

Thank you very much. Forgive me if I have dressed up for you, but, if you don't mind, to feel freer, I asked for this chair so I could lean my jacket on it.

Well, I have given it an apparently provocative title, but it is not meant to be.

A city is educational if it allows girls and boys to educate themselves. Or allows boys and girls to educate themselves. Understanding "educate themselves" on their own, which is a little bit the opposite of being educated.

The general idea is that, when a boy is born, when a girl is born, a long period of time passes during which almost nothing happens. Like a time of training, of preparation, in which the most important thing is to look after them, protect them, make sure they are safe, so that they can reach the important phases, the important stages of life, in the best possible physical condition, which is considered to be the only thing that matters at this stage of life.

When Sigmund Freud was asked in an interview which had been the most important year of his life, he answered, without hesitation, the first one.

And in reality, that is how it is. It is not true that the child waits for what was once called "the age of reason", which coincided with the school experience, when the important learning of writing and counting began.

What I like to do at the beginning is describe how, on the contrary, children begin their experience of knowledge in a completely different way, discovering things and playing.

The two strong experiences with which the child begins to enter the world are surprise and play.

This is how, for example, the child discovers words, begins to speak. It is interesting to observe and reflect on the fact that nobody teaches children to speak.

And after learning it, we continue speaking throughout our lives. And we learned it by ourselves, discovering it, being surprised by it.

There is a moment, at the very beginning of life, after just a few days, when the child discovers that the air coming out of their mouth can produce a sound.

Of course, they had already cried and sounds had also come out, but probably the boy or girl was so immersed in the

reason for that crying, in anger, pain or whatever it was, that they had neither the time nor the possibility to reflect on it.

But a moment comes when a sound is produced. This surprises the child so much that they would like to reproduce it, but they do not know how, until it happens again.

And it happens again and again, until they discover how they can produce it themselves.

And a new phase begins in the life of girls and boys, what in Italian we call “lallazione” and what you call babbling. A phase that parents know very well, very tiresome: the child who keeps... playing with their voice, playing with their voice.

This is tremendously important, because at a strange moment, and purely by chance, “mama, mama, mama” comes out.

The family explodes, like the stands when there is a goal: everyone on their feet. “She said mama!”

No, the child was playing, but “mama” came out. And the family congratulates them enthusiastically, they call grandma... Well, it is a moment that I think all families remember.

And of course the child, because they see that they have such a great success, repeats it and discovers that these words, which they do not know are words, have an impressive effect.

When they say “mama”, their mother appears. That is to say, these are sounds that cause the appearance of the person who, for them, is the world, and this gives them enormous power. And that is why they keep calling her.

The child discovered the word, discovered speech, and from then on, throughout their whole life.

This is how children discover drawing. They discover it because, by chance, one day the moving hand leaves a mark.

This surprises a child. Normally, a moving hand does not leave marks. By chance, in this case, the hand had a marker, for example.

But the child does not notice this. And they see this mark, and once again the same thing happens. It happens once and again until they realise that they can look for something that leaves marks, and this new experience of drawing lines begins.

What we call “scribbles”, which is  
a derogatory word, something bad, a scribble.

On the contrary, it is a form of art, because  
this is where the whole experience of graphic expression begins,  
through play. Playing, in this case, with marks.

And one can say: well, yes, we accept that, but then  
we have to wait until the age of six, when they start school.

No. Throughout this period, from the first  
days of life until the age of six, an enormous number of things  
happen.

I am not an expert, I cannot describe them all, but  
I like to give one more example before moving on to the broader issue  
that we have to address.

We are around the age of three. When I heard  
my eldest son say to me: “Dad, I have discovered.”

I was surprised because my son said “discovered”.  
So it seemed to me almost as if he were going backwards.  
He had said it correctly and then he said it incorrectly.

But of course I did not remain with that  
initial impression and I tried to understand it.

And what I understood almost frightened me.  
I discovered that my son had understood, he knew that verbs  
have conjugations.

