristics of the flats constitute one of the special interests of this boy. If we trace this interest we will find



that as a little boy he began taking great notice in garage doors, which led him to locate them in the different streets of the city and to accurately know the itineraries to the doors in question.

A 2 year old boy begins his sessions with an incessant wandering through which his interest in doors becomes apparent. After a while, he transfers this interest to working with different materials inside the office. Looking at other children's drawings of the sun and the moon leads to an interest in spacecrafts to which he adds doors with the help of a participant. The spaceship, with its doors, is manned by an astronaut and travels to various planets that become a very specific special interest. When he is 7 years old his parents take him to the planetarium, where they listen to an educational conference by an astronomer. He corrects the astronomer from his seat in a low voice regarding the distance between planets and other statements and the latter is amazed by his contributions.

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# Orientation for working at school: “Practice among many”

## At school with autistic children

In the classic teacher-student relationship, the teacher occupies the position of possessor of knowledge. This puts the teacher in a position that coincides with the difficulty of the autistic child to place themselves in a position of learning. We must bear in mind that this doesn't only constitute an obstacle for the autistic child to access learning but also entails a difficulty for the teacher to successfully carry out his role.

The autistic child may perceive the possessor of knowledge as an imposing or capricious other. If it is true that some children do not understand the meaning of a school task, others who do not have comprehension problems can manifest contrary behaviour or self-isolate because the teacher's request is perceived as senseless. They ask themselves: What does the teacher want from me? Why does he/she want me to do this? **The teacher's request might be experienced as intrusive and persecutory and move the child to raise their autistic defences.** Teachers frequently testify to their anguish before the rejection of their

autistic students - at times hetero or auto aggressive - and to finding themselves without resources to tackle these relational problems.

Autistic children often present repetitive movements, the so called stereotypies. These sometimes imply very precise regular movements that show impressive skills going from the execution of rhythms or a great mastery in spinning dishes or glasses, to very specific interests and knowledge. These interests may refer to characters from cartoons, certain means of transport, a specific kind of music, an interest in numbers, plants, animals, ...

**What to do when the child obstinately repeats the same movement or wants to watch the same thing once and again? We don't consider those behaviours to be a disadvantage, a deficiency or an inadequate symptom but rather the draft of a solution, an ability or invention of the child we need to apprehend the details and grasp the logic of. This will allow us to highlight the value of their particular manner of confronting their difficulties.**



For this to happen, we need to approach the child docilely, without imposing our presence. An initial time to listen without us making demands is necessary to gradually establish a relationship that enables them to trust us. Only then, will we be able to delicately propose small changes and implement a few variations by implicating ourselves in their repetitions. In this the teacher or participant is not alone. On the contrary, the possibility of relying on colleagues to establish triangulations, that is, to speak to one another in the presence of the child so what is said can reach them indirectly in a way that is less invasive. The intention is to create a pacified, even playful atmosphere by using tailored strategies that avoid an excessively directive style, so the child can open up to others and to knowledge little by little.

**We call this modality “practice among many”, underlining with this term the relational dimension involved:**

- **On one hand, in the position of the teacher or participant committed with construing an accompaniment of the autistic child.**
- **On the other, as implied in the relationship with other participants and teachers, aiming towards inclusion of the autistic child.**
- **Finally, it highlights the importance of creating a network between all the participants involved in working with and accompanying the child: the school and first and foremost the**

**families, but also the sanitary services and professionals of various fields.**

The strategies we propose permit approaching the relational problems that the teacher finds when, for example, applying learning systems for students with special needs or teaching methods that stress the acquisition of cognitive content and pre-established results.

Confronting these difficulties requires the teacher to adopt a position different from the habitual one: to be willing to learn from the autistic child instead of immediately putting the accent on teaching and transmitting knowledge. This attitude favours the possibility of an encounter with the child, so they don't need to raise their barriers before a knowledge imposed by educational requirement.

### ***The times in the accompaniment of an autistic child***

How can teacher and participants accompany the autistic child at school? Distinguishing the different times at play for the child will help us grasp the logic that prevails from moment to moment, so as to facilitate their learning. This temporality doesn't necessarily occur linearly, one step behind the other, but may occur in a more complex movement made of comings and goings.

**Hereby follows a description of these moments, that will be later specified through the narration of a boy's work with his teacher:**

**1) Pacification:** Before addressing competencies, learning and socialisation, a preliminary work is necessary to ensure the child is at ease and trusts us.

**2) Construction:** The achievement of a pacified state will allow the autistic child an openness that in turn will allow an added complexity to the minimal or stereotypic elements they initially presented, with the teacher's help.

**3) Learning:** The first constructions will allow the child to extend their interests to other elements, subjects or practical abilities, thus achieving a position of learning based on their areas of interest.

**4) Social ties and inclusion:** Developing a particular creative learning itinerary will allow the child to use their constructions to establish social ties with other children in the class. The aperture to diversity implicit in these new bonds constitutes one of the key elements for inclusion.

### ***Necessary conditions for the autistic child's openness to learning***

The practice among many gives preference to the special interests and skills of every child, no matter how bizarre or repetitive, over the contents of the school programme. The teacher can then become a partner and accompany them towards learning by letting themselves be taught by the child. If the teacher knows how to “not know in the place of the child”, the child will be able to engage their own skills and abilities without having to defend themselves from others and their demands.

Letting oneself be taught by the autistic child requires considering the traits with which they introduce themselves as if with a calling card; that which is most singular to them. It signifies a bet on the autistic child's subjectivity: valuing their special interests and inventions, taking into account the objects they carry with them or manipulate, following their repetitive movements, the tappings on objects or parts of the body, their recurrent or incomprehensible verbosity or their passion for certain very specific subjects.

If the teacher or participant tries to associate themselves with the work of the autistic child, they will be able to open a channel through which to connect with them, making it easier to pacify them. **Through this new pacified bond, what was a barrier may become an openness to knowledge, the basis of all learning.**



