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Qualified listening and its relevance in the implementation of socio-educational measures

A Escuta qualificada e sua relevância na execução das medidas socioeducativas

Angela do Céu Ubaíara Brito^{1,2} , Ricardo Fabrício Alves Malafaia³ 

¹ Universidade do Estado do Amapá, Colegiado de Pedagogia, Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação. Macapá, AP, Brasil. Correspondence to: A. C. U. BRITO: E-mail: <angela.brito@ueap.edu.br>.

² Universidade do Estado do Amapá, Colegiado de Pedagogia, Programa de Pós-Graduação em Recursos Naturais da Amazônia. Macapá, AP, Brasil.

³ Instituto do Melhor Ensino Superior do Amapá, Colegiado de Psicologia. Macapá, AP, Brasil.

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze qualified listening as a tool within social pedagogy for the planning and management of socio-educational measures. The specific objectives are: to assess its contribution to the development of a contextualized, Individual Care Plan; to investigate its impact on adolescent engagement; and to identify challenges and opportunities in the integration between the Unified Social Assistance System and the facilities responsible for implementing socio-educational measures. A qualitative case study was conducted at a Specialized Social Assistance Reference Center in the city of Macapá (Brazil). Data collection involved two focus groups (seven adolescents and four professionals), semi-structured interviews, and document analysis of 22 records. All sessions were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using content analysis with data triangulation and intercoder reliability above 85%. Qualified listening facilitated the co-construction of care plans tailored to individual needs, as evidenced by the adolescents' active participation in proposing activities and greater adherence to the Individual Care Plan. Participants reported feelings of relief and safety, along with strengthened bonds and team consensus on the importance of clear listening protocols. Gaps were identified in the standardization of procedures and inter-institutional communication, alongside potential for expanding support networks. Qualified listening proved essential for the effectiveness of socio-educational measures by fostering youth protagonism, increasing plan adaptability, and strengthening support networks. The institutionalization of participatory listening protocols and ongoing professional training is recommended, as well as further research to consolidate restorative practices and ensure the sustainable social reintegration of adolescents.

Keywords: Listening effort; Participatory planning; Social inclusion; Socioeducation; Teaching.

Resumo

Analisar a escuta qualificada como instrumento na pedagogia social voltada ao planejamento e à gestão de medidas socioeducativas, com objetivos específicos de: avaliar sua contribuição para a construção de um Plano de Atendimento Individual contextualizado; investigar seu impacto no engajamento dos adolescentes; e identificar desafios e potencialidades na integração entre o

Sistema Único de Assistência Social e as unidades de execução de medidas socioeducativas. Adotou-se abordagem qualitativa por meio de estudo de caso no Centro de Referência Especializado de Assistência Social em Macapá, com dois grupos focais (sete adolescentes e quatro profissionais), entrevistas semiestruturadas e análise documental de 22 registros. As sessões foram gravadas, transcritas e submetidas à análise de conteúdo com triangulação de dados e conferência intercoder acima de 85 %. A escuta qualificada favoreceu a co-construção de um plano ajustado às demandas individuais, evidenciada pela proposição ativa de atividades e maior adesão ao Plano de Atendimento Individual. Foram relatados alívio e sensação de segurança pelos jovens, fortalecimento de vínculos e consenso na equipe sobre a importância de protocolos claros de escuta. Identificaram-se lacunas na padronização de procedimentos e na comunicação interinstitucional, bem como potencial para ampliar redes de apoio. A escuta qualificada comprovou ser essencial para a efetividade das medidas socioeducativas, ao promover protagonismo juvenil, adaptabilidade dos planos e fortalecimento das redes de apoio. Recomenda-se institucionalizar protocolos de escuta participativa e investir em formações continuadas, além de ampliar pesquisas para consolidar práticas restaurativas e garantir reinserção social sustentável dos adolescentes.

Palavras-chave: Escuta ativa; Planejamento participativo; Inclusão social; Socioeducação; Ensino.

The historical and legal framework of socio-educational measures in Brazil is rooted in the 1988 Federal Constitution, which, for the first time, established the accountability of adolescents in conflict with the law with an emphasis on social reintegration rather than mere punishment. Law No. 12,594/2012 (SINASE, National System for Socio-Educational Care) reinforces this foundation by defining guidelines for implementing such measures – from deprivation of liberty to open-environment alternatives – and highlighting the need for integrated management across the justice, social assistance, and education sectors. This legal evolution underscores the urgency of adopting practices that ensure the active participation of adolescents in shaping their socio-educational trajectories, aligning with human rights and citizenship principles.