I say this almost with fear, because  
he was three years old. And now I know that all children around  
the age of three make this discovery.

They know that verbs have conjugations.

And in our languages they have three  
conjugations. And that the third one, in the past participle, correctly  
ends in “-it”. Therefore, *discover*, which belongs to the third  
conjugation, has to become “discovered”, despite what his father  
says.

This is impressive. Children discover  
rules and apply them with an almost religious fidelity.

And of course, from that point on, who knows how many  
things he discovered, and all the children of that age.

I remember that in Costa Rica, in a nursery school,  
I was talking to the children and a three-year-old boy said to me:  
“Do you know, Francesco, that my cat has died?”

“Has died.” *To die* belongs to the third conjugation.

When my son turned six, like all boys and girls, he went to school.

On his first day of school, his teacher asked him to fill the first page of his new notebook by writing A. A whole page of A's.

His teacher thought, interpreted, considered that my son, like all his classmates and schoolmates, were ignorant and illiterate and had been conjugating verbs for three years.

This is one of the enormous problems of education.

Yesterday I met some children from here. We spent a very pleasant time, at least for me, and I told them this anecdote and asked them whether this had happened to them too, because I imagined it had —my son is now almost sixty years old, so it could have happened a long time ago.

Well, there were eight or nine children. When I asked those who had written a whole page of A's to raise their hands, all of them, I think, except one, raised their hands.

Even today, a six-year-old child is still considered illiterate.

This way of discovering through surprise and play is useful in many areas of our lives.

It is useful for walking, for eating, for controlling our bowels and bladder, for going to the toilet. Well, all these things that are part of the beginning of our lives, we discover by ourselves.

Until forty years ago, it was considered that, until the 1980s, more or less, this way of learning continued when the front door of the house opened, at around four, five or six years of age, no later, because at that time all boys and girls went to school without adults.

There was nobody accompanying their child to school. It was a huge problem to do so, because these children were considered disabled children, socially disabled, that is to say, children who had parents who accompanied them.

It was a disgrace.

And all children went outside to get used to living in the street, and in the street this learning continued, which is called incidental learning, that is, learning that happens by chance.

And in the street they learned to get to know one another, to know others and to know the other gender, to recognise that we are different in character and physically, by playing.

Well, I think you all know what playing doctors means.

It is a fundamental stage of our childhood.

This is how they learned about dangers, obstacles, and developed strategies to overcome them, master them, control them or avoid them.

They learned how to fight and how to make peace, because the next day they wanted to play again.

They experienced the satisfaction of success, the pride of achievement and the frustration of failure.

Frustration at five, six, seven or eight years old is hard, but it passes. Because the next day we want to play again.

We have to develop strategies to repair the fight, to repair the conflict.

Experiencing frustration for the first time at fourteen can be fatal.

Unfortunately, we have seen an increase in suicide attempts, even for causes of this kind, apparently trivial ones.

Discovering new things. Continuing with this idea of playing with words, outside the home they continued discovering plants, animals, ways of being, corners, ways of escaping the control of adults... Well, many things.

Yesterday John Powell, in that beautiful lecture he gave us, said that belonging is impossible without otherness.

And I thought: perhaps that is true.

And it occurred to me that there is one case in which there is belonging without otherness. And that is exactly when children play without adults.

If there are no adults, children get together and look for ways of living together.

This is also very important from a perspective of social integration through children.

I could give many examples, but I do not have time.

I will give just two.

In the summer, my family used to go to a small village, which was my wife's village, a depopulated village that had almost no children, but which was a village of French emigration.

And in the summer it became quite full and there were many French children.

And my children would go out after breakfast and appear again for lunch, disappear and come back again for dinner.

And I remember talking to them and saying:  
"But what do you do?"

"We play."

"But do you play with children who speak another language? You don't know French?"

And they could not answer me, but they went out anyway, every day.

And they knew how to play with children without understanding them, without understanding the language.