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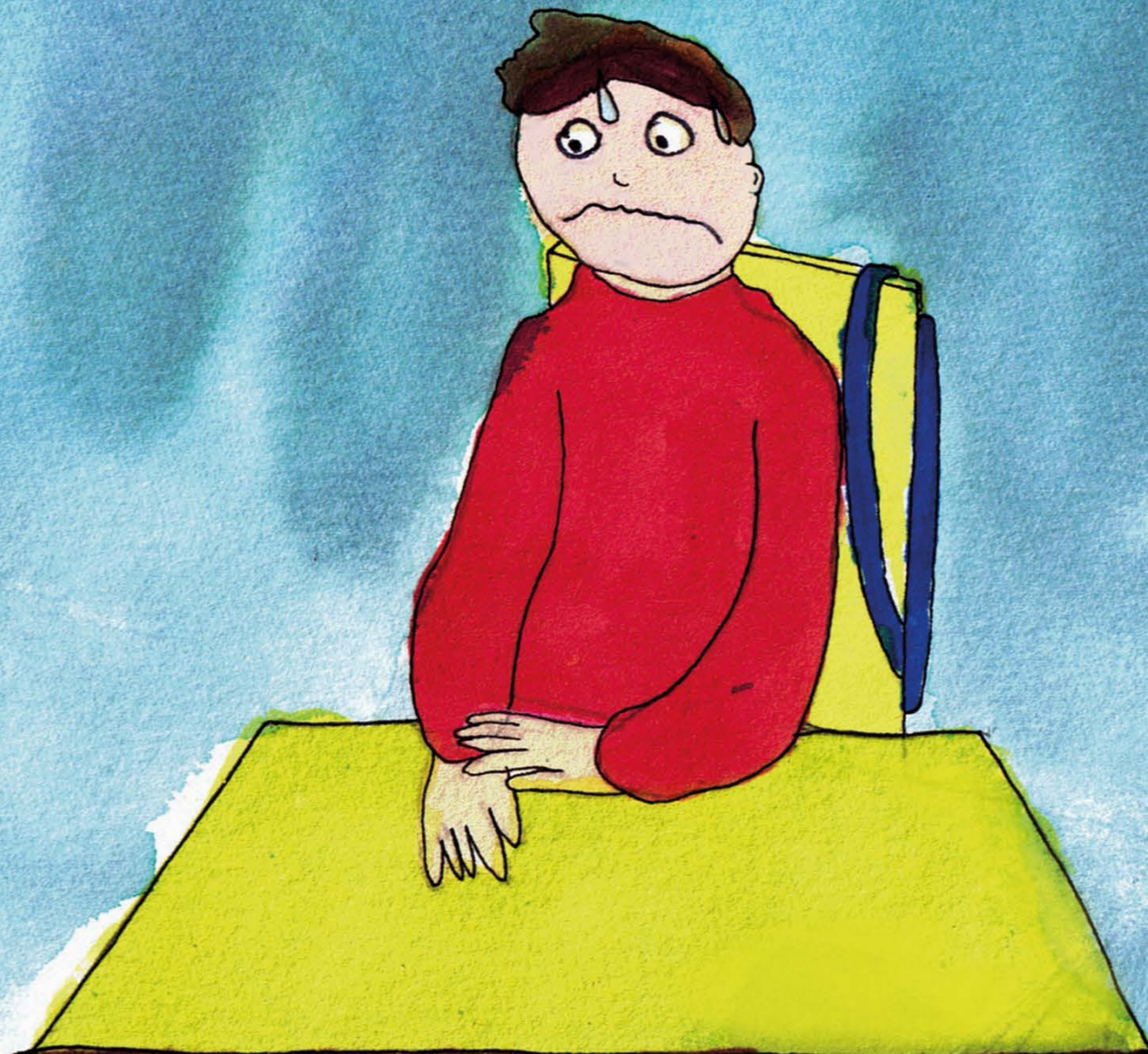
# Mario's story

04



What we will read next is *the story of Mario*, a boy who at the time was seven years old and was attending second grade at school.

The story is about his particular itinerary at school and about his encounter with a teacher who was able to help him get over some of his great fears.











Therefore, Mario didn't feel calm when he had to spend time in the classroom.

It often happened that when the group was more unruly, he had to **quickly leave the classroom** because he was very afraid.



Only when he was alone with the teacher *in a quiet place* (like an empty classroom or the school gym), could he calm himself and feel better.







Furthermore, Mario rarely spoke and didn't like people talking to him: **he was afraid of the sound of people's voices.**

*This made it very difficult to communicate with his classmates.*

Because of this fear, he would block his ears very strongly with his hands if he was in the middle of a conversation, bottle up and keep his head down.



EFFI EFFI,  
TICO TICO,  
TARA TARA TURE,  
BOCIOMO, SACAFU, COTZ

The few times he would speak to someone, *he would use an almost incomprehensible language* and most times people couldn't understand what he wanted to say.





Each day, Mario would come to school with an object he didn't want to separate from because he liked it very much.

*This object was a key that he always held between his hands.*







Always having that key at hand animated him considerably and helped calm him down when he felt afraid.

*When somebody tried to take the key from him, Mario would get very angry.*





Very frequently, Mario would be so interested in his key that *he didn't listen to anything or to anybody*. He would move apart, isolating himself from his classmates and from the teacher.





As time went by, the teachers began to wonder to ask themselves how they could help Mario...

*It was necessary to find a way to communicate with him as soon as possible so that he could be helped to make friends with his classmates and make himself understood without being frightened.*







The teacher understood that object was very important to Mario and so, instead of having him give it to her at the beginning of each school day, she decided to let Mario carry it with him.

*She thought of how to use the key to play with the boy, to engage him and to find a useful purpose for the object.*



In the first place, *she suggested to Mario that he use the key to unlock and lock the keyholes of the doors:* she suggested he exchange his key for the school's set of keys, so he could be responsible for opening and closing various doors in the school such as those of the different classrooms or the gym, and then receive his own key back.

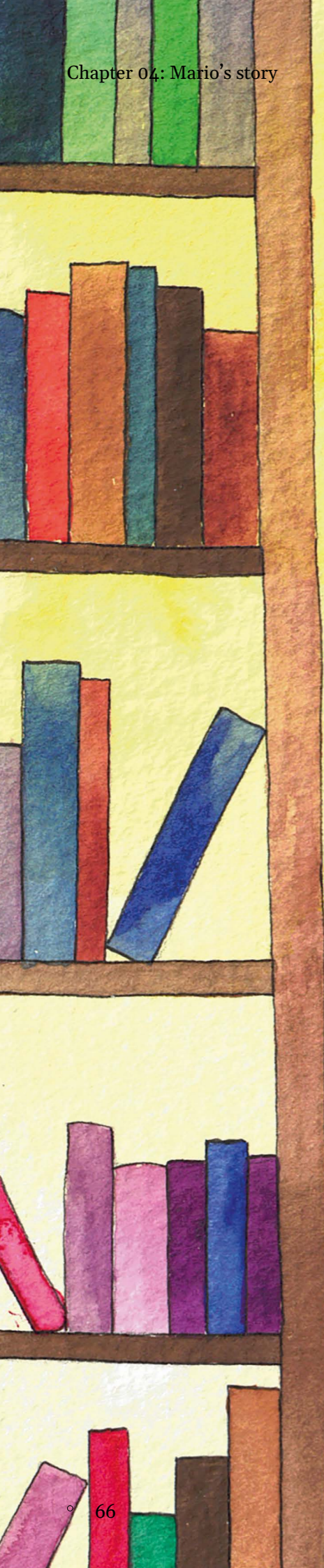




Mario accepted this game of exchanges with pleasure and, with the passing of time, *also consented to exchange his key for other objects.*

For example a ball, paints to draw with the rest of his classmates, a book...

*Because he knew that his key would be returned to him shortly afterwards.*





This game helped Mario to gain some security and to interact more with the teacher and the rest of the classmates by also using words.

He began, more and more to exchange words and communicate with other people.







As time went by, Mario understood that *the key was not the only thing capable of lifting his spirits when he was afraid* and by exchanging it for other objects and communicating with the teacher and classmates he could also confront his fear.

*Of course, Mario did not get rid of his key - he still liked it very much - but he decided to keep it in his pocket or in his schoolbag (and not always in his hand) as if it were his favourite good-luck charm!*

The teacher, based on what he liked, was able to help Mario face his fears. She did not deprive him of the object in which he was interested for most of the day *but instead found a trick to involve him in other activities*, exchanging his object for something else.



Aside from that, it was necessary to find solutions that would help him *feel safe, even inside the classroom*, or there was a risk that he would lag very far behind his classmates in relation to the syllabus.

