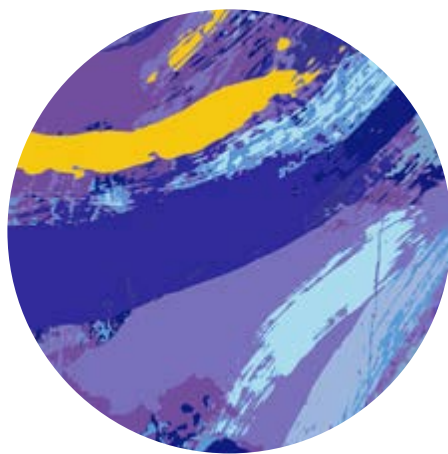


A **Routledge** FreeBook

# UNDERSTANDING LORIS MALAGUZZI

## A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO HIS WORK AND LEGACY





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# WHAT'S IN YOUR FREEBOOK?

This FreeBook provides a short introduction to a unique new publication, *Loris Malaguzzi and the Schools of Reggio Emilia*, the latest in the ground-breaking *Contesting Early Childhood* series. For the first time in English, this new and unique book brings together a selection of the writings and speeches of Loris Malaguzzi, a leading figure in the evolution of the world famous municipal schools in the northern Italian city of Reggio Emilia, and one of the most important figures in 20th century education. While the schools and much of Malaguzzi's work are focused on young children (from birth to 6 years), Malaguzzi was always concerned with the renewal of all public education, and his ideas and practices are relevant to every sector of education and all types of educational institution.

As well as one of Malaguzzi's speeches, made in 1989, and photographs of him, this FreeBook provides introductions and reflections from the team who have edited the new book: a Working Group of educators from Reggio Emilia, all of whom knew Malaguzzi well and worked with him for many years, and Professor Emeritus Peter Moss, UCL Institute of Education, London, UK.

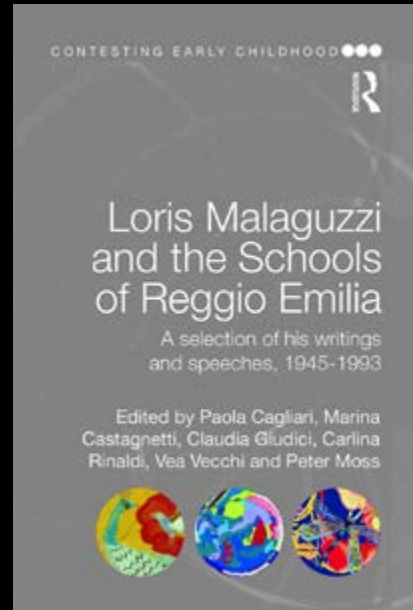
In this FreeBook, you will find:

1. Walking on Silk Threads: Reflections from the Reggio Emilia Working Group  
*Putting the legacy of Loris Malaguzzi into context, from the team in Reggio Emilia.*
2. Introduction to Loris Malaguzzi and the Schools of Reggio Emilia  
*Peter Moss introduces Malaguzzi's life and work, as well as the contextual background, and ways of reading his language. He also looks at the relevance of Malaguzzi's work to practitioners today.*
3. First Steps: 1964-69  
*Focusing on this key period in the evolution of Malaguzzi's ideas and Reggio Emilia's schools, this chapter looks at the historical context and Malaguzzi's life during these years, as well as discussing the selection of documents from this period.*
4. Speech by Loris Malaguzzi, Reggio Emilia, April 1989: 'Our children: beautiful heads rather than heads full'
5. Selected images

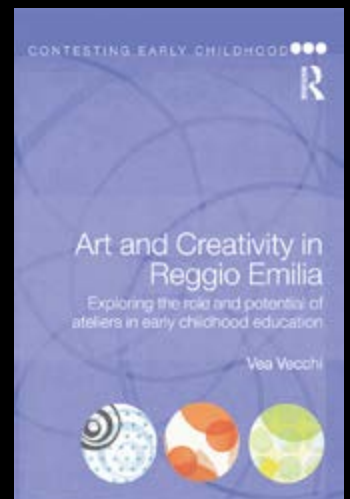
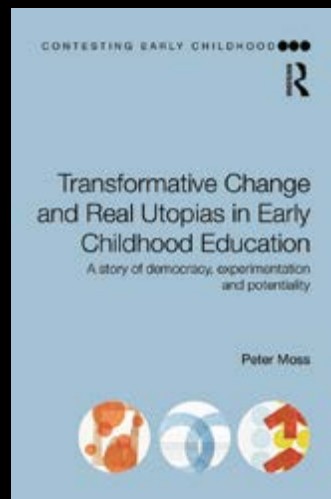
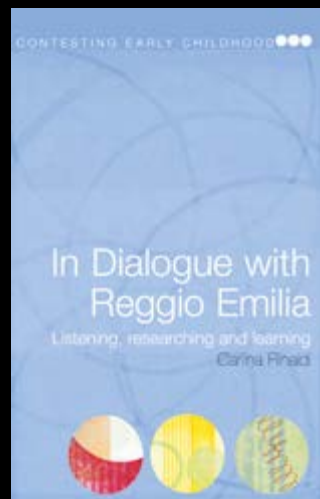
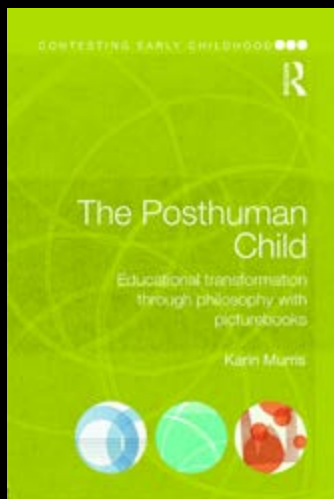
As you read through this FreeBook, you will notice that some excerpts reference other chapters, please note that these are references to the original text and not the FreeBook. You will also notice some references in square brackets, e.g. [2.ND]; these similarly refer to documents in the original text and not the FreeBook.

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Available in English for the **first time**, discover a wide range of Malaguzzi's innovative writings and speeches on his pioneering work in Reggio Emilia, curated and edited by Reggio Children and the Istituzione Preschools and Infant-Toddler Centres of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia, and Professor Emeritus Peter Moss.



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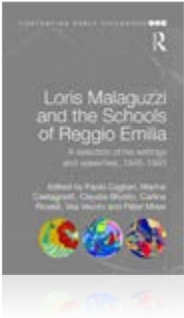
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WALKING ON SILK THREADS:  
REFLECTIONS FROM THE REGGIO  
EMILIA WORKING GROUP

# 1 :: WALKING ON SILK THREADS

## REFLECTIONS FROM THE REGGIO EMILIA WORKING GROUP



The following is excerpted from *Loris Malaguzzi and the Schools of Reggio Emilia: A selection of his writings and speeches, 1945-1993* edited by Paola Cagliari, Marina Castagnetti, Claudia Giudici, Carlina Rinaldi, Vea Vecchi and Peter Moss. © 2016 Reggio Children and Preschools and Infant-Toddler Centres – Istituzione of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia. All rights reserved.

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Selecting texts by Loris Malaguzzi and making a synthesis of each decade as presented in the book *Loris Malaguzzi and the Schools of Reggio Emilia: A selection of his writings and speeches, 1945-1993* (a project long hoped for that has come true, thanks above all to the passionate and competent commitment of Peter Moss, whom we warmly thank) has meant greater emotion and awareness, revisiting a history that precedes some of us, which some of us experienced first-hand, and which we are still living. Turning our gaze to the past is never simple, it reawakens memories, reinterprets events and provokes comparison with the present.

Certainly what emerges from the words of Loris Malaguzzi is a portrait of an exceptional man, but also the portrait of a city [Reggio Emilia] that has been capable of discussing and of facing change in original and often counter-current ways, of battling to evolve into a society it believed to be more intelligent, cultured and fair for all.