How did they do it, perhaps?

The other example is a friend who told me that she had a son who always talked to her about a friend called Pablo.

But he was in the first year of primary school and she did not know this Pablo.

One day the teacher called her in to tell her something, and when she arrived in the classroom she took the opportunity to call her son and say: "Show me Pablo."

"Oh, Pablo is the one wearing the red jumper."

Pablo was the only Black child in the class.

And he was the one wearing the red jumper.

The colour of his skin meant nothing.

For forty years now, something very strange, new and ongoing has been happening.

The front door closes.

It is estimated that, around the 1980s, families in our countries —many countries— decided that a boy or a girl could not go outside alone.

They had to be accompanied.

This new development changed children's entire lives.

And it changed family life.

And it changed the life of the city.

We had to invent things to do with children if they could not leave the house to spend the afternoon with their friends.

Before moving on to this second part, which is the part to which I would like to devote a good amount of time to describe what we are proposing, we need to observe one thing.

After this stage came school.

And obviously, in most cases, for example, in the schools of my colleagues yesterday afternoon, where children learned to write by doing a page of A's, this whole process of discovery was abruptly—I will not say dramatically—but in some way, yes, interrupted.

Nothing was discovered there, because everything was prepared.

What is prepared is called a curriculum.

And the curriculum is brought by the teacher.

And the role of the children is to listen.

To learn because someone explains things to you.

And they explain to you not what interests you, as when you looked for it yourself, but what is planned.

And the leading role shifts from the children to the adults.

And the adult considers that their pupils, more or less, are empty.

They are empty vessels.

Into which they put new things.

And after a while they can measure how much the vessel has been filled.

The extraordinary thing is that all this happens in a situation of equality that has no equivalent in any other experience in life.

The pupils are all the same age.

This is extremely unusual.

As if they were twins, a class of twins.

It looks like a horror film.

That is how it is.

That is how it was for all of us.

Of course, it is not compulsory.

It is not always like that.

Marta Mata has been mentioned.

Marta Mata, besides being an important Catalan politician, was a very important educator.

I was lucky enough to know her, to be her friend.

And Marta Mata belonged to this world of education which, inspired by teachers such as Célestin Freinet, the French educator, considered that children had the right to discover and continue discovering inside and outside school.

In other words, the school was interested in what children brought from outside.

Free writing —I cannot go into technical aspects now— is like a gateway for outside life into the life of the school.

The school day for these teachers... Well, to put it simply, I think many of you know the film *The Teacher Who Promised the Sea* and, although it is very dramatic, the whole educational part is exactly what I am talking about.

School was and is done this way, because these teachers, fortunately, still exist: starting with the experience of the children.

Children bring to school what they have experienced in the afternoon. That is why these teachers do not give homework, do not assign tasks, do not occupy children's time with absurd things, forgive me, but instead allow them to experience very important things such as free play, so that they can bring them to school the next day.

These teachers exist. Unfortunately, there are few of them, and there should be all of them, because this is one of children's rights: to have this kind of education.

Of course, I was saying that a huge issue arises: what do we do with children if we think they cannot go out into the street?

And this is where things usually begin, when there is a need. This mobilises many interests, both economic and political and social.

On the one hand, the school raises its hand and says: "It's me," and the school extends its service.

In Italy, my school, my children's school, was four hours a day: from half past eight to half past twelve. Then lunch at home and the afternoon, as I said.

Now school is from half past eight to half past four. Not always, not all schools, but most of them.

And they give homework and the family is almost happy about it, because that way they have something to do during the afternoon.

Then activities were invented that did not exist in my time.

In my time, we played football. Today this is not possible.

Today, children study football. It is something different: it is a course, you pay for it, there is a teacher, a teacher called a coach, who teaches you how to play football.

We played it our own way, inventing rules or imitating rules.

Well, that would be for another lecture.

That is why activities make it possible to make a child's schedule, a girl's schedule, today more complicated than that of their parents.