*In fact, Mario would frequently leave the classroom to find refuge in a quieter space.*



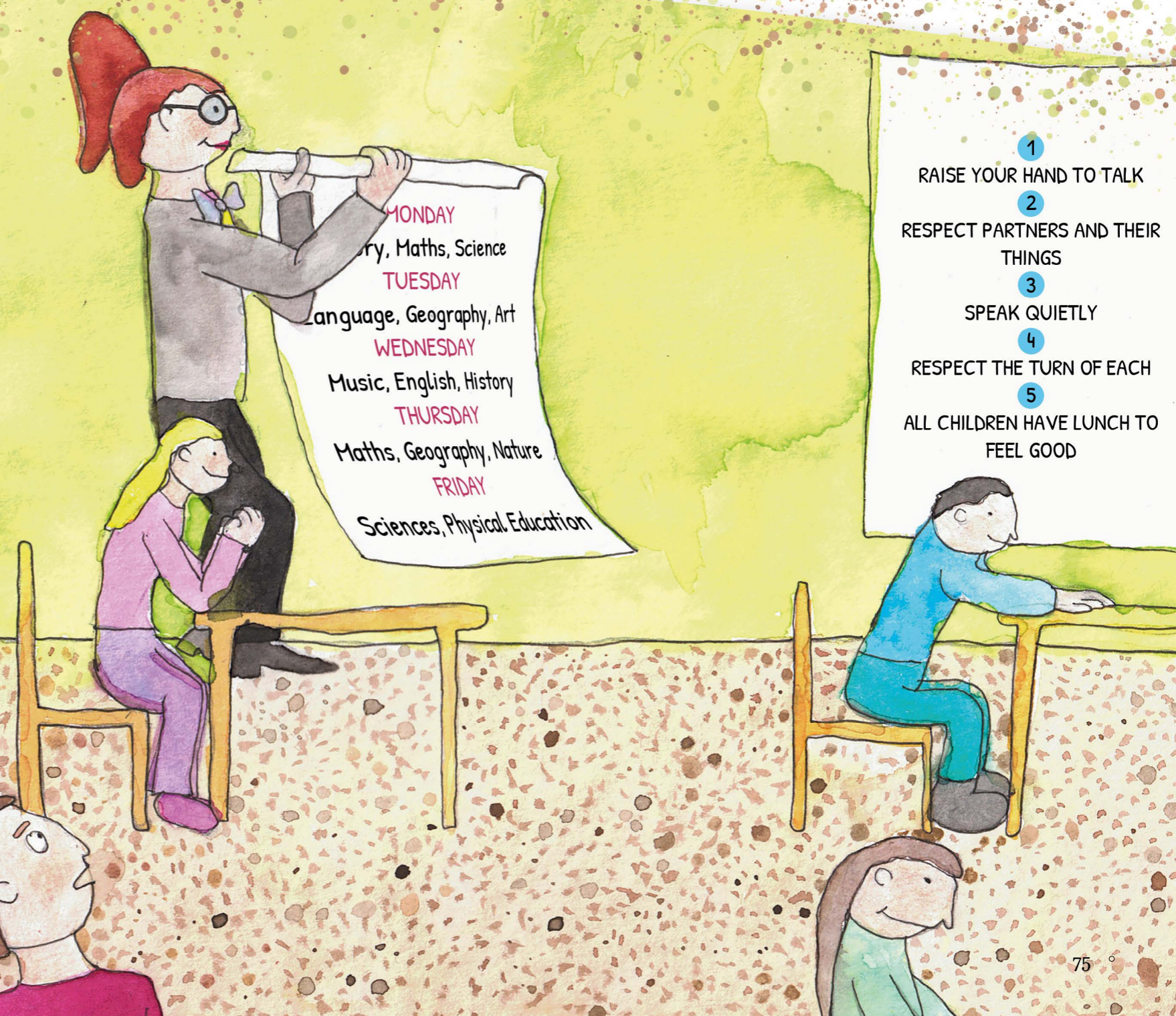
At first, to help him not be afraid when spoken to, the teachers tried to address him indirectly, *communicating through a third person*, close to Mario, so that the boy could also hear what was being said.



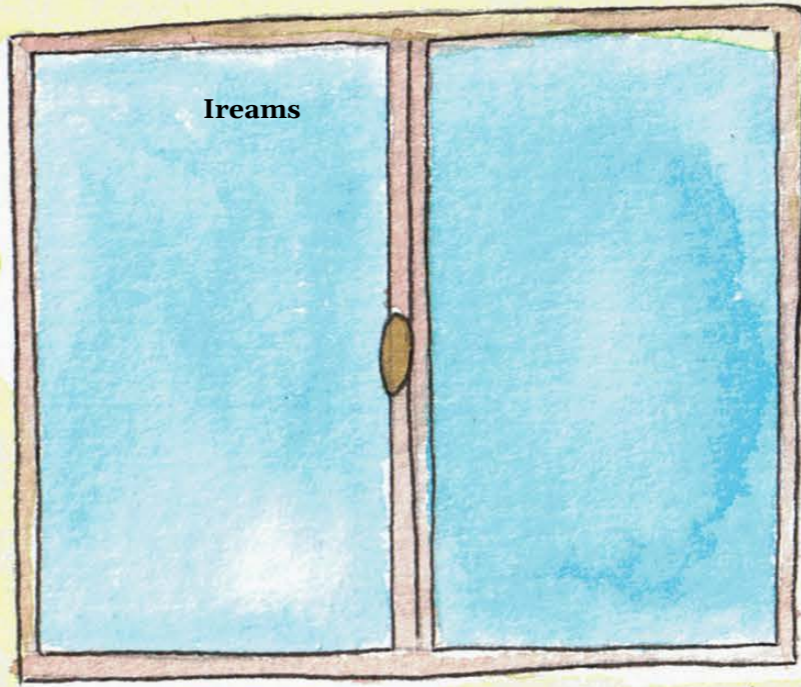
They decided to create a more agreeable and predictable context for Mario.

To that end, they first made posters on which the days and times of the different lessons were written so Mario could know what he would do at school hour by hour and day by day.

They then prepared other posters with a list of **rules to be respected in class**, valid for all the children including Mario. The rules referred to behaviour during class, to respecting turns when speaking or when getting up from the chair.







The classmates helped Mario feel less afraid of sudden noises and voices by respecting the rules.

*Thanks to these measures, he gradually feel more at ease, up to the point that he began to remain in the classroom during class.*

***That was a big achievement!***





The teachers kept thinking how to extend the relationship that had now been established with Mario's teacher, to other people.

How to help him speak to others without fear? How to help him express what he felt?

Mario in fact still used a language that was not clear. **He would sometimes repeat the same words continuously**, while at other times he would remain locked in himself, as if he inhabited a world of his own.

WHEN THE TRAIN GOES  
TO LONDON IT'S SCARY!  
I LEFT THE PATATRAC!







One day something extraordinary happened which produced a great change.

Mario was in class paying no heed to what the teacher was saying. In fact, he was only repeating the same phrase in a voice that got louder and louder: **“Lambsgrove Street makes me laugh”**. After various attempts to make him stop, the teacher said: **“Oh how pretty, the Lambs-grove street!”**.

This intervention immediately caught Mario's attention and, sharpening his gaze, he said: **“Cows-grove Street”** and then the teacher intervened again: **“dogs-grove and cats-grove”** and he, in succession: **“wows-grove, meows-grove and cluck-cluck-grove”**, until they both burst out laughing.



From that moment,  
everything changed.

The teacher ***understood that the boy liked to invent words*** and that he had a veritable talent to do so.

She thought that following this road might constitute a real opportunity to start a relationship / create an alliance with Mario without him being afraid and at the same time doing what he liked.







The teacher organised some activities especially for Mario.