What legacy has Loris Malaguzzi left us? To the city and those of us who live in the present, he has left a precious treasure to be defended and nurtured: the awareness that respect for children's culture is closely tied with respect for ourselves and the civilisation being constructed. The awareness that no problem, however complex, can be resolved without innovating our thinking and creating connections with the context in which it is situated. An innovation, however, that does not betray basic values and ethics that have accompanied the constructing of our educational and political thinking.

It has not been an easy journey. Malaguzzi says this several times: and we repeat it, those of us who have continued on the road mapped by Malaguzzi and many others, participating in the educational project with enthusiasm, hard work and creativity. It has always been like 'walking on threads of silk', keeping a fine balance and often at risk of falling, not as poetic as the quote would make it seem. It means having the courage to take decisions even if they go against the flow, when there is a risk of making mistakes, being exposed to potential error because the situation is not clear. It means 'avoiding opportunist and obsequious attitudes towards authority', discussing and exchanging points of view constantly with other realities, trying to evolve situations that appear stagnant and irresolvable.

Revisiting almost fifty years through Malaguzzi's writings and speeches, we understand some of the capabilities needed to construct durable innovative projects that require and defend quality: intelligence, creativity, rigour (stringent rigour), courage, patience, perseverance, the capacity to make connections and to argue the case for these projects. A general attitude of great human solidarity – social, cultural and political.

# 2

## INTRODUCTION TO *LORIS MALAGUZZI AND THE SCHOOLS OF REGGIO EMILIA*

# 2 :: INTRODUCTION TO LORIS MALAGUZZI AND THE SCHOOLS OF REGGIO EMILIA

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## THE SCHOOLS ARE HIS BOOKS

Loris Malaguzzi was one of the most important figures in twentieth-century education. Devoting much of his life to early childhood education and to the municipal schools for young children in the Northern Italian city of Reggio Emilia, he has gained an international reputation in this sector. Yet, symptomatic of the narrow interests that prevail today, Malaguzzi is little known by those who work in other sectors of education, whether with older children, young people or adults; and despite Malaguzzi's clear understanding that his work in Reggio Emilia was relevant well beyond the confines of early childhood, to the renewal of all public education and schooling. Moreover, though he wrote a lot, and could doubtless have pursued a distinguished academic career, his name is not well known among academic educationalists. What he wrote was not for academic journals, and in many ways the clearest testimony to his educational importance lies not in the written word but in the educational project he did so much to create and evolve: a public network of schools, the municipal *nidi* and *scuole dell'infanzia* of Reggio Emilia, the former for children under 3 years, the latter for 3- to 6-year-olds. As others have observed, truly 'the schools are his books'.

Loris Malaguzzi's life, from 1920 to 1994, spanned most of what has been termed 'the short twentieth century'<sup>1</sup>. He was born soon after the end of one world war, and grew up and entered adulthood under fascism and during a second world war. Following the heady days of liberation, he lived the remainder of his life first during the rapid economic growth and social change of the post-war 'golden years', then during the early stages of the rise of neoliberalism to global hegemony. He died after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet regime.

Born in the town of Correggio, situated in the Po Valley in the province of Reggio Emilia, Malaguzzi moved with his family to the city of Reggio Emilia when a young child, and lived there for most of the rest of his life. He also worked in and for the city for many years, an employee of the *comune* [local authority] of Reggio Emilia who devoted himself to a variety of municipal children's services, not just the schools for young children for which he became famous, but also in a pioneering centre for children with psychological problems and in summer camps. Before that, his early working years were spent as a teacher in state primary and middle schools, including a formative stint in a small and isolated mountain village, vividly recounted in the second document in this collection [2.ND<sup>2</sup>], as well as in adult education working with young men whose education had been disrupted by war. With friends, he commandeered the abandoned villa of a fascist boss, to set up a 'people's school',

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1. Originally proposed by Iván Berend (Hungarian Academy of Sciences) but defined by Eric Hobsbawm, the British Marxist historian, 'the short 20th century' refers to the period between the years 1914 and 1991, from the beginning of World War I to the fall of the Soviet Union.

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2. This and similar annotations in square brackets indicates the number and date of the selected document referred to; the first part is the document number and the second part is the document's date, e.g. 97.92 is document number 97 from 1992. ND means the document is not dated.



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an after-school centre for children experiencing difficulties in middle school. Little wonder then that he had such a wide appreciation of education across the board, and such a broad commitment to its renewal.

*Loris Malaguzzi and the schools of Reggio Emilia* offers a unique perspective on Malaguzzi the educator: told in his own words. The words are to be found in documents selected from an archive created at Reggio Emilia's *Centro Documentazione e Ricerca Educativa, Scuole e Nidi d'infanzia – Istituzione del Comune di Reggio Emilia* [Documentation and Educational Research Centre] (of which more below). They begin with a newspaper article about literature and culture written in 1945, shortly after the end of the war in Europe when Malaguzzi was 25; and end in late 1993, with some sketched thoughts about a new development for Reggio Emilia's education project, the birth of Reggio Children, 'a place looking to the future' that was founded shortly after his death in January 1994.

Anyone hoping for a sequence of academic papers setting out the seamless evolution of pedagogical thought will be disappointed. But those who want insight into the life and work of an educator actively engaged in public education, intent on building a distinctive pedagogical project in a well-run municipal school system, and for whom theory and practice were totally inseparable, will not be. There are, for sure, articles and speeches containing more sustained expositions of Malaguzzi's evolving thinking, mostly not from academic journals or conferences. These, however, are interspersed with a miscellany of shorter documents, often fragments: letters, announcements of and programmes for seminars and other events held for local people, scraps of autobiography, poems and much more. Reading these you can feel his excitement and frustration, hope and irritation, passion and perseverance as they record the unrelenting and focused effort of this exceptional educator working to build a new public education in a renewed school, striving to bring others along with him but also ready to contend with the many obstacles strewn in the way of this ambitious project.

So what is to be found here are not only insights into the evolution of a great pedagogical thinker, but also into the everyday work of a great educational builder. We see Malaguzzi working with others – politicians, parents, educators, fellow citizens – to make his ideas and ideals happen, not just in one school but in a growing network of schools, a municipal education system that was formally established in 1963 and that today includes thirty-three schools managed by the *comune*, with a further fourteen schools managed as co-operatives under agreements with the *comune* (most of these latter schools are *nidi-scuole*, where a *nido* for children under 3 years and a *scuola* for 3- to 6-year-olds are provided as one educational service in

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the same building). This is radical public education enacted on an unprecedented scale and sustained over an unparalleled period of time. In this selection of documents by Malaguzzi, we can find some answers to key questions about this remarkable pedagogical experience and ample proof that the schools are indeed his books.

### READING MALAGUZZI

Each reader will find something different in these documents, creating their own interpretations of Malaguzzi's words. Malaguzzi would have appreciated that this was inevitable, since he well understood that perspective and subjectivity were not only unavoidable but also to be valued. What follows here, therefore, are some reflections on my own reading of Malaguzzi, what has particularly struck and resonated with me, what meanings I have taken from this rich and varied material.

Like everyone, Malaguzzi was a product of a particular time and place. As already noted, he grew up under a dictatorship, entered adulthood in the midst of a terrible war, then experienced the heady days but also the great turmoil that followed Liberation and the restoration of peace and freedom. Three formative experiences, three 'places where I learned to speak and to live' [2.ND] – teaching in the small, remote and impoverished village of Sologno, the Liberation of Reggio Emilia, and participating in the community effort to build a school in the village of Villa Cella – date from just a few years, during and immediately after the war.