Within this perspective, qualified listening emerges as a central element of the social pedagogy applied in socio-educational service units. More than a technical procedure, it is a mechanism that acknowledges each youth's individuality by attending to their needs, expectations, and cultural backgrounds. Scholars such as Monte (2011) emphasize that creating spaces for expression and dialogue not only promotes youth autonomy but also legitimizes adolescents' voices in the formulation of follow-up strategies.

Qualified listening is operationalized primarily through the development and monitoring of the *Plano de Atendimento Individual* (PAI, Individual Care Plan). This document is collaboratively constructed by professionals from various fields – such as social workers, psychologists, and educators – who define tools, procedures, and goals for behavioral and educational progress. The active participation of adolescents in building the PAI not only enhances its alignment with their actual needs but also fosters a sense of belonging and accountability in their own social reintegration processes.

The present study explores the impact of qualified listening on the planning and management of socio-educational measures, examining how this practice contributes to more contextualized PAI, how it influences adolescent engagement, and what challenges and potentialities arise from the integration between the *Sistema Único de Assistência Social* (SUAS, Unified Social Assistance System) and socio-educational service units. Conducted at a *Centro de Referência Especializado da Assistência Social* (CREAS, Specialized Social Assistance Reference Center), the study aims to address gaps in the existing literature – particularly regarding detailed descriptions of listening tools and their effects on youth autonomy – thereby contributing to the improvement of policies and practices in the socio-educational field.

Method

Participants

This study was conducted at the CREAS located in the city of Macapá (Amapá State, Brazil) and involved 11 participants, divided into two subgroups. The first group included seven adolescents (ages 12 to 18) undergoing socio-educational measures of Assisted Freedom or Community Service. These participants were from peripheral neighborhoods of Macapá and were selected for convenience based on institutional records. The second group consisted of four technical team professionals – a psychologist, a social worker, an occupational therapist, and an educational psychologist – all with more than two years of experience in socio-educational support.

Instruments

To explore the contributions of qualified listening to the planning and management of socio-educational measures, three main instruments were used. First, focus groups were conducted in two formats: FG1 with adolescents and FG2 with technical staff. Each session lasted approximately 90 minutes, was facilitated by a trained moderator, and structured around eight pre-tested topics. Sessions were audio-recorded and fully transcribed. Second, a semi-structured interview guide with 15 open-ended questions was developed based on the literature on qualified listening and reviewed by two subject-matter experts. Interviews lasted about 45 minutes each, were audio-recorded, and complemented by field notes. Finally, a document analysis was carried out using 22 documents produced over the previous 24 months, including PAI, administrative records, progress reports, SINASE guidelines, and internal CREAS manuals.

Procedures

The project was first presented during a CREAS staff meeting, after which formal invitations were distributed to potential participants with a two-week response window. Focus group and interview sessions took place in a private room at the CREAS, respecting the adolescents' school schedules and the professionals' availability. Recordings were transcribed within 48 hours and made available for participant validation upon request. Thematic content analysis followed Bardin (2011), with manual coding and intercoder reliability checks performed by two independent researchers (agreement index > 85%). Triangulation was applied across focus groups, interviews, and document sources.

Ethical Considerations

The study followed the guidelines of *Conselho Nacional da Saúde* (CNS, National Health Council) Resolution No. 466/2012 and was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the State University of Amapá (Opinion No. 6.433.972; CAAE: 70214423.2.0000.0211). Informed Consent Forms were obtained from the legal guardians, and Assent Forms were obtained from the adolescents. To ensure confidentiality, participants were assigned alphanumeric codes, and all recordings were stored in an encrypted folder with restricted access for a five-year period, in accordance with current legislation.

Results

The findings were organized into four thematic categories that emerged from content analysis: (1) awareness of the goals of qualified listening; (2) active participation in the development of the PAI; (3) emotional experiences during the process; and (4) perceived importance of the issues discussed. In each category, convergence between adolescents and staff perspectives was observed, with specific nuances.

Awareness of the Goals

All adolescents ($n = 7$) demonstrated a clear understanding of the purpose of qualified listening, identifying it as a means to: understand their rights, map their needs, and set goals for social reintegration. Five participants spontaneously noted that listening helped them “understand the reason behind the process” and “visualize future steps”. The technical team reinforced this perception, emphasizing that clearly defined goals allowed them to align interventions with SINASE guidelines and reduce ambiguity in case management.

Active Participation

Adolescent involvement in planning their PAI was significant: six proposed specific activities (such as sports or art workshops), and four expressed a desire to revisit the document periodically to monitor their progress. On the professionals’ side, all four staff members reported increased engagement when adolescents contributed concrete suggestions. They noted that qualified listening transformed the PAI into a dynamic tool, adaptable to individual needs.