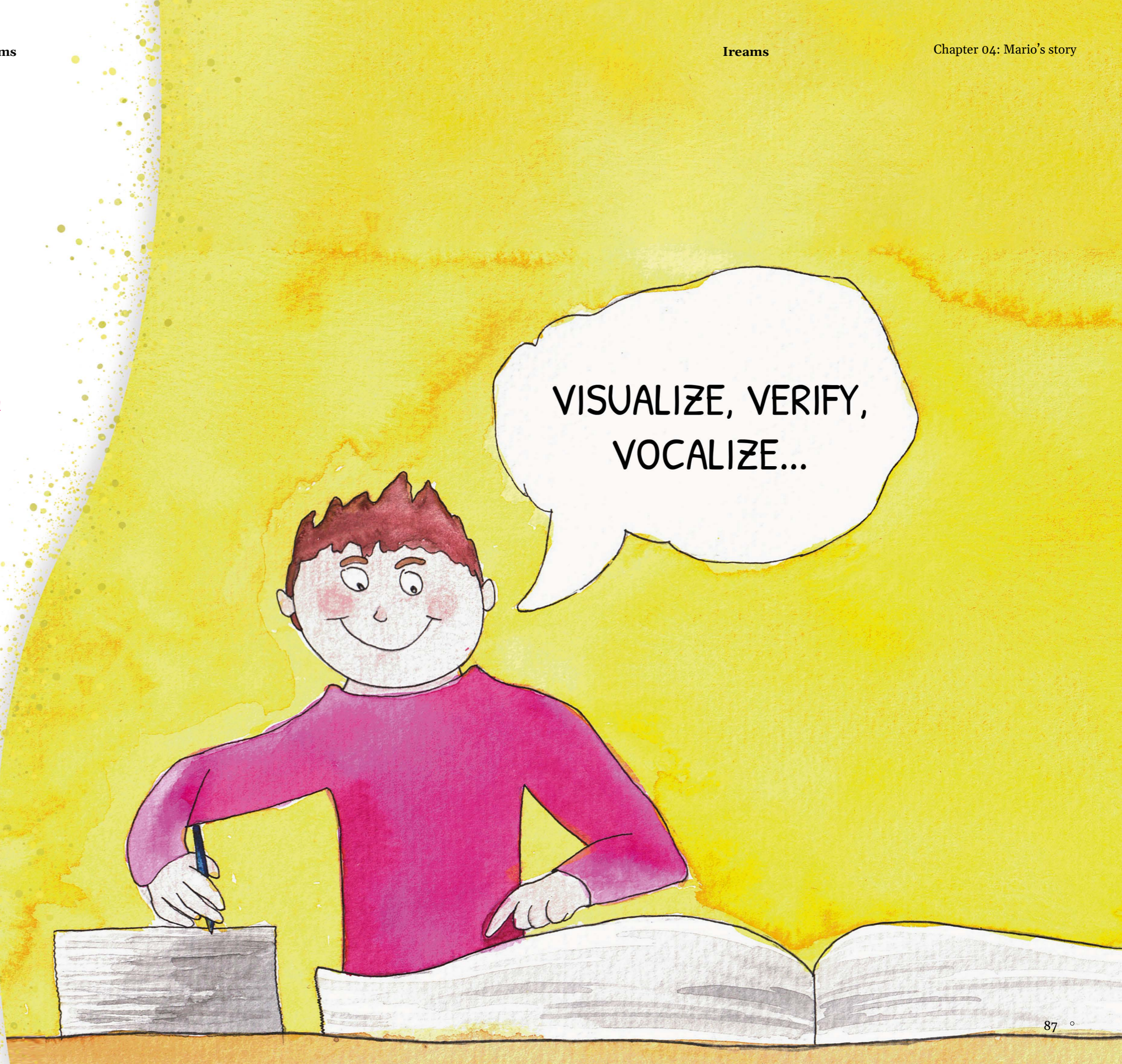
As Mario spoke little and very fast, she came up with an idea: *she proposed that he speak slower, so that she could transcribe the words he said, as if he was dictating to her.*

Mario could then express what went on in his mind, without worrying about having to give his words meaning and having to make himself understood, because in this case it was him teaching the teacher and not the other way round!



In order that he focus his energies to better align his activities with the syllabus, the teacher proposed that Mario look up in the dictionary the words he repeated incessantly.

*Mario was very interested in this activity from the start and in fact stopped repeating words and began looking them up in the dictionary, paying great attention to their meaning.*





Narration and writing workshops were also organised and each time proper little books which collected Mario's **word-plays and funny words were produced**: *Word in action, Mario's travels, Fun stories, Dispersed verses*, based on the subjects that most interested him, like means of travel or lists.

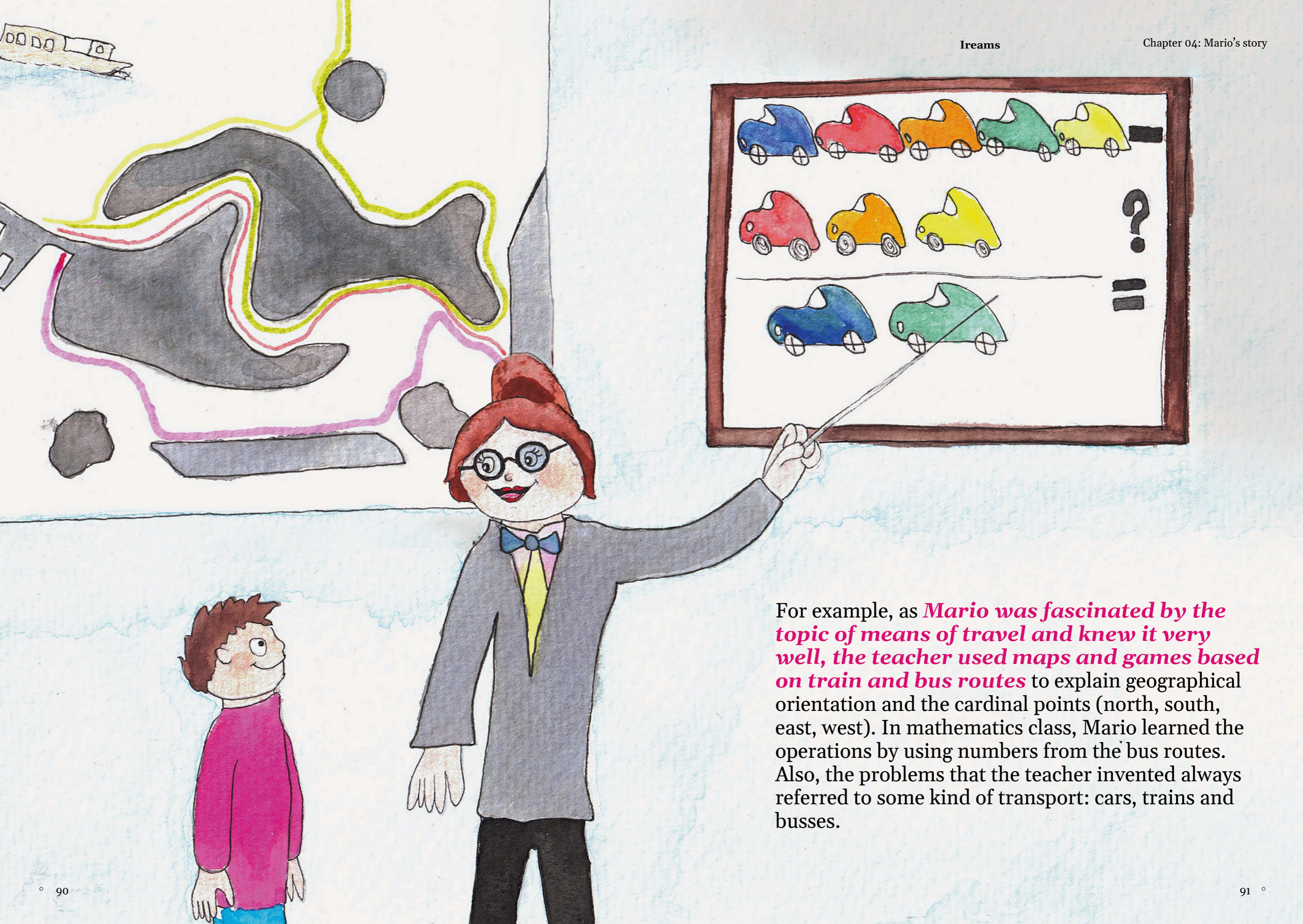
The teacher would take the occasion to teach Mario **the rules of writing and grammar based on the stories invented by him**.