All three of these experiences also took place in a small area of Italy, in and around the city of Reggio Emilia, located in Northern Italy about 70 kilometres to the west of Bologna. Like most Italians, Malaguzzi was deeply rooted in his *territorio* [local area<sup>3</sup>], in particular his beloved Reggio Emilia to which he devoted most of his life. He was a *Reggiano*, and proud of it. Yet this intense local identification and loyalty did not make him parochial. He may have been rooted in a particular culture, but the values and political orientation of that culture were shared with many other *comuni* [local authorities]; and he was in constant and vigorous relationship with the wider world, in the rest of Italy and countries beyond.

This temporal and spatial context must have had a powerful effect on Malaguzzi and his approach to education. It is apparent in his recollection in later life that the immediate post-war years 'were times when everything seemed possible' [98.92]. It is apparent in his strong commitment to democracy as a fundamental value and practice in Reggio Emilia's schools; also in his insistence that the schools

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3. *Territorio* carries a deep meaning in Italian about local identity and roots, encompassing local traditions, land, foods and wines, the local ways and history, often too the local dialect – all of which vary so much from *territorio* to *territorio*.

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should be open to and engaged with not only children's families but also their local communities and all citizens, and that the city itself should recognise, welcome and accommodate children as young citizens (though he thought it remained resistant to such inclusion, being more orientated to the needs and lives of adults, see for example 39.70). It is apparent, too, in his deep respect for children and parents, and his steadfast appreciation of their rich potential, of what everyone is capable of given the right conditions. While his voracious reading and unceasing intellectual curiosity, his love of border crossing into new disciplines and paradigms, his encounters with so many people and experiences from outside Reggio Emilia and Italy, all of which took him and his fellow educators into so many new places, must surely have owed something to growing up under the stifling censorship and other restrictions of a fascist regime.

This context, too, shaped his politics. His ideas and work, Enzo Catarsi comments, 'were influenced by his participation in the struggles of democratic and progressive movements and by various examples of cooperative education'<sup>4</sup> (2004, p.8). He was a man of the left, both in his general attitude to the world and more specifically as a member for many years of the post-war *Partito Comunista Italiano* or PCI [Italian Communist Party]: 'I knew nothing about politics, of the October Revolution, of Marx, Lenin, Gramsci, Togliatti. But I was sure I was taking the side of the weakest, of the people who carried most hope' [2.ND]. In that time and place there was nothing exceptional about this commitment: the PCI had a mass membership in the years after the war, especially in the Emilia-Romagna region where Reggio Emilia is situated. The PCI was also the ruling party in many *comuni*, including Reggio Emilia, and whatever its faults, it provided efficient, honest and progressive local government in stark contrast to that found in many other parts of Italy and, indeed, to the national government in Rome.

It was in such PCI-led administrations that the 'municipal school revolution' of the 1960s emerged in many Northern towns and cities, including Reggio Emilia, producing an exceptional educational experience for young children. Indeed the revolution extended beyond early education, with a shared view of individual and collective rights producing other innovative services, including health care. We can find here the birth of the Italian welfare state.

Several documents in this collection feature Malaguzzi addressing meetings of the PCI or its organisations [e.g. 12.56, 17.59, 59.75]. They not only show the evolution of his thinking and his political engagement, but demonstrate his readiness to criticise and challenge the Party, including its approach to democracy – he was not

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4. Catarsi, E. (2004) 'Loris Malaguzzi and the municipal school revolution', *Children in Europe*, 6, 8-9

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someone to toe the party line unquestioningly. We can also read him, on several occasions, contesting the views and policies of the dominant party in post-war Italy, the *Democrazia Cristiana* or DC [Christian Democrat Party] and their allies in the Catholic Church [e.g. 12.56, 42.71, 59.75, 61.75]. He was opposed to Church schools, which dominated early childhood education for years, in principle as well as for the way that many were actually run, and favoured a secular education system, arguing in the 1970s for a national system of preschools funded by the State but run locally, by *comuni*. This critical attitude towards Catholic education did not, however, become disdain; several documents emphasise that his political opposition was conducted with respect and a willingness to dialogue and indeed to find some measure of compromise [e.g. 61.75].

But Malaguzzi comes across as highly political in a wider sense of the word, beyond the narrowly party political. He was deeply aware that education was political, because it called for making choices between conflicting alternatives, including values, understandings and ways of working; and not only making choices, but being prepared to go out and argue the case for them. Put another way, he was always wanting to ask critical questions before suggesting solutions, rather than (as is so often the case today) wanting to be told 'what works' without first delving into and arguing about the meaning, purposes and values of education. Malaguzzi, in my reading, is a vivid example of the contention that education is, first and foremost, a political practice. And that overtly political stance was the product of post-war Italy, a context where people argued about real alternatives, believed another world was possible – and assumed education had an important part to play in bringing that world about.

Malaguzzi himself entirely understood the significance of context; it was an important part of what might be termed his paradigmatic positioning – the way he saw, interpreted and related to the world. Other important parts of that position, which he foregrounds increasingly as the years pass, are connectivity and complexity. 'Interconnecting, the great verb of the present and the future' [92.89], as he put it: and in his mind everything did connect, whether the many different facets that made the wholeness of the child; or the interplay of culture, science, economics and politics; or the growing range of disciplines that he was drawn to study, culminating in his fascination with cybernetics and neuroscience, and his insistence on the need for inter- or trans-disciplinarity [88.87, 94.90].

Seeing the connectedness of everything, together with a profound awareness of context and an understanding of the singularity of each person, led inevitably to

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an appreciation of complexity – and a corresponding abhorrence of the dominant contemporary discourse, with its love of classification and linearity, predictability and certainty, separation and reductionism. This discourse he viewed as outdated and in crisis, contested by new scientific perspectives and understandings: for ‘unpredictable today is a category of science’ [92.89], while:

against the old distinction-separateness of sciences (in particular the ‘exact’ sciences, both technological and human) [the challenge is to] re-establish their inseparability, their communication and integration, in a trans-disciplinary framework which ought increasingly to animate both research and teaching, to defeat the classification of single disciplines.

[88.87]

Such outmoded thinking applied to education led him to excoriate what he termed ‘prophetic pedagogy’, which:

knows everything beforehand, knows everything that will happen, knows everything, does not have one uncertainty, is absolutely imperturbable. It contemplates everything and prophesies everything, sees everything, sees everything to the point that it is capable of giving you recipes for little bits of actions, minute by minute, hour by hour, objective by objective, five minutes by five minutes. This is something so coarse, so cowardly, so humiliating of teachers’ ingenuity, a complete humiliation for children’s ingenuity and potential.

[98.92]

Rather than a longing for predictability and regularity, Malaguzzi valued uncertainty, desired wonder and amazement, loved to marvel at the totally unexpected.

Malaguzzi was an educator par excellence and not just an educator, but an educator who assumed leadership for the educational project in Reggio Emilia. What comes across to me in reading these documents is a distinct and important idea of what this leadership role requires, that is if performed as part of a public and democratic education. The political element has already been mentioned, the need to engage with alternatives and to make and contend for certain choices. The importance of participation and respect for all those with an interest in education – in effect, everyone in the city – has also been referred to, to which should be added his belief

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in the values of cooperation and solidarity. To these qualities, I would like to add what seem to me, from my reading of the documents in the book, to be two more defining features of his role as educational leader.

First, the intellectual educational leader. He was an intellectual who loved the company of other intellectuals (see, for example, his vivid account in the third document in the book of being 'In the post-war city' [3.91]). He was a man of many interests, great curiosity and incessant border crossing, never losing his delight at encountering new ideas, new perspectives and new friends. A man who wrote poetry, loved theatre and drama, and was very well and very widely read. A man who kept abreast of the latest developments and debates in politics, economics, culture and science. A man who wanted a modern education that understood and responded to contemporary conditions and needs and was open to contemporary thinking and knowledge – whilst never losing sight of its responsibility for the future. And a man with a strong critical faculty, applied not only to the outdated thinking and institutions that he found so typical of Italy, and to the organisations of which he was a member, but also to leading figures in psychology and pedagogy, many of whom he also admired greatly and took inspiration from (see, for example, his increasingly critical appraisal of aspects of Piaget's work [25.65, 31.67, 77.ND, 85.85, 88.86, 94.90]).