Also because their parents have to accompany their children to all these activities and they cannot afford to do the same themselves.

Because if they do their own activities, they cannot guarantee those of their children.

Ah, well, I forgot about... There is this drawing. Well, forgive me, I will come back to it in a minute.

This is when I was talking about children's drawings.

This is a drawing by Vanna.

Vanna is a girl from Reggio Emilia.

And I met her when I was visiting the Diana school, which is one of the well-known schools in Reggio Emilia.

I was a friend of Loris Malaguzzi, so I used to go to Reggio Emilia often.

And Vanna, when I met her, was six years old, already in primary school.

She came to the Diana school to say hello to her teachers and I was there.

When she came in, the teachers showed me this drawing, which was this size, drawn with Indian ink, with many details.

It is an important drawing for a five-year-old girl.

And I said to her: “Vanna, you are coming back from primary school, aren’t you?”

She says: “Do you have a notebook?”

And Vanna shows me her notebook.

And I take this photograph.

This is the photograph of Vanna’s notebook at the age of six.

A drawing of three characters, more or less like the previous one.

Well, another time, when I come back and you have another hour to give me, we will talk about what happened to Vanna during these few months.

Growing almost a year older, her drawing has become this.

Well, I was saying that when faced with the question of what to do with children, many forces come into play.

I said: the school expands, activities are born.

Cities say: “Don’t worry, vote for me and I will create play spaces for children.”

These spaces are the same all over the world, with swings and slides, in some cases, as in Italy, fortunately, open.

In other cases, for example, in Argentina,  
enclosed by fences to protect them, where children only go  
accompanied by adults.

So they will spend some time there playing.

This is what we think.

Until they get tired, because that is the deal.

“I’ll take you, when you’re tired you tell me and  
we go home.”

And what happens is something that should  
worry adults a great deal, because children get tired.

After spending some time waiting in line for the  
swing, or using the slide, they approach the adult and say:  
“Mum, Dad, I’m tired.”

And we cannot say it, but inside we say:  
“Well, thank goodness, let’s go home, because I have lots of things  
to do.”

So we think that we have fulfilled our duty, and  
in some way the children have fulfilled theirs too.

What we do not think is that a child who is playing never  
gets tired.

They forget they are hungry.

They forget to go to the toilet.

They wet themselves.

But they do not stop playing.

Our mother used to call us many times because  
dinner had gone cold, it was ready, but for us  
finishing the game was impossible.

A child who tells you “I’m tired” means that  
they have not played.

And then toys were born, an industry,  
a factory.

There are toy supermarkets and shopping centres.

When I was a child there were no toys; it was  
after the war.

We played enormously, enormously.

If I could explain to you how I played when I was little, I would need an entire morning to do it, and there were no toys.

Well, we made the toys ourselves.

So everything surrounding children costs a great deal.

Activities cost money, toys cost money, and then screens arrive.

Television was a nanny, a nanny that took care of the children.

In front of the television they were not exposed to risks.

And the whole discussion with paediatricians began, who said: “Yes, there are risks.”

There are risks of childhood obesity, risks to eyesight, risks to attention.

And this whole issue began of how much time a child should spend in front of a screen.

“The less, the better.”

For God’s sake, do not put a television in the children’s bedroom.

But in many homes televisions arrived in the children’s bedrooms.

And finally the mobile phone arrived.

The mobile phone solves all the problems.

The mobile phone enters children’s lives from the first days of life.

It seems, and I say this with great bitterness, that it is common for mothers who are breastfeeding their child to use that time when they have nothing else to do to read messages, to exchange them.

This is dramatic, it is dramatic.

These things need to be taught in schools, to girls and boys: this cannot be done.

Because in those first days of life, when the child gets tired of breastfeeding from their mother’s breast, always and in all cultures they stop and look at her.

And of course, if the mother is looking at something else, the child does not find her.

This dialogue of looks is considered the beginning of a relationship.

That is why it is something...

There are videos, videos that I saw decades ago, made in different cultures, and this game of looks between the baby and the mother who is breastfeeding them is always repeated.

They simply do not know.

I imagine that this is not talked about at school, at least.

And the mobile phone gets into the hands of a newborn child, a few months old, because it contains songs and images designed for children of that age.

It is not accidental.

The mobile phone helps pass the time while we are in a restaurant and so the child does not bother us.

Most Italian children of primary school age have a mobile phone.

Exactly.

Normally parents like this very much because, for them, for us, it has been difficult to get used to this wonderful, enormous machine, where the whole world is and which can solve all problems, but it has not been easy.

For me it is still extremely complicated.

A child learns it in a very short time.

It is estimated that a seven- or eight-year-old child knows how to discover everything that is inside a mobile phone, so parents neither imagine nor suspect how children use it.

Today we think that this is the strongest, most important and most serious problem facing childhood.

It is interesting to observe that the day before yesterday was the anniversary of the project “The City of Children and Girls”, which was born exactly thirty-five years earlier, on 27 May, in my city, Fano, when I proposed this project to the Municipal Council and the Council approved it.

In the speech that I presented to the Council and which I have on my computer, because it forms part of the Municipal Council minutes, the official record, everything that happened is there and my words are there too.

And in this speech, the first thing that I asked for, in 1991, was that children should be able to go out of the house again without adults in order to experience play.

Considering—for me this was very clear from then on, and it is also clear to everyone who works in child development—that play is the most important experience not of childhood, but of life, even more than studying.

Someone who knew something about science, such as Einstein, says, writes, that play is the highest form of research.

Therefore, play disappears from a child's experience from the moment children can no longer leave home alone.

The verb “to play” cannot be conjugated with verbs such as “accompany”, “control”, “watch over”.

It can only be conjugated with the verb “let”.

You have to let them.

“I’m afraid, I don’t know, my husband doesn’t agree...”

Well, as you wish, but they do not play.

There is no other way.

Of course, one of the things learned in the street was to take into account the rules set by the family.

My mother was afraid too. I was also afraid when my children were small, but there was no alternative and I let them, I let them with rules.

And the children knew that if they did not follow the rules, there would be consequences.

In my childhood they could be physical or simply consequences, such as not being allowed out the next day or things like that.

But I had to obey all of them, but I could break them.

Transgression is a very important experience, a bad one, but an important one.

And it is always a complicated assessment.

“Do I respect what they are asking me to do or not?”

And if I do not, I know there will be consequences.

This is how a moral sense is learned.

Building a moral sense at four, five,  
six, eight years old, and not starting at fourteen, fifteen or sixteen.

Well, let us move on to the final part.

From this moment when I ask the City Council of  
Fano to give children back the possibility of going outside  
as a political and social objective for the city.

For the city to take responsibility for it.

To know how to invite children to go out and  
families to let them go out.

Opening a debate about why this does not happen.

This is also a mystery.

Normally people say they cannot go out because  
today's city does not allow it.

It would be interesting to explore this  
sentence a little further.

Why does it not allow it?

Today you have all the data.

A city has all the data because they are  
computers.

The police know everything about a city.

We can check whether Granollers, for example, in the  
last forty years, has become a more dangerous city or  
a safer one.

I do not know, but I would bet that it is safer.

Much safer.

Crime has probably gone down, as have  
incidents and deaths from traffic accidents.

But there are many more cars.

Yes, but they are much safer.

There are many more safeguards.

There are laws that have intervened.

They are not enough.

We think they should be better.

We can do more, but it is already important to consider that the city where I was a child was a bombed city and we played among the ruins, where there were remnants of war, very dangerous ones, and that was where we played.

So it is not true.

What has changed is fear.

Danger has gone down and fear has gone up.

And this is an effect of other social mechanisms, such as information.

Information is obsessive.

I have noticed this a lot during my recent trips around Spain, for example: how a piece of news on the television news about something that has happened, especially if it is something bad, behind the words spoken by the journalist, the images are repeated two, three, four, five, six times in a row.

This creates in the mind an idea of frequency that does not correspond to reality.

And with social networks this is multiplied and we arrive at viral images, which means that not only does the whole of Spain see them, but the whole world.

And it is a fact that seems extremely frequent, almost habitual.

And of course, when I think that it may be habitual...

It has not even been an hour.

I started at a quarter past and I am using all of it.

Forgive me.

Well, I found...

The final stage is this: in our international project we are proposing a campaign called "I Go Out to Play".

We think that, given the power of a mobile phone, it is not enough to say: do not use it.

"I give it to you, but do not use it."

"I give it to you, but I control you."

“I give it to you, but we agree that you will not use it.”

It should reach children’s hands from a certain age onwards.

When will it be useful?

When will it be necessary?

Probably at fourteen, sixteen... I do not know.

When will they need it?

And that is why we are opening this proposal that we call “I Go Out to Play”, proposing something that children aged four, five, six, eight, ten or twelve might find more interesting than a mobile phone.

Going out to play with friends every day without adults.

I met children from several countries: from Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Portugal, Spain and Italy.

A month ago there was a small group of children representing these countries.

I talked to them.

What did they think about the mobile phone?

And some impressive things came out.

They told me: “The mobile phone is dangerous. There is a lot of violent information and it has the potential to become an addiction.”

“It is like a silent poison.”

“You do not know who is inside it.”

“Things appear that sometimes you do not even want to see.”

“With it we become blind.”

“It is like a drug that you do not eat, but watch.”

“The mobile phone traps us.”

“And when they call us to play, we do not want to go.”

There were not many children, so I came up with a proposal that I will repeat here and with which I will finish.

They were...

You are not aware of what we are talking about.

What you are telling me means that you know.

I suggest that you become the protagonists of this struggle.

Not that adults force you.

Ask for it.

And I asked the children to ask their parents:

“I give up my mobile phone if you allow me to go out every day to play with my friends without you being there.”

And to tell teachers:

“We are willing to give up our mobile phones if you give up giving us homework.”

Not because we do not want to work.

If we need it, we do it in class.

But the afternoon is for playing.

If we have homework, we do not have time to play.

Well, that is why now, the last five minutes...

I am sorry, but I am here to keep my promise.

I will use them to show you these images, which are cartoons that I prepared specifically for this campaign, and I will simply go through them, reading the texts.

“I Go Out to Play.”

And the parents answer:

“We love you so much that we let you.”

“They are irritable.”

“They won’t leave me alone.”

“They touch everything. They get bored.”

“I don’t know what to do.”

“Give them the mobile phone. It’s fantastic.”

“Bye. I’m going downstairs to play with my friends.”

“But don’t run, don’t cross the street, don’t get dirty.”

“Well, it would be better to stay at home with the PlayStation.”

“You cannot go out alone because the street is dangerous.”

“There is traffic.”

“Stay at home with the mobile phone.”

“These are the images of the rape.”

“We explain to them how and where to find drugs.”

“Here are the horrible images of the victims of the massacre.”

“The prohibited images of violence.”

“You do not need to go out to see Juliet.”

“You can meet on a video call.”

“But I wanted to kiss her.”

“Doctor, Paula is six years old.”

“She is always bored, sad.”

“Is there any treatment?”

“Of course. Let her go out alone every day to play with her friends.”

“Out at four.”

“Bye, Dad. I’m going out to play with Pablo.”

“Out of the house, but there, with the doors open, without any danger.”

And then they win the staircase.

“Out at five.”

“I was the teacher, but tomorrow we will play theatre or market.”

These were the games I played on the staircase when I was little.

“Bye, I’m going out to play with Rosa and Luis.”

“When I come back I’ll tell you about it, but not everything.”

But a friend will always be better than a mobile phone.

We hope so.

Thank you.