**This procedure was also used by her for other subjects.**

## NARRATION AND WRITING WORKSHOP







For example, as *Mario was fascinated by the topic of means of travel and knew it very well, the teacher used maps and games based on train and bus routes* to explain geographical orientation and the cardinal points (north, south, east, west). In mathematics class, Mario learned the operations by using numbers from the bus routes. Also, the problems that the teacher invented always referred to some kind of transport: cars, trains and busses.



In time, **Mario began to share his inventions** not only with the teacher but also with his classmates, getting to the point where he would read his texts out loud every day before the lessons began.

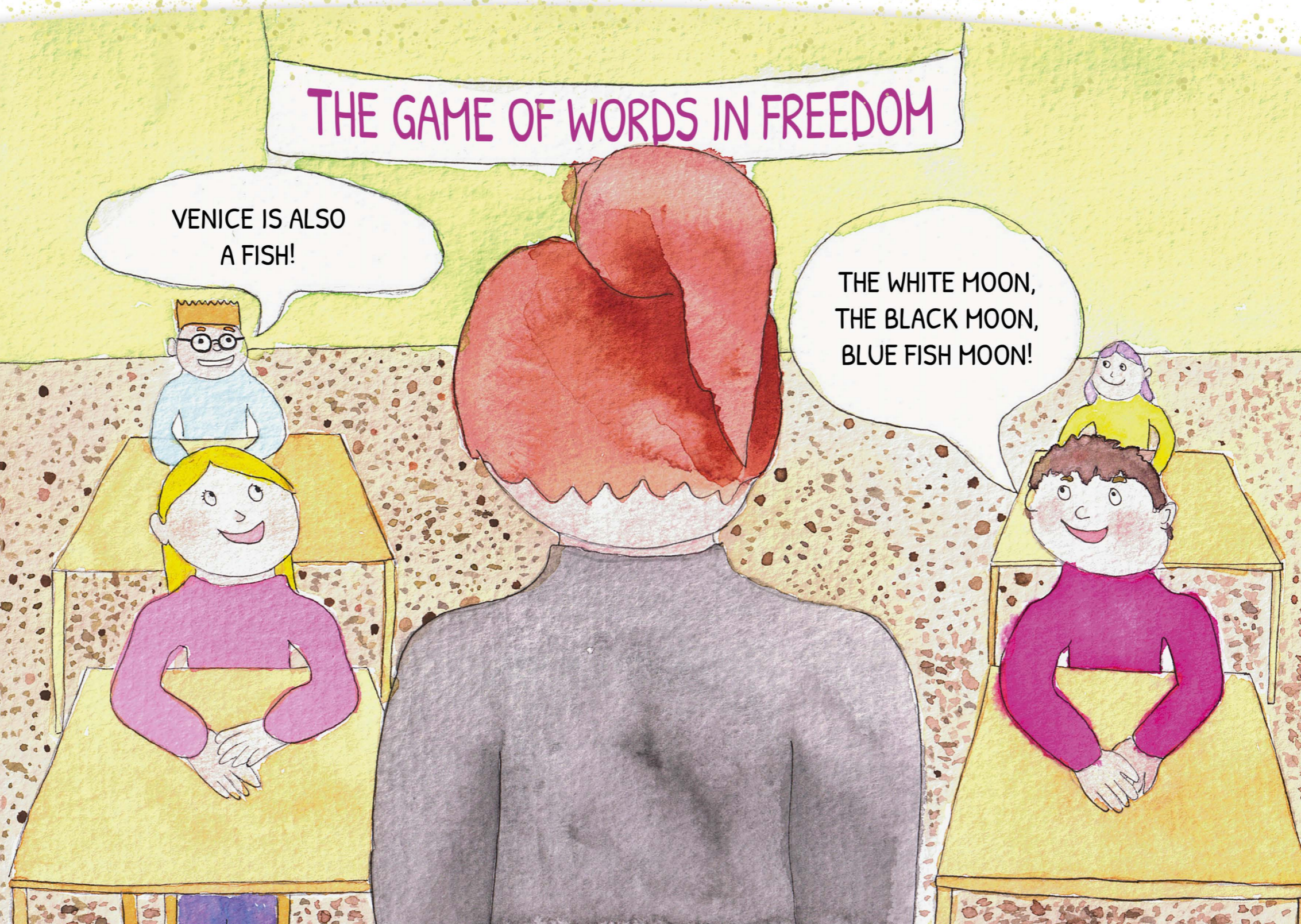
Thanks to these readings, his classmates began to know better and to understand his likes and preferences.





*“The game of words in freedom”* was made up in class, where all the children could express themselves freely, using their favourite words, even if they didn't have a precise meaning. This way, Mario who had a real predisposition to play with words found a space in which to share his passion with his classmates, a space where he could be listened to and could in turn listen to others.

Thanks to this game, Mario began to have his first exchanges of words with other children, who then started to better understand his wordplays as well as his sense of humour and his jokes.





*In time, Mario became well loved by his classmates. Many of them asked to be sat next to him in class and his presence was much requested during school outings because he was so likeable!*

For his part, Mario started to be happy to go to school, was able to remain in the classroom during lessons, interact with his classmates and stay up to date with the syllabus.

The rules written on the posters - which all the children had followed - as well as the activities created by the teacher based on Mario's passions, allowed him to get over his biggest fears.



PEGGY GUGGENHEIM  
COLLECTION



We could say that Mario, using his key, opened a very important door fundamental to his future: the door to language and words.

*How would Mario have been able to interact with his classmates and with the teacher if he had continued in isolation with his key, without the possibility of exchanging it first for other objects and later for words?*





*Mario found one of his greatest passions in language.*

He loved to invent words, stories, tales and poems. He continued to cultivate this passion and when he went on to middle-school once again became famous for the stories and poems he invented.

*We can affirm that Mario, thanks to the strategies set in motion by the teacher, was transformed: while before no one understood his way of communicating now, turned into a little writer,*

*he participated in school life with much more serenity and interacted with his schoolmates!*





# Orientation for working at school: “Practice among many”

## The times in Mario’s journey at school: from pacification to learning and social inclusion

Picking up the thread of Mario’s story, we want to highlight some of its salient moments.

Mario, covering his ears and expressing himself in an unintelligible language made of meaningless phonetic resonances, allows us to specifically identify the barrier the autistic child erects in regard to language but also to add an important precision: this barrier sinks its roots in a more profound rejection, particular to autism, of the use of the voice. More specifically, this rejection entails a difficulty to cede what is present in the playful use of the voice, losing it in favour of entering the world of the spoken world, of articulate language.

Small children experience a bodily satisfaction when they produce their first gurgles. They make a musical use of the voice that disregards the meaning of words. In the “normal” experience of language, there is a disjunction between language and voice. Indeed, when trying to grasp a meaning, the voice (or the phonetics) remain at the back of the field of perception. If we listen to a conference

in a foreign language that we don’t master, the great effort required to follow the phonetics frequently makes us lose a good part of the content. In general, phonetics tend to remain in the background and don’t affect our comprehension of the meaning of the phrases.