But these are just some of the ingredients of being an intellectual, the raw materials that enable this role. What sort of intellectual was he? The French philosopher Michel Foucault distinguishes between two types of intellectual. The 'universal intellectual', he argued, for a long period:

spoke and was acknowledged the right of speaking in the capacity of master of truth and justice. He was heard, or purported to make himself heard, as the spokesman of the universal. To be an intellectual meant something like being the consciousness/ conscience of us all.

(Foucault, 1984, p.67)

But since the end of the Second World War, Foucault discerned the emergence of a new sort, the 'specific intellectual':

A new mode of the 'connection between theory and practice' has been established. Intellectuals have become used to working, not in the modality of the 'universal', the 'exemplary', the 'just-and-true-for-all', but within specific sectors, at the precise points

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where their own conditions of life or work situate them (housing, the hospital, the asylum, the laboratory, the university, family, and sexual relations). This has undoubtedly given them a much more immediate and concrete awareness of struggles.

(*ibid.*, p.68)

This description of the specific intellectual seems to me to fit Malaguzzi very well, situated as he was in the specific sector of education, aware of and engaged with its struggles, striving to establish new ways of connecting theory and practice. Moreover, he understood the teacher in this light too: in 1975 we find him telling a meeting of the PCI that '[t]he role of the teacher that the need for school renewal calls for is a new type of intellectual, a producer of knowledge connected with the demands of society that are expressed through various types of organisation' [59.75].

Second, the democratic educational leader. Today's new public management calls for hierarchical structures that separate senior officials from those engaged in the everyday work of services, the former controlling the latter at a distance through a web of procedures, targets and measurements. Malaguzzi, by contrast, offers an alternative of democratic and participatory management inscribed with an ethos of cooperation and dialogue and practised in close relationship with the 'frontline'. He is a pedagogical leader constantly engaged with and contributing to the everyday lives of educators and children, working ceaselessly to involve children, educators and parents with his ideas and to learn with them. He did not just plan new schools and ensure their sound administration; he was constantly in them once open, taking the pedagogical pulse, engaging with all and sundry, talking and listening. When he spoke about education and schools it was from first-hand and current experience.

As such, his working life is complex and multi-faceted. So, one moment he is the administrator, the head of the emerging early childhood service in Reggio Emilia, writing to the Mayor, other city politicians or officials or to schools: about problems with the construction of the new Diana school, or arguing for the school to have an *atelier* [arts workshop]; or warning against the *comune* assuming responsibility for a sub-standard Church-run school; or proposing measures to school staff to implement the *Comune's* new *Regolamento* [Rulebook]; or chiding some schools for failing to ensure representation at meetings. The next moment he is the educator, organising series of lectures or other events for parents and teachers, in which he also often participates as a teacher. Then he is the pedagogical director, setting out his ideas about summer camps or schools and their underlying pedagogy, to

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a variety of audiences, locally, regionally or nationally, a role that is inescapably connected with that of pedagogical researcher; research is central to his idea of the identity of the school and the work of the teacher. Another time he is the student, learning from the work on maths of Piaget and other Swiss psychologists, reading prodigiously and widely, wanting to keep abreast of the latest thinking in many fields. He is a broadcaster, sharing this latest thinking and new ways of working with others; while on other occasions, he is a campaigner, arguing the case for more and better services for children and families or for the defence of what has been achieved in the face of threatened cuts – all this within the wider frame of a passionate commitment to the idea of public education. Last but not least, he is a democrat and community activist, building open and participant relationships between the new municipal schools, the families whose children attend them and local communities.

A man, therefore, of great energy and relentless activity, restless and never satisfied; reading the documents often left me breathless, wondering how he found time to do so much. He combined the capacity to think, discuss and do, continuously putting ideas to work and feeding the products of that work back into his thinking, this inter-active process fuelled by relationships, by his daily engagement with fellow educators, parents, administrators, politicians – and children. It is the range and richness of these roles and relationships and their synergy that is reflected in the diversity of documents presented here.

Above all, leading an educational service meant not just knowing about the system, the nuts and bolts of organisation, procedures and resources, important though he recognised that to be. It meant thinking, dialoguing and arguing about education itself. His role as educational leader was not to implement national policy, not to tell others what to do, not to lead a pliant following wherever he chose – it was to create and evolve an educational project in his city, but always in relation with others and in a spirit of participation and cooperation. Following this process of constant co-construction through these documents is a fascinating exercise, spotting the first reference to some feature that has subsequently come to identify Reggio Emilia's educational project, noting why, where and when it emerges, how it is initially conceptualised and discussed, and then how it evolves over time.

### SELECTING THE DOCUMENTS

The very diversity of the documents included in the book, their variety of formats and contents, gives us a unique insight into the man and his work, the times in which he was living and working, the many people and organisations with whom he was



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in relationship, the subjects that engaged him, and his emerging thinking about children, families, schools and education. They show that Malaguzzi not only spoke a lot, he also wrote extensively. Where have these documents come from and how have they been selected?

They have been selected from an archive created at the *Centro Documentazione e Ricerca Educativa, Scuole e Nidi d'infanzia – Istituzione del Comune di Reggio Emilia*, housed in the city's Loris Malaguzzi International Centre. The formation of this archive owes much to the work of Marina Castagnetti, who has been at the *Centro* since 2000, before which she was a teacher at the Diana school in Reggio Emilia. She found documents in many places, including in municipal schools, each having its own archive, and in the collections of some teachers and *pedagogistas*. She went to the municipal Panizzi Library looking through old newspapers, seeking articles by Malaguzzi and discovering he had had regular columns in the local paper. The *Centro* itself already had 177 audio cassettes of Malaguzzi speaking at a wide range of meetings, as well as a large number of documents that had been published (in Italian) in one place or another. It contained, too, video cassettes, especially from 1987 onwards when the *Centro* was established and began asking for video material when Malaguzzi spoke abroad. Less high tech, Marina also found, buried in old files, other material including notes from meetings. The end result was the creation of an archive of 441 documents, plus a large number of audio and video cassettes.

Building up such a large and diverse archive owes much to the fact that Malaguzzi archived all his papers. This is true, also, of other educators in Reggio Emilia. Moreover, Malaguzzi and other educators took notes about everything. We can see here two important habits deeply ingrained in the culture of Reggio Emilia's educational project. To document so as to be able to reflect, dialogue and make meaning; and to conserve, so as to be able to go back and to re-cognise (a word and concept discussed below).

The archive from which the documents in the book have been selected is not complete; it remains open for the addition of further items. Nor is it comprehensive, not containing all of Malaguzzi's known writings, interviews and speeches. It does not include, so neither does the book, writings, interviews or speeches publicly available in English (see the references section at the end of the book for a list of some English-language publications by or about Malaguzzi); a decision was made not to include these documents, most of which are from the last years of his life and can be read elsewhere. Nor have we included any of the editorials or other articles he regularly contributed to the Italian early childhood magazines *Zerosei* and

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*Bambini* between 1976 and 1993. Last but not least, the archive contains none of the notebooks that Malaguzzi regularly kept, which contained for instance summaries of his reading, ideas that had come to him and many notes he took at meetings. These are held in a family archive.