Emotional Experiences

Reported feelings included shame (5/7), anxiety (4/7), and, conversely, relief (6/7) and safety (7/7) resulting from the listening process. The sense of being “valued” emerged in nearly all accounts, indicating that the emotional dimension of listening was key to building rapport. The technical team observed that emotional support facilitated adherence to planned activities, especially during follow-up interviews, where adolescents expressed increased trust in staff members.

Perceived Importance of the Issues Discussed

Participants emphasized the importance of addressing sensitive topics, such as family dynamics and gender identity, in a structured way. Four adolescents reported that clarity and order in approaching these topics helped reduce feelings of confusion and insecurity. Among professionals, there was unanimous agreement on the positive impact of intentional listening: “When we manage to systematize the facts into steps, the youth internalize responsibilities and envision personal development goals,” said the educational psychologist.

These findings suggest that qualified listening promotes mutual understanding and empowers adolescents, thereby enhancing both the technical planning and the emotional engagement essential to the effectiveness of socio-educational measures.

Discussion

The results confirm that qualified listening strengthens the development of more contextualized Individual Care Plans, as adolescents indicated that jointly formulating goals based on their lived experiences allowed for the alignment of social reintegration strategies with their individual needs. This finding addresses the first research question, demonstrating that qualified listening contributes to the creation of PAI that are better suited to the adolescents' socio-familial and cultural backgrounds. This aligns with Moreira and Drawin (2024) and Silva et al. (2022), who emphasize the importance of adolescents' co-participation in developing their care plans.

Regarding adolescent engagement, the practice of qualified listening increased motivation and adherence to proposed activities, corroborating the findings of Costa et al. (2021), who associate the validation of youth voices with the strengthening of youth protagonism in socio-educational contexts. Reports of relief and safety suggest that when adolescents feel heard, they develop greater trust in the technical team, which is an essential element for the effectiveness of interventions (Monte, 2011; Worthington & Bodie, 2017).

The integration between SUAS and socio-educational units presented challenges, particularly the need to standardize listening protocols and improve interinstitutional communication. Professionals pointed to a lack of alignment between SINASE guidelines and day-to-day practices, indicating the need to strengthen institutional coordination, as also suggested by Baptista (2012) and Almeida et al. (2025).

The study also identified potential opportunities, such as expanding the social support network and ensuring continuity of follow-up after the completion of the measure, in line with Costa et al. (2021) and Maynard et al. (2021).

Limitations of this study include the sample being restricted to a single CREAS unit, which may limit the generalizability of the results, as well as the exclusive use of qualitative methods and group interviews, which may have influenced participants' responses. Future research could adopt mixed-methods approaches and expand the number of units analyzed to strengthen the external validity of the conclusions.

In summary, this study demonstrates that qualified listening is a key tool for improving the planning and management of socio-educational measures, clearly answering the research questions: it contributes to the development of more contextualized PAI, enhances adolescent engagement, and reveals both challenges and potential in the integration between SUAS and socio-educational units.

Conclusion

This study showed that qualified listening provides the necessary foundation for building effective PAI, as it enables adolescents to take responsibility for the harm caused and actively participate in setting goals that reflect their personal experiences. The main findings reveal that qualified listening goes beyond the mere recording of narratives; it incorporates interdisciplinary knowledge and restorative practices, promoting youth protagonism and supporting the co-construction of socio-educational strategies tailored to each adolescent's unique trajectory.

When placed in an active role, adolescents demonstrated greater commitment and trust, expressing motivation to carry out proposed activities with autonomy. This reinforces the importance of standardized protocols and ongoing training for multidisciplinary teams. Additionally, the strengthening of family and community support networks was observed – key elements for sustaining restorative practices and ensuring effective social reintegration.

This dynamic process of listening and shared responsibility contributes to the development of socio-emotional skills, fostering reflection on past behaviors and the construction of realistic future perspectives. In this sense, qualified listening emerges as a transformative force, capable of bringing together techniques from psychology, social work, and education into more humane and effective interventions.

The consolidation of these findings points to the need for public policies that ensure integration between SUAS and socio-educational units through clear communication flows and the institutionalization of regular participatory listening cycles, with evaluation indicators that directly involve adolescents and their families. To make such practices systematic and sustainable, it is essential to establish operational protocols that standardize qualified listening throughout all stages of the socio-educational process.

Finally, this study lays the groundwork for future research using mixed methods and larger samples to strengthen the evidence base and refine operational protocols, while maintaining the adolescent at the center of decision-making. Recognizing adolescents as active agents of change reinforces the humanizing dimension of socioeducation and offers concrete contributions to the development of more effective practices and policies.

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Contributors

Conceptualization: A. C. U. BRITO. Formal analysis, Methodology, Project administration, Writing – original draft, and Writing – review and editing: A. C. U. BRITO and R. C. A. MALAFAIA.