In the case of autistic children, issuing the voice has an anguishing effect, almost akin to a body part being torn off. In turn, the voice of others may be perturbing because it is experienced as an excessive and uncontrollable stimulus that resounds directly on the body. To protect themselves, some of them restrain their voice and/or cover their ears. This effect can be tempered through some artifices, such as singing, for example. The excess of the voice in the autistic experience can sometimes extend to other areas and manifest itself as a hyper-sensibility to other types of noises or ambient sounds.

In Mario’s experience, what appears in the forefront is the voice and its resonances, prevailing upon him. In the absence of a discrimination between voice and words, he listens to all the sounds of the tongue





and is hyper sensible to tones of voice. This effect resonates within his body, which is why he covers his ears. This situation, which made him suffer, has nevertheless become a great resource for him thanks to the accompaniment of his teacher.

The teacher took Mario in, in an appealing atmosphere regulated by a precise organisation of time and space. Nothing was left to chance, as the autistic child has trouble with unforeseen events and surprises.

The teacher tries to adjust to the difficulties of the child: instead of directing her requests directly to him she intervenes using a strategy of triangulation, speaking to other colleagues or to other children on the bet that Mario is listening.

Mario has a privileged object from which he never separates: the key is his autistic object. The teacher's interventions facilitate an encounter with the boy and make possible the displacement of the autistic object to other objects that progressively enrich his field of interest and open a path to learning.

The game of exchanging keys is a "gentle forcing" that accompanies him in the passage from a stereotyped and solipsistic use of an object to a new object of interest associated to the first through a common trait (the school keys that the teacher exchanges with Mario and then other objects from the classroom). Following this path, Mario makes his interests more complex each time and sets to work on enriching his own construction.

From his first constructions - centred on his interest in the resonances of words and on his ability to invent phrases - he will accumulate new knowledge and skills bit by bit, to then access a more general learning. The hypersensitivity in relation to the voice, which used to scare Mario, becomes a joyful satisfaction that enables him to develop a poetic ability in the use of words.

**Mario, with the help of the teacher who values his inventions, his linguistic abilities and his new learnings, was able to establish a bond with his classmates, reaching what we can truly call inclusion.**







## Families Speak

### The civilising effect of a possible inclusion

*María Jesús Sanjuán*

*President of the family association TEAdir-Aragón (Spain)*

There are many different autisms in the world of autism. Some may be included within the ordinary education system and others will require to follow different paths.

**In any case, we will meet a human being who sees the world from a very different position than ours.**

It will be precisely their gaze, hidden and elusive that will give us the first clue. Their words, scarce and frugal, will have to make us cautious when talking to them. Their movements, sometimes out of rhythm, will give us an idea of the fine wire they feel they tread. The serious demeanour will require us to somewhat lower the tone of our overwhelming sounds ... , and all that and much more will open the way for the new student.

As families, we present ourselves to the institutions scared and expectant but keen to help. **Our contribution is the great amount of information we possess about our children. Our children are**

**seen by the institutions as special students but this is an incomplete vision that often reduces them to a mere report in which singularity translates as deficiencies.** We should perhaps introduce a nuance, saying that **where institutions see special cases, what they encounter is uniqueness** and it is the families who can present it and present them in a favourable light. This is why joint work between the school and the family is the most effective means to reduce any pressure that the educator and the student may feel.

Here we have some examples of singularities to consider so as to be able to work with the student:

***On what occurs in class ...***

There frequently is no need to shorten the syllabus but it is necessary to go over its contents little by little with the student, using precise expressions and phrases that leave no room for different interpretations.



They don't need to be looking at the teacher or the blackboard to listen, the information will be better absorbed without the impact of the teacher's gaze.

If schoolwork can be done on a computer, why not allow it? The distance provided by a screen can be a tool for the student. We need to take into account that in some cases, adults with autism wear sunglasses to be able to maintain a conversation without feeling invaded by others.

It may happen that the student doesn't give the expected answer to an apparently obvious question. Before giving up on the matter, it is possible to try to reformulate the question or to guide them towards the point of interest. We should remember that their interests may not coincide with ours, so it might not be a question of not knowing the answer but of perspective, leading to a different answer.

On many occasions, writing exercises require much studying and that effort is marred by their incomprehensible wording. It is preferable to allow them to schematise their answers. Clarity and concision help them organise information.

It can't be expected for them to answer many requests at the same time or in quick succession. Let us bear in mind that they will have to decode the messages, so one by one is better than a bombarding.

**When approaching a student with ASD, it is important to first observe them, to not take anything for granted.** The specific student in front of the teachers is not equatable to the cases

described in those syllabus which treat ASD as an educational specificity, when broaching the subject of diversity. It is best not to presume to know all about the case before even encountering it. **The magical way is to take things case by case, knowing that the particular can lead to generalisations but not the other way round.**

The tools or resources for the student with ASD will always work for the rest of the class but will not have much effect contrariwise.

The accompaniment of our children has helped us families develop our own study techniques and we have built our own index of resources. It is important for the educator to keep that in mind and to allow for certain adaptations that may help the child follow the rhythm of the class, even if the elements used are not quite orthodox. The educator can even incorporate that difference by making the rest of the class participate. For example, a student for whom numbers were fundamental to ordering his life and his environment, would sum and subtract numbers from license plates. This singular interest was acknowledged by the teacher and applied to the rest of the class, becoming a way of practicing mathematical calculations through a game.

Consider the possibility of evaluating the student without submitting them to the pressure of various exams on the same day, dense with content and to even consider the possibility of fragmenting the exams programmed for a same subject.

It is important to keep in mind that what

happens in one setting may affect what happens in another very different space and time, which necessitates a permanent open channel of communication between all the people who share their time with the student with ASD.

It is the educator's task to become a facilitator of the student with ASD: to facilitate that the group understands that difference has a place in a world where there is a constant push for homogeneity; despite the bombardment of proposals for inclusion that nevertheless do not take the particular, the singular, the genuine of each person into account.

The student with ASD compels one to question oneself. They make one think about communication, about the fact that the familiar road is not always the way to deliver someone a message. That it sometimes requires changes, trials, even discomfort and it forces one to stop and withdraw for consideration, and that it may be tempting to abandon the attempt. But the reward obtained with the satisfaction of a student with ASD is unparalleled.

**The educational system must create and be open to proposals that incorporate students with ASD to all stages of education. To that end, any means allowing for a "true" inclusion must be made available, since SCHOOL is one of the most important tools they will have when they reach adulthood.**

Occasionally, we as families find ourselves overwhelmed by the impossibility to transmit that the modification of some

forms of behaviour does not interrupt the logic of a class and facilitates the passage of the student with ASD through the educational system enormously.

The students who go through ordinary schooling usually find themselves in great obstacle races. And the families, submitted to great pressure, end up passing that pressure on to their children, feeling they need to demonstrate twice as much as other children in order to have a place there.

As families, we advocate for the encouragement of conversations and training that produce a less stereotyped image of students with ASD than the one currently prevailing. We advocate for the creation of groups in which the student can feel they belong and in which "everyone" and "each one" can coexist.

**True inclusion concerns us all as a society and SCHOOL is a determining element in defining the type of society we want to be. The horizon of inclusion at stake as evidenced by autism, is also a bet on civilisation.**



# Families Speak

## The two faces of inclusion

Mireille Battut

President of the family association *La Main à l'Oreille* (France)

An inclusive society represents a sustained, coherent and convergent effort of society and we are at the beginning of a long and necessary road\* (1) It's about time!