Even with these exceptions, the many hundreds of documents in the archive are testament to how much Malaguzzi wrote and spoke about education – and far exceed the space available in the book. A selection has had to be made. The book, therefore, draws on 103 documents from the 400 plus in the *Centro* archive. Moreover, few of the documents are presented whole, a selection being made within these documents with [ . . . ] indicating where material has been cut. The selection process was undertaken by a Working Group of educators from Reggio Emilia: Paola Cagliari, Claudia Giudici, Carlina Rinaldi and Veà Vecchi and Marina Castagnetti. Together with myself, this group has also formed the editorial team that has produced the book, in collaboration with Annamaria Mucchi of the Reggio Children publishing team. All members of the Reggio Emilia Working Group have worked in and with the municipal schools for a long time and, particularly important, all knew Loris Malaguzzi well. Once selected, the documents were translated into English by Jane McCall, who has lived and worked for many years in Reggio Emilia; she combines expertise as a translator with great knowledge of the subject matter, an invaluable asset in such an undertaking.

### THE LANGUAGE OF MALAGUZZI

Translating Malaguzzi's words has not always been easy. He was quite capable of being precise and clear-cut. But on paper and at first glance his words can sometimes seem difficult to understand, on occasion almost impenetrable – even in his native Italian. There are a number of reasons for this. The contemporary context and the references made to people and events may not always be understood by readers today, especially those not from Italy. I have tried to help by supplying an historical and biographical introduction to each of the five periods covered in the book, together with a timeline for Malaguzzi, Reggio Emilia and Italy. I have also added an 'editor's note' by way of introduction to some documents and supplied short footnotes to provide basic information about certain people, places and events that crop up in the texts.

In the case of texts based on oral presentations, the transcriptions may not always be complete or wholly accurate. Moreover, what is inevitably lost in this project, which reduces presentations spoken in Italian to English words on paper, is

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Malaguzzi's voice, his way of talking, and his body language. Those who knew him well emphasise that he was most at home when speaking, and he was clearly a very gifted communicator, full of passion and 'theatrical, like a magician', as one of the Working Group put it. Another recalled that 'Loris's way of speaking had the style of the narrator. He drew people in, he was very fascinating to listen to, but it took time to fully understand him.' He also held people's attention because he was always in tune with the times, with what people were feeling, so people felt he was talking to them, about matters that concerned them. So while his listeners might not immediately have understood everything he said, he kept them hooked, he pulled them towards what he was looking for, what he was seeking to express, he carried them along, he made them want to go further.

When Malaguzzi spoke, another recalled, he gave teachers a sense of importance, raising the work to an intellectual level that made them feel how valuable it was. He opened listeners up to new horizons and perspectives, to a larger future, to a wider view, to a new world. The operative word, repeated frequently by members of the Working Group, is 'opening': to new ideas, new perspectives, new research, new possibilities. At the same time, he was a good listener, 'he would let teachers present [their work], not interrupt – then comment'. Sadly, we can never recapture these qualities of Malaguzzi, qualities that made him so loved and respected and trusted. What inspired and excited in person may not always transfer equally well onto the page.

Malaguzzi's voice was, of course, an Italian one. He grew up before English had become the dominant global language it is today; he never learnt it. This did not mean that he never travelled beyond Italy, never spoke with people from abroad or never read foreign authors. Quite the contrary. He spoke and read French; and, as the texts that follow show, he was an avid border crosser in every sense of the word, travelling to many other countries, meeting with many European and American educators, and reading a wide range of books in translation.

One aim of the book is to make a body of Malaguzzi's work, written or spoken in his native tongue, accessible to English-speakers who have little or no Italian. But to do this, to translate his words from Italian to English, requires giving some thought to the act of translation. Languages do not translate perfectly; there is no complete equivalence between one language and another. Concepts, terms and other vocabulary may not always correspond, and meaning in such cases can get lost in translation. Presented with a text translated into your own language, it becomes easy to forget this possibility, an especial risk for English-speakers who are so

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accustomed to everything being served up to them in their native tongue. The danger here is of the Other being made into the Same in moments of false recognition and mistaken equivalence, the alterity of the Other being lost and, hence, the provocation to think that arises when confronted by difference.

So ease of reading may be at odds with comprehension, obviating the struggle to work on the meaning of something different. Translation, too, may lose some of the political significance in the original language. A good example is the competing terms used in Italian, especially in the earlier years of the Reggio Emilia education project, for services for children from 3 to 6 years. These were originally known in Italy as *scuola materna*, with a clear connotation of welfare-orientated services that substituted for mothers and whose staff were primarily to display motherly qualities; the term fitted comfortably with the ideology of Church-run schools, predominant in Italy until the 1960s. But *comuni* such as Reggio Emilia wanted to develop a different concept for these services, as places that were neither home-like nor motherly, but were instead clearly understood to be for children and places of education, a role expressed through the term *scuola dell'infanzia*. To translate both terms into English as 'nursery school', 'kindergarten' or 'preschool' is to lose the competing politics underlying the two different terms and, hence, their part in a wider political confrontation.

Most of Malaguzzi's Italian words, from the documents selected for the book, have been translated into English. But, as the English-language editor, I have chosen to retain a number of important and recurring terms in their original Italian, either because of the risk of losing meaning in translation or to provide a constant reminder to English-language readers that they are engaging with another language, culture and politics. In such cases, where I have chosen to retain the original Italian, I offer an English approximation the first time the word or term appears, as well as including the Italian original and the English approximation in a glossary that appears in the book. The words that have not been translated mainly refer to services, roles and organisations, the sort of vocabulary that defines the main structural components of Reggio Emilia's education project and the political context in which it evolved.

Then there are other words that are translated into English, but which have a particular meaning as used by Malaguzzi; taken together, they make an important contribution to understanding his perspectives and the distinct identity of Reggio Emilia's pedagogical project. Rather than 'develop', with its connotations of linearity and predictability, people and projects 'evolve' [*evolvere*], responding unpredictably

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to contingencies, 'a-rythmic and discontinuous' rather than 'a uniform, regular advance' [21.63]. To 'experiment' [*sperimentare*] is a constant imperative, meaning to explore, to try or test things out. And this in turn requires 'verification', to 'verify' [*verificare*] meaning to test ideas or theories in the flow of everyday work, finding out through examination and experimentation if they hold up or not. This can be seen as part of an attitude of 'research' [*ricerca*], an enquiring mind that never takes anything for granted, that treats theories as points of reference but is constantly putting them to the test, verifying them, seeing if they are useful and, if so, in what way. All these qualities are complemented by a readiness for 'confrontation' [*confronto*], a willingness and capacity to question the interpretations and perspectives of others, and to offer your own for similar challenge in frank but respectful exchange – without degenerating into hostility and antagonism.

A number of words are used by Malaguzzi to express his view that everything is inter-connected and inter-dependent, a view that also attracts him to cybernetics, with its attention to systems, and to the writings of Gregory Bateson. There is, for example, a cluster of associated words – 'organic' [*organico*], 'holistic' [*olistico*], 'integral' [*integrale*] – used to affirm that the child cannot (or, at least, should not) be divided into pieces in pedagogical or other work. Other words also refer to various forms of connectedness or interaction, including 'node' [*nodo*], a point in a network at which lines or pathways intersect or branch out; 'contamination' [*contaminazione*] or 'contagion' [*contagio*], to suggest being influenced or touched by someone or something else – but used in a positive sense; and 'articulate(d)' [*articolare*], where pieces connect up in a complexity. 'Ecological' and 'matrix' [*matrice*] refer to the cultural, social and/or political environment in which something develops and emphasise the importance of 'context', a word that itself appears many times.

Two other words are very central to understanding Malaguzzi and the municipal schools. To 're-cognise' [*ri-conoscere*] is fundamental to every process, 're-cognition' being about returning to a previous experience, often with others, to reflect, re-think and re-know its meaning; for example when a small group rejoins the larger group and tells what they have been doing, creating in the process new shared knowledge, whilst themselves 're-knowing' the original experience through sharing it with others. Re-cognition also supports the importance of conserving, since conserved documentation can be subject to re-visiting, re-thinking and re-knowing, providing a rich resource for reflection. Finally, to 'qualify' [*qualificare*] is not about adding a reservation or caveat, but rather refers to giving greater or different value to something, so enhancing its position.

