

# ENSURING CHILDREN'S RIGHTS TO DEVELOPMENT

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## ONE-DAY CONFERENCE

CHILD RIGHTS & INCLUSIVE EDUCATION:  
LEARNING, DIALOGUE AND LIVED EXPERIENCES

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## REFLECTIONS ON PROMOTING GROWTH AND BEST EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES IN THE FIELD

The following is a paper presented on January 19, 2026, at the University of Crete in Rethymno, within the framework of a conference on children's rights organized by the university in cooperation with UNICEF and the Erasmus Office.

### *Introduction*

When we speak of the child's right to development, as enshrined in Article 6 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, we cannot limit ourselves to a reductive vision that considers only physical and cognitive aspects.

Development must be understood in a holistic sense: physical, mental, intuition, impulse-desire, emotion-feeling, imagination as reported in functions's star used in Psychosynthesis of Roberto Assagioli

I would like to share a reflection on how this right can be translated into educational practices that respect the child's wholeness, preserving that authentic and transpersonal dimension that is too often sacrificed on the altar of social conformity.

### *1. Transpersonal Development: Preserving the Thread of Authenticity*

Roberto Assagioli's Psychosynthesis invites us to recognize the child as an evolving consciousness that carries within it a transpersonal dimension—a connection to something vaster than the ordinary personality.

Giovanni Pascoli spoke of the inner "fanciullino" (the "little child") as that authentic, wondering part capable of awe and a poetic vision of reality.

This inner child is precisely what the traditional educational system constantly risks suffocating through what we might call "educastration"—a process that stifles spontaneity, creative imagination, and intuitive connection with the world.

Schooling, in its drive toward conformity, often cuts the thread connecting the child to their authentic spiritual dimension. When we ask children to all respond in the same way or to follow standardized paths, are we responding to their developmental needs or to the organizational requirements of the system?

Instead, development requires cultivating:

- The capacity for inner listening and contact with one's deepest Self.
- Creative imagination as a bridge to transpersonal dimensions.

- The capacity for wonder and empathic connection with all living beings.
- Respect for individual timelines of spiritual maturation.

Our educational task should be to accompany the child on their journey of individuation, protecting that sacred space where they can remain in contact with their authenticity before social masks become prisons of the soul.

## *2. The Montessori Method: Workshops for Harmonious Development*

Maria Montessori, medical doctor and pedagogue, who inspired Assagioli in his writings on the education of the future, intuited something revolutionary: the child is not an empty vessel to be filled, but a being endowed with a natural drive toward self-construction.

Her method responds perfectly to the need for integral development because it is based on fundamental principles that preserve the child's authenticity.

Montessori experiential laboratories are characterized by:

- **The Prepared Environment:** Not a traditional classroom, but a space where every element is designed to invite autonomous exploration. The child can choose, move freely, and follow their own interests. This respects heterochrony: every child has their own timing and original rhythms of development.
- **Developmental Materials:** Concrete objects that allow for direct sensory experience. Learning does not happen through verbal imposition, but through doing, touching, and experimenting. Abstraction emerges from concrete experience; it does not precede it.
- **Guided Freedom:** The child is free to choose, but within a structured environment. This is what

Montessori called “active discipline”—not blind obedience, but self-discipline born from genuine interest.

- **The Educator as Observer:** The adult is not at the center as a dispenser of knowledge, but at the margins as a facilitator. They observe, understand individual needs, and intervene only when necessary. This preserves the space for the child's self-determination.

In Montessori laboratories, we see children working with deep concentration for long periods on activities they have chosen themselves, simultaneously developing autonomy, cognitive skills, and that inner satisfaction that comes from following an authentic impulse.

The “Emotion of Knowing” (Emozione di Conoscere) method represents a revolutionary paradigm, particularly important for children with disabilities, yet valuable for all children.

We have a duty to remember that too often, in the life of a child with a deficit, the emotion of discovery is stifled by mechanical learning paths, where “being able to do” is subordinated to “demonstrating competence.” But what is the purpose of learning to read a clock, make a coffee, or count coins if it does not spring from an authentic desire?

The fundamental difference lies between “acting out autonomy” and “being autonomous.” A child can mechanically learn to pack their backpack, but this is quite different from knowing how to decide what to bring, when to get ready, and what is truly needed—that is, being capable of governing oneself based on authentic intentionality.

Key principles of this approach include:

- **Heterochrony:** Recognizing that every child, especially those with disabilities, has original rhythms and non-linear development. There is no “one-size-fits-all” path.

- **Globality:** Every intervention must consider the person as a complex system—emotions, relations, and context. We cannot teach isolated skills.
- **Opportunities:** Instead of pre-organized itineraries, we seize real, emotionally significant opportunities where the authentic need to act, to know, and to do emerges.
- **Active Experience vs. Passive Endurance:** It is essential to move from a style where the child undergoes experiences organized by the adult to a style where the child activates themselves in relation to their own goals and needs.

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Intelligence is not the sum of skills possessed, but the capacity for self-determination and the ability to understand and interact consciously with one's context. This capacity is nourished by emotion—the energy that transforms obstacles into a pleasant adventure and effort into satisfaction.

### *Conclusion*

The child's right to development is thus much more than a legal principle: it is an invitation to profoundly rethink our educational practices.

Whether it is preserving the transpersonal dimension by nurturing the “inner child,” creating Montessori environments where direct experience guides learning, or supporting the “emotion of knowing” in children with disabilities, the common thread remains the same: respecting authenticity, protecting intentionality, and nourishing the passion for discovery.

Only then do we truly fulfill our duty to ensure that every child can develop “to the maximum extent possible”—not toward a predefined model of compliant adulthood, but toward the full expression of their own original humanity.

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