Meanwhile, we exist... So, before exposing myself on the steep hill of an ideal of inclusion, I will speak with our words, our tongue, of the road we traverse, on the reverse of the norm. In a way, of the *verlan* (2) of inclusion.

### The reverse of the norm or the *verlan* of inclusion

I chose three moments of this journey: the discovery of the divergence, the manifestation of a social desire, the -modest- building of an inclusive community. It must be said that in this field, modesty is worth a thousand grandiloquent statements.

### **Very distinguished twins**

George and Louis were born twins. And it happened their trajectories soon separated. At the age when one watches *Le Manège enchanté* (3).

Georges tells me one morning: "Louis dreamt he ate carrots and fell asleep suddenly, like Flappy the rabbit!". A bit surprised, I ask him: "Is that your dream or Louis' dream?". He answers logically: "It is Louis' dream because Louis dreamt it". Georges includes Louis in his conversations with his stuffed toys, but little by little the aplomb of logic stumbles against an anguishing uncertainty ... "Why doesn't Louis speak?". To George, Louis seems to enjoy a state of satisfaction unaccessible to him. Meanwhile, George plays at ghosts under a sheet, like Louis. Following the preparations for an excursion, he says: "Louis will be happy, but ..." (thoughtfully) "why doesn't Louis speak?".

After a while, when school begins, the divergence is there. It ended up imposing itself. It asserts itself in the form of making a distinction between the brothers. I accepted this distinction; for Louis, with the forced assimilation that was recommended to us to bring him back to normality; for George, so he can be free of too heavy an enigma. I named them my very distinguished twins.

### **The manifestation of a wish in unison**

This distinction was pretty soon a part of our family organisation. When George, 6 years old, asks to "finally" go see the fireworks of the 15th of August, I can't help but say yes: there are no vacations in Toulon without fireworks! It is a spectacle that attracts thousands of people each year. But I ask myself, what about Louis? What if he panics? What if we lose him in the crowd? George will go with the rest of the family while Louis and I admire the spectacle from behind the window. Nevertheless, it so happens that when he sees the preparations for the departure, Louis firmly lets it be known that he wants to go as well. But of course, these boys are right! So we will go together.

We advance in the warm, enveloping night. The boys each hold the hand of an adult. George presses forwards, impatient. Louis adjusts his step to that of the crowd, at one with the march. He let out his feelers to sense the materiality of the distance in the rhythmic balancing of the moving bodies. He decided to love that moment. I experience the shared pleasure with the trust of his hand in mine.

As we reach the meeting point, the steps quicken, the excitement grows, the multitude is denser and sometimes a body deviates its course, impacting on ours. We arrive. The spectators have already congregated at the Mourillon fort. We find a protected portal and decide to sit there and await the show. Up to this point, Louis has borne the situation but now we have stopped, he begins to throw uneasy glances around him. He looks for a flight

angle. The escape is coming. I know the sign. "Do you want to come back, Louis?". We have agreed we would return home any time he wanted it. Nothing compels him to like crowds.

Louis is happy to pull my hand, showing he has memorised the way home. He jumps along the edges of the sidewalk and has fun brushing against people sitting on the terraces. I surprise myself thinking it is more fun to walk against the flow than to assist openmouthed to an established spectacle.

The first firecrackers explode right at the moment we were going around the corner. Louis hears them and turns his head in a reflex. Touched! No going back home. Now he is running towards the horizon where the multicoloured explosions succeed one another. Once he gets to the square, he turns to me and asks to go back to the portal where the rest of the family is.

**It was the irruption of an object commonly deemed to be attractive - the fireworks - that led Louis to want to join the rest of the family and enjoy it together. That day, I was glad to have listened to him but I would not have thought to impose it on him. Inclusion is not an imperative.**

### **A well bordered terrain institutes a community**

As he grew up, Louis instituted various tactics to always have the gaze of an adult on him - a gaze that no doubt helps him feel his existence - while a priori he appears indifferent to any other child. So much so



that nothing would seem to me further away from his spirit than a collective sport. So, to sign him up for rugby! The suggestion seemed so improbable ... that we could not but accept it.

**I can now say that nothing has shown me more about an inclusive society than the adapted rugby section of the Val de Bièvre Rugby Club. Because what it is about is the birth of a community in diversity.**

When we first arrived, none of the children participated in a collective spirit. Some of them were very uneasy with the demands that might be asked of them or with the shouts and movements of the other children. The monitors, attentive but not too directive, wanted them to be comfortable: we are here to have fun but we are not obliged to do so. There needs to be a time to calm down. Rugby is about contact. Once this stage was over, they were ready to release their energy happily.

Some of them felt the need to go for a wonderful escapade, trying out the possibilities offered by a great extension of green. Louis was one of them. Others tended to demand closeness and contact, making the matter of their autonomy difficult; a necessary stage before the team could play. **For Louis, a possibility of inscription in the game materialised when he was invited to go fetch the material and to participate in the preparation of the field.** Today it is almost a ceremony: Louis puts the posts around the field, he is in charge of establishing its borders. His role is to ensure everyone a welcome.

Louis is a master in his field. He is the master of the verlan of inclusion.

The activity is limited but not compartmentalised. It is a mixed section open to brothers and sisters and friends. Parents also have fun and chat on the stand during the practice. We record small videos of the action that we later share with our children, who adore watching themselves on the smartphone while the parents and the coaches marvel at their progress.

**The collective spirit that has been built is based on solidarity, not on competition.** In the field, they shove, shoot, make like a caterpillar, like a crab, like a lobster, they build forts, run in search of treasures and finish with throws, before the cakes and apple juice of the third half ... Rugby is figures, rules, rites that repeat themselves, reproduce themselves. At the beginning and at the end of each session we regroup, join our hands together, palms to the ground and yell “Chanka!” with all our hearts. Week after week, rain or shine, we would not miss it for the world.

**The motto of the club is: “Our rugby is not conjugated if not in the first person plural!”. That plural is added to the singular, it doesn’t substitute it, confirming each and everyone is the first person. Each one of these plurals is singular,** as evidenced by the fact that with every new season, a new plural is built around the new arrivals. Outside the field, there are also singular duos born in relation to a favourite object or a special interest: a car, a chronometer, maracas, ... friendships are made.

### ***The role of the norm, or the necessary transformation of schooling to welcome our existences***

#### ***A collective for a new citizenship***

Our collective of parents from Val de Bièvre began on the edge of the rugby field and it now shines over the whole of our administrative sector. Even if we may have had - or have - differences regarding the great controversies that have crossed the world of autism, about what it was or wasn’t convenient to include in the methods recommended; it matters little in view of what brings us together. **Our children have capacities that cannot remain in fallow land. They have a right to an education and to the preparation of their future.** Nevertheless, whether they began their itinerary at school or in a specialised establishment, they soon find themselves in a situation of exclusion.

At the beginning of this course, Enzo, 12 years old, has had to definitively leave the day hospital which he used to attend, finding himself at home, with no other social activity - as much for him as for his mother - than our rugby meets on Saturday mornings. Nevertheless, he has received a notification related to ten or so specialised establishments (IME, in France) of our Department. Unfortunately, all the establishments rejected his file: they are full or “outside the sector”. For my 14 year-old son Louis, the great plunge into Nothing is planned for his fifteenth birthday. We know there will be no places in a year. Like the other families, we are familiar with the countdown. We know that lacking

“places”, the administration has created “response mechanisms”. But these so-called solutions, temporary, improvised measures are already largely saturated (less than a hundred “mechanisms” before the almost thousand cases “without solution” in our Department). Consequently, by the time he has become a matter of priority, the boy will have lost all his achievements and will have regressed by virtue of going round in circles at home.