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In addition to retaining some words in their original Italian, I have adopted some other conventions in editing the book in English. Resisting the temptation to modernise and sanitise, I have retained Malaguzzi's original language, even where he uses terminology that would not be widely used or acceptable today, for example 'education of the psychically abnormal, those with irregular conduct, and the socially maladjusted' [10.54]. I have retained the original layout of letters and other formatted documents, as well as retaining capital letters and the use of bold or italic fonts and underlinings where they occur in the original documents. I have used square brackets to indicate where I have made additions to the original text or where I have provided an English translation of an Italian term or give the reference number for one of the selected texts. Lastly, I have used the term 'municipal schools' to refer to all services for children from birth to 6 years provided by the *Comune* of Reggio Emilia (or other Italian *comuni*); a more literal translation would be 'communal schools', but this, I think, reads strangely in English and may lead to misunderstandings.

These are issues and conventions that need to be acknowledged and born in mind. But they should not detract from the pleasure of reading Malaguzzi, from the excitement of not knowing what will come next, and from the privilege of entering the life and mind of this amazing educator. Fizzing with incredible energy and boundless enthusiasm, he takes us all on a roller coaster ride, full of surprises and variety. This is education as it should be; not a pallid account of technical practice abetting predetermined outcomes, but a vivid and original story of democracy, experimentation and potentiality.

### THERE ARE ALTERNATIVES!

*Loris Malaguzzi and the schools of Reggio Emilia* provides a valuable collection of historical documents, helping us to understand the life and work of an exceptional educator and how they were shaped by a particular time and place. But is that life and work still relevant to educators today, and to educators beyond the fertile lands of the Po Valley?

I think they are, but not because Malaguzzi provides a reproducible pedagogical programme, a Reggio Emilia approach that others can buy into and follow. For what I think emerges from the book is the evolution of a local cultural *project*, a project that is *sui generis*, a unique project forged in a particular context and by particular actors. For certain, Malaguzzi and Reggio Emilia drew on many traditions, many disciplines, many theorists, many other experiences, for they were and are inveterate border-crossers. But they used this rich material to construct their own educational identity,

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just as did every other Italian *comune* that participated in this 'municipal school revolution'.

Rather than a model to be copied, in my view *Loris Malaguzzi and the schools of Reggio Emilia* remain relevant today and worldwide as a provocation, inciting us to think, and as an indication that another world is possible. At a time when education is stifling under a 'dictatorship of no alternatives', with its toxic mix of instrumentality and standardisation, managerialism and technical practice, all fomenting in a climate of neoliberalism, Malaguzzi shows that there are indeed alternatives. That it is possible to create a system of democratic public education, in which the political and ethical precede the technical; and not just create but sustain that system over many years, for unlike most examples of radical education that last but a few years before fizzling out, the schools of Reggio Emilia have endured for more than 50 years.

This success is more than just a matter of survival. For the municipal schools have managed to maintain momentum, achieving a dynamic of sustained movement and experimentation. Central to this achievement, I think, has been the participation, commitment and cooperation of many, many people – educators, parents, politicians and, of course, children. Malaguzzi may have had a leadership role, but the schools of Reggio Emilia have been a collective endeavour.

Equally important has been a continuous attention to enabling conditions, an appreciation that a radical education project needs both political and popular commitment and will *and* very strong organisational backing. One important theme in the documents in *Loris Malaguzzi and the schools of Reggio Emilia* is the evolution of that organisational backing for the schools, creating an environment in which new ideas and perspectives – often fed into the public arena by Malaguzzi himself – could be applied in practice and researched in the municipal schools. Malaguzzi and the schools of Reggio Emilia have combined great creativity and innovation with great rigour and attention to detail. Reggio Emilia provides an inkling of what might be achieved by democratic public education if it had just a fraction of the resources currently poured into creating conditions to support baleful and impoverished neoliberal educational regimes of competition, testing and 'prophetic pedagogy'.

The death of Loris Malaguzzi in 1994 was a great sadness and an enormous loss, but the project survived and continued to evolve. It proved greater than the man. This is not to belittle his part in the project. Far from it. If Reggio survived the death of Malaguzzi, it is in part because he helped to build strong and sure foundations, both cultural and structural, including a body of committed and creative educators; and

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because he worked at so many levels, from pedagogical theory to the organisation of a network of schools.

Loris Malaguzzi was intensely local, a *Reggiano* through and through. But he was also a man of and in the world, a man whose voice deserves to be, and should be, heard wherever there is an interest in education – not just early childhood education, but any education. With his boundless curiosity, his endless invention and his constant belief in human potentiality, he is, quite simply, a global figure and a man for all seasons.



# 3

## FIRST STEPS: 1964-69 PETER MOSS AND THE REGGIO EMILIA WORKING GROUP

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#### INTRODUCTION

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#### THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

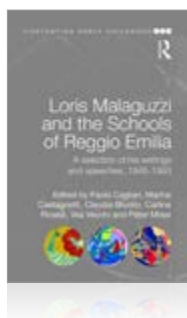
The middle to late 1960s saw the establishment of Reggio Emilia's project of early childhood education, with the first municipal school opened in November 1963, the *scuola comunale dell'infanzia* Robinson Crusoe, followed by a second school in 1964, named after Anna Frank, and a third, Primavera, in 1968. Then, following a long struggle with the Prefect, the central government's local representative, two originally self-managed schools were municipalised, including the school at Villa Cella that had so inspired Malaguzzi when local people built it after the end of the Second World War. As a municipal school it was renamed *XXV Aprile* [25 April], the date of Liberation. A period of rapid expansion, in the 1970s, was to follow, but that expansion built on the foundations laid down during this period.

These first municipal schools emerged from a very particular context. This was a period widely known in Italy as the 'fabulous' sixties. It was a time of intense political, cultural and social activity in the city and beyond. The schools themselves were generating experimentation and discussion, but as part of a wider national ferment of debate and initiative on education and public schools, stimulated by organisations such as the *Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa* [MCE, Movement for Cooperative Education] and individuals including Ada Gobetti, Mario Lodi, Gianni Rodari, Bruno Ciari – all good friends of Malaguzzi – and Don Milani.

Schools for young children were only part of the 'fabulous' sixties. Reggio Emilia, but also many other *comuni*, were developing a variety of public services and stimulating cultural activities as part of a wider project of renewal. Bonazzi describes how:

[L]ocal government functions and policies had to be reconstructed in relation to the requirements and priorities of a country in a phase of rapid and massive industrialisation. The municipal administration [in Reggio] wanted to promote services and initiatives capable of guiding and accompanying economic development, adapting this development to the needs, requirements and aspirations of the life of the community and its single members, not the other way round. To pursue the creation of what was later summarised in a successful slogan as 'a city made to measure for people'.

(Various Authors, 2012, p.88)



The following is excerpted from *Loris Malaguzzi and the Schools of Reggio Emilia: A selection of his writings and speeches, 1945-1993* edited by Paola Cagliari, Marina Castagnetti, Claudia Giudici, Carlina Rinaldi, Vea Vecchi and Peter Moss. © 2016 Reggio Children and Preschools and Infant-Toddler Centres – Istituzione of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia. All rights reserved.

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These ambitions led to important developments in urban planning, social services and health, in particular 'new' psychiatric services, as well as in culture, where the *Comune* assumed direct management of the theatre, sponsored literary events and concert series, developed municipal libraries and supported innovative institutions including a National Centre for Independent Cinema News and the Antonio Banfi Institute of Studies in Philosophy.