The worst of this being the isolation, we decided to address the public administration collectively (In France, the ARS, the Regional Health Agency and the MDPH, the Departmental Homes for Disabled People). We have thus been received as a “collective” and this **acknowledgement is the start of a new citizenship: an inclusive society will be built -and will only be built- by articulating the administration,** the professionals and the collectives. It was agreed we would work jointly to favour the articulation of solutions, and to meet twice-yearly to make a balance of the situation and to approach the matter of the extension of the number of places and innovative projects that the Health authority can approve.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to acknowledge the systemic character of the waterfall of difficulties at hand: while France decided to put an end to the “exile to Belgium”, nothing has been done to compensate for this in the country. The scarcity of solutions for adults, already patent, has become catastrophic. Therefore, adults are kept as long as possible in institutions for teenagers,



beyond the age limit, blocking the entry list for the younger applicants.

**To summarise the “inclusive society” as “home autonomy”, a betrayal of our children**

The President of the Republic pledged before the representatives for disability, to “not leave any disabled student without a solution regarding their schooling”. There is no doubt that an inordinate effort is being made to increase the number of disabled students admitted in primary school, an effort for which the adapted children education units represent a very positive trump card.

Unfortunately, many of them will not be able to tolerate school for long, because the way it is standardised currently is not inclusive. **The present stage may be qualified as integration, as it is necessary for the disabled child to adapt and not as inclusion, because the school has not changed to adapt to the disabled child.** As a result, many children have very reduced schedules, resting on the possibility of sharing mutualised companions.

Regarding those excluded from the educational system, they are simply not taken into account. Between, on one side, the so-called “school inclusion”, currently not possible unless the child is *at the very least* close to a particular norm and, on the other, the general disability policy subordinated to the “great domiciliary shift” of the Autonomy branch; there is nothing. **Our children have no place. Instead, they are oriented towards “mechanisms” that promise temporary “domiciliary support**

**with an objective of inclusion”.**

The public authorities cannot ignore the children who are left aside. Their access to adapted schooling should be contemplated within the framework of the disability policy, as it is the administration who orients it.

**Education is an obligation, a constitutional right, not an aspiration or a compromise.**

It follows that there should be as many places as children who receive notifications. However, the funding laws don’t make any provision for the adaptation of medico-social institutions to accommodate the necessities known to exist, but only home “abrogate measures”, many of which represent partial, individual solutions for the waiting and reprieve of the caregivers (aka the exhausted families). Even worse, these DIY solutions are qualified in ministerial instructions as “inclusive solutions in school and home”. **It is worrying to read that a so-called home “solution” would be termed an inclusive solution ...**

Let us put things in their place: **we ask for the State to be coherent and commit to establishing the structural means for the inclusivity of our children, which means - at the very least - their education.**

**The teacher of inclusion is not in the school**

And so? While he still has the privilege, Louis enjoys his welcome in a specialised establishment (the Vallée Foundation). Last Friday, when conversing with the

team, I found out Louis is very distracted. The hypothesis is that new arrivals have joined the group, and “Louis is not indifferent to them, pushing him to try and focus attention on himself”. The fact that the other young persons don’t leave him indifferent is no doubt an interesting evolution but it suggests that any change in the group will destabilise him and demand of him an effort to readjust. I note that this also happened with rugby at the beginning of the course, with the renovation and the addition of new players to the group.

We agree to suggest activities to Louis where his role is to welcome others, as when he makes the installation on the rugby field. Maybe he will feel invested and responsible for their inclusion. This works marvellously. Louis is proud to serve the midday meal to his schoolmates, which also helps to better moderate his own appetite.

Will the School of the Republic know to one day accept / propose that a (disabled) child be the master of ceremonies of the class, because that is how he functions when learning to be sociable? **And, knowing that what works for one does not necessarily work for another, will the School of the Republic know to include the multiple and unforeseeable modalities of our existence?**

**Notes**

(1) I am referring to a very serious work that addresses the steep road to arrive at “the full citizenship of disabled people in an inclusive society”. It is important to accentuate citizenship, words and the exercise of rights.

“An inclusive society is not made by decree, [...] it requires the dynamization of the political and territorial structures [...] it implies cultural changes and requires an approach by constructive and gradual stages, [...] so the words of the disabled citizen, their access to rights and the exercise of their duties may be fully satisfied at all levels of society, in all its territories.” Radian-Michels report for the full citizenship of disabled people in an inclusive society, June 19, 2019.

(2) Verlan is a form of French slang consisting in the inversion of syllables in the word, so words are pronounced backwards. In French, l’envers (backwards), pronounced backwards is “verlan”.

(3) Le Manège enchanté is a French cartoon series about a group of children and animals who experience adventures with a magic carousel.



# Postface

# 06

## Incomparable singularity

Educational centres' role is to teach about life, their objective is for a child to find a place in the society that takes them in, so they can participate in the great conversation of human beings.

It is not the only institution with this task. If school is in charge of it through the acquisition of knowledge, other sectors of society also participate, starting with the families, as well as associative, cultural and sporting life. It is an approach "between many" that requires the compromise of each and everyone, both professionals and families.

Children with autism go to school, it is a fact and it answers to a political will. Only, they are not so easily "teachable" and it sometimes occurs they perturb, revolutionise the classic functioning of the school. How can the school then accompany these children to comply with the task it is responsible for?

**Inclusion is the keyword that orients educational policies today. It prevails over integration, which itself aims towards a certain normalisation of the children,**

**so they "integrate" in society. Inclusion changes things, requiring the educational system to adapt to the particularities of the children to be able to embrace them.**

However, it must be said that inclusion based on specific needs and reasonable adaptations doesn't work if it takes the road of the protocols and the instruction manuals, if it goes the way of a "for all". This leaves many children and teachers without resources. Is there an alternative?

This small work, rather than offering recipes or models to follow that inevitably require children and teachers to fit within, proposes itself as a "guide". That is, it suggests an orientation in the accompaniment of autistic children in school.

This isn't easy because they defend themselves from the other's presence. What some of them want, produces anxiety in others and they are if anything, in a position of rejection, of negation. A great deal of tact, patience and questioning is necessary to be accepted as a partner.





Therefore, the precise and detailed indications gathered herein, regarding the relationship of autistic children with their body, space and time, emotions, the gaze, the voice, words, the demand, others and objects, are very valuable. Because, taking these characteristics into account, it is possible to find a fair position to support the child in their attempts.

**The emphasis on the children's special interests, rather than on their special needs not only allows for the creation of a bond, but it also provides satisfaction and an access to knowledge.** Temple Grandin is the paradigmatic example of this, because she was able to begin learning in school based on what school teachings could contribute to the construction of her hug machine. It was central to her interest and would later lead at a professional level to the construction of cattle chutes.

What autistic children show us in the first place - because it is a matter of being open to what they teach us and in this they are the "guides" - is that there is no "for all", there is no universal formula to accompany them, be it at school or elsewhere. It is more a matter of inventions, encounters and contingencies based on singularity, on that which makes every person different, a richness rather than a deficiency.

Mario's case is exceptional. Not so much as a model to copy but in as much as he has sustained rigorously - and his teacher with him - the invention he created to find a place in the world. Let us call attention to the fact that his teacher, his milieu and himself have been transformed.

**This is what makes every autistic child, like every human being, exceptional. There is no comparing, only incomparables.**



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