Developments in early childhood education were not limited to Reggio Emilia. This was the period of what Enzo Catarsi has termed the 'municipal school revolution', when many *comuni* in Emilia-Romagna 'pre-empted Staterun services by starting up their own services for young children' (Catarsi, 2004, p.8). Reggio Emilia, along with Rimini, Modena, Parma and Bologna, led the way in deciding to start a municipal early childhood education, but close behind were other cities. The 'revolution' was a shared experience, though each city had its own story, its own circumstances.

Eventually, too, the national government was stirred to action. The idea of state-run *scuole materne* had been strongly opposed, not least by the Catholic Church that saw its dominance in this field threatened; even in Reggio Emilia at the end of the 1960s, 80 per cent of schools for 3- to 6-year-olds were Church run. After one national government had been brought down by the issue in 1966, Law no.444 was passed in 1968, which officially recognised the existence of schools for 3- to 6-year-olds and established the state as a provider of these schools (*scuole materne statali*); it also proclaimed the right of Italian children to such education. Moreover, the State could now provide funding for non-state schools, including those established by *comuni*, on condition they took disadvantaged children. Central government, which had favoured church-run *scuole materne* and impeded attempts by the *Comune* to develop its own services, would no longer be an obstacle to the growth of Reggio Emilia's education project.

The law not only provided material support for expanding education for young children, but gave added legitimisation to the very concept. Until Law 444, *scuole materne* had been associated with a welfare role – with helping poor families, with assistance for working parents and with private philanthropy. While the legislation retained this social role, it also affirmed an educational purpose and value and the place of these schools in the State education system. More problematic, the law stated that only women could be employed in these schools for young children, a requirement only removed in 1977.

Whilst this important law was passed by a government led by the *Democrazia Cristiana*, a permanent feature of national politics since the end of the war, these few

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years in the 1960s did see signs of renewed political and social movements. Reacting to a dysfunctional university system, unable to cope with increasing numbers, a student movement exploded onto the scene in 1967. More than just a protest at bad conditions, it adopted an irreverent anti-authoritarianism, becoming 'an ethical revolt, a notable attempt to turn the tide against the predominant values of the time' (Ginsborg, 1990, p.301).

Though the student movement climaxed in spring 1968, agitation continued through the 1970s. It connected, too, with a new upsurge in industrial unrest that began in 1968, and lasted undiminished into the early 1970s; this in turn gave rise to a new left represented by a 'bewildering number of revolutionary groups' (*ibid.*, p.312) and a 'climate of permanent agitation and conflict' (p.321). Adding to this climate was an array of other social movements, exploring radical alternatives in many fields. All in all, as Paul Ginsborg puts it:

in these years [1968–73], collective action aiming to transform existing social and economic relations spread into nearly every part of Italian life. Everywhere, but especially in the Centre and North of the country, groups of activists challenged the way in which power was exercised, resources distributed, social classes divided . . . [It was in civil society] that radical alternatives spread most rapidly: 'red' markets, kindergartens, restaurants, social clubs, etc., opened (and often shut) one after another. Their aim was to organise social life along quite different lines, which not only challenged the individualism and segmentation of modern urban society, but also superseded the subcultures of the traditional left.

(*ibid.*, pp.322, 323)

This social ferment and industrial unrest towards the end of the 1960s, with the political pressure it brought to bear, finally forced movement on a long-awaited institutional change. Provisions for regional government had been written into the 1946 Constitution, yet despite being promised as an 'absolute priority', nothing had been implemented, perhaps in part because 'regional devolution meant giving more power to the Communists in the Red Belt of Italy' (*ibid.*, p.271). Now, following elections in May 1968 and faced by growing protest, a new national government (as usual, though, led by the *Democrazia Cristiana*) finally took action, passing a law for the election of regional councils, followed in 1970 by the first elections and a

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budget law empowering government to transfer functions to regions, as originally set out in the Constitution. In future years, the Emilia-Romagna Region was to form a productive relationship with Reggio Emilia for the furtherance of early childhood education in both the city and the wider region.

The emerging pedagogical project in Reggio Emilia, and Malaguzzi's part in it, indeed the whole 'municipal school revolution' should be seen against this energising and hopeful background.

What is striking about the period covered in this chapter is not only this political, social and cultural background, but also the boldness and self-confidence of cities like Reggio Emilia in taking the lead in developing services geared to contemporary conditions and the improvement of life. This municipal activism was fuelled by a belief in the public sector's ability and duty to run these services, especially the *comune* 'since it was the expression of democracy in the local area' (Various Authors, 2012, p.99). In 1969, Loretta Giaroni, Municipal *Assessore* for Schools and Social Services in Reggio Emilia from 1967 to 1975, emphasised this link to democracy when she noted that 'increasingly the municipality is proposed as a tool for fusing direct democracy with representative democracy. The experience of the protest movement for [municipal] *scuole materne* sees the municipality in this role' (*ibid.*). This strong democratic theme, with the linkage of representative and participatory democracy, can be seen in the creation in 1968 of *Comitati d'Iniziativa* [Initiative Committees] in city neighbourhoods in Reggio Emilia, to press for the opening of municipal early childhood services; their values and experiences were inherited and developed by *Comitati di Scuola e Città* [School and City Committees], established in 1970.

#### MALAGUZZI'S LIFE

Malaguzzi in 1964 was already active in children's services in the City, leading the *Centro Medico Psico-Pedagogico Comunale* and reforming the city's summer camps: he had 'extensive experience of working with children and highly innovative ideas on children's potentials and competencies, their ways of learning, and the role of school and education' (*ibid.*, p.83). He was also an important figure in the cultural life of Reggio Emilia. It was not surprising, therefore, that the *Comune* gave him the added responsibility of directing its new schools. He continued this dual role – working with the *Centro* and the municipal schools – until 1970.

For Malaguzzi, early childhood education in the municipal schools was clearly a women's issue, and rightly so. But in Reggio Emilia, and across Italy, there was

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strong disagreement about the role of women in the family and society. Catholic opinion supported women's family role and confining their paid work to part-time employment. The Left, through the work of groups such as the UDI, argued for women's right to employment, to be full members of society, and for services to support this goal. As noted in the previous chapter, a debate that followed these fault lines took place in Reggio Emilia's council in 1962, prior to the decision to open the first municipal school.

But women were not just the object of debate. Women, women's movements (such as the UDI) and women administrators in local government played an active role in demanding and campaigning for services, services that paid attention not only to their own needs but to those of children as well. From its inception in 1944, central values of the UDI were social justice, employment, peace – and the rights of women and children (*ibid.*, p.67). Women's political commitment, their 'widespread protagonism' for services that would meet their own needs but also children's, created a context 'from which theories of "new" schools sprang, bringing into play the concepts of solidarity between generations, participation in the local community, and autonomous social management' (*ibid.*, p.100).

Like the women campaigning for change, Malaguzzi was clear municipal schools were also there to fulfil an important right for children: a right to early education, education being something that, as has already been noted, he recognised as necessary from birth, since children are (as he later put it) 'born with many resources and extraordinary potential'. From the beginning, therefore, he rejected the idea that promoting early childhood services involved a choice between children or women; they were clearly understood by Malaguzzi and other advocates to be of value to both, offering both the possibility of emancipation.

While very involved in many ways in his home city, Malaguzzi was also deeply engaged nationally, an active participant in the vibrant educational scene of 1960s Italy. He assumed direction of the municipal schools in neighbouring Modena, the first of which was opened in 1964, and continued this role alongside his work in Reggio Emilia until 1974. There was also much exchange with places further afield. Writing later, Malaguzzi, described how he and colleagues from Reggio Emilia 'travelled to gather suggestions from the experience of other Italian cities: Florence, Bologna, Milan, Genoa and Rome' (*ibid.*, p.91). In the late 1960s, Malaguzzi, together with other educators, organised national conferences on early childhood education in various Italian cities.

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He was in close contact with leading educationalists of all persuasions, never committing to any one organisation or movement, and basing his relationships on mutual respect and dialogue. One of his closest relationships was with Bruno Ciari (1923–70), a leading figure in the *Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa*, and appointed head of Bologna's educational and extracurricular services in 1966. With his respect for scientific and critical thinking and his belief in the importance of educating the whole child, strong relations with families, collective and democratic working and the physical environment, Ciari was a source of great inspiration to Malaguzzi, a friend he was to describe as 'the most lucid, passionate and acute intelligence in the field of childhood education' (Malaguzzi, 2012, p.22).

But Malaguzzi's interests and contacts were international. As well as Freinet's work in France, Malaguzzi was attracted to psychological and pedagogical developments in Switzerland, participating in the work of the *Centro Educativo Italo-Svizzero* [CEIS, Italo-Swiss Educational Centre] in Rimini. He was later to recall that at this time 'Switzerland was a laboratory of psychological and pedagogical thinking without equal in Europe, with Édouard Claparède, Pierre Bovet, Adolphe Ferrière, the Rousseau Institute, the Geneva School of Piaget and the infinite shadow of Jean Jacques [Rousseau]' (Various Authors, 2012, p.78). This new thinking from Switzerland, but also from other countries, was influential with Malaguzzi and the schools in Reggio Emilia from the start, linking the city into a national and international world of new ideas and ways of working and fostering a spirit of curiosity, experimentation and research. Looking back, in 1993, he recalled how:

the cultural growth of the schools [in Reggio Emilia] during the 1960s was constructed as permanent research [. . .] [with] much reading (Lev S. Vygotsky, Erik Erikson, Bruno Bettelheim, Adolphe Ferrière, Célestin Freinet, Rudolph Arnheim) and much reflection. [. . .] We organised seminars, open to families, with the most committed representatives of Italian pedagogy. So that in 1965 annual periods of professional development began to take shape such as the Pedagogical November. [. . .] We began an exchange with the Geneva School, which works with active pedagogy and Jean Piaget, we began a dialogue with French pedagogy and colleagues, connected with the thinking and the new techniques of Célestin Freinet.

(*ibid.*, p.91)

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After twenty years of isolation under fascism, Italy and Malaguzzi were now well and truly reconnected to the rest of Europe and beyond.

#### THE SELECTION OF DOCUMENTS

Reggio Emilia Working Group

Either pedagogy – like all the human sciences – is remade, reconstructed and updated based on the new conditions of the times, or it loses its nature, its function, its proper capacity to correspond to the times it lives in, and above all to foresee, anticipate and prepare the days of tomorrow.

(Loris Malaguzzi, 1969, 'The Meaning and Intervention of School Management Committees in the *Scuole dell'Infanzia*' [37.69])

The second period we have chosen to organise Malaguzzi's work into begins with the opening of Reggio Emilia's first *scuola comunale dell'infanzia* on 5 November 1963. It was a difficult and embattled opening that shaped many of the choices Malaguzzi would make during the period, and which the reader will find traces of in the selected writings. From that day on Malaguzzi would be associated with the municipal-run schools for young children, a completely new reality in Reggio Emilia and for Italy in general.

In an interview Malaguzzi gave in 1993 he said:

responsibilities were clear in our minds; many eyes, not all friendly, were watching us. We had to make as few errors as possible; we had to find our cultural identity quickly, make ourselves known, and win trust and respect. [. . .] It was a feverish time, a time of adaptation, of continuous adjustment of ideas, of selection of projects and attempts. Those projects and attempts were supposed to respond to the combined expectations of children and families and to reflect our competences, which were still in the making.

(Malaguzzi, 2012, p.31)

We believe his statement expresses the distinct commitment of the time, a period full of initiatives that Malaguzzi promoted and collaborated on, scattered across the whole region. These ranged over various fields and confronted different subjects:



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from a seminar on numbers to an exhibition on toys accompanied by a collection of children's drawings, and touching on still other themes in public conferences and professional development meetings. A breadth of interest that was capable of bringing together diverse cultural levels and contexts with an attention, coherence and quality of communication we believe to be quite surprising in the field of education; always striving to make 3- to 6-year-old children and their schools better known to parents and citizens in order to legitimise the investments being asked of the *Comune*. This was an educational and ethical project Malaguzzi felt to be important and necessary for a new society.

The theme of removing children from anonymity is particularly important and had already appeared in Malaguzzi's previous writings and we will find it remains constant over time. It was well defined in the *Casa di Vacanza* [summer camp] project, where he arranges for each child to have a 'biographical record' written up by teachers, which also includes 'a psychological and behavioural profile' [23.64]. At a later date we find him presenting the *scuola materna* experience to the city of Reggio Emilia, giving his assurance that children attending *scuole materne* will not enter elementary school 'anonymous and unknown', but accompanied by materials and documents [33.68].

It should be remembered that Malaguzzi was a marvellous organiser and again, in the *Casa di Vacanza* project, organisation is defined in specific ways that were revolutionary for the times: ratios of adults to children to vary with children's ages, the group considered as a socio-ethical entity, the basic structure of the pedagogy with priority given to 'recovering equilibrium and psychological adjustment [of children]', professional development for educators, planning based on written reference work, and parent involvement. Malaguzzi also proposed using the summer camp buildings, normally deserted in April and May, in a specific programme for children under 6 years, halving the numbers of children attending for this younger age group.

Organisation, which in our introduction to the previous chapter we define as 'the conditions', is one of the recurring themes in Malaguzzi's pedagogy and in a speech at a conference in Rimini in 1966, he states 'organisation is always an important pedagogical factor' [31.67]. The venue for the conference was no accident. For it was in Rimini that the *Centro Educativo Italo-Svizzero* was founded and directed by Margherita Zoebeli, becoming a place where the generation of innovating and radical educators, to which Malaguzzi belonged, had access to professional development, meetings and exchange, a crucible where kindred ideas could be debated. The CEIS

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had close ties with the *Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa*, whose main points of reference were Freinet and an active pedagogy valuing the teacher's role as experiential guide. The intense and close relations between Malaguzzi and Bruno Ciari were generated in this setting.

What strikes us in Loris Malaguzzi's writings is his great commitment to change, to which this very fertile, dynamic period of history was probably conducive. Malaguzzi did not only abstractly theorise, but always firmly fused his ideas (new, revolutionary, borrowed from theories of the time but never in servile, deferential ways) to the construction of new experience and realities. The new experiences looked for (and found) new terminologies: what had previously been defined as a '*Colonia*', mainly conceived in terms of health, prevention and recreation, was changed to a '*Casa di vacanza*': the same process would take place when changing from '*scuola materna*' (school for 3- to 6-year-olds) to '*asilo infantile*', later adopting the term '*scuola dell'infanzia*'.

These were new names for radically different projects and experiences. Another of the many initiatives during this period was the '*Novembre pedagogico*' [Pedagogical November] of 1965, with a programme of five parent conferences and four professional development meetings for teachers [25.65]. We cannot know if professional development in this format was something new for the time; however to us it certainly seems of great import that it was given such visibility and was announced to parents and citizens in a leaflet promoting 'a series of events in November with the aim of giving value to the work and problems of the *scuole materne* and stimulating more thorough knowledge and esteem for them, both in families and in public opinion' [25.65]. Making visible the professional development of teachers (all female since men were excluded by national law until the mid-Seventies) was intended to give value to a profession held in low esteem and associated with a concept of welfare, care and minding young children.

Parents were a necessary presence in the new *scuola dell'infanzia* project, to the extent that Malaguzzi had no qualms about scolding them for their absence from the first *Novembre pedagogico* meeting [26.65]; or recommending they participate at subsequent meetings about the psychology of children aged 3 to 6 years [29.66]. These meetings to enable deeper examination together with experts lead back to the idea of 'discuss[ing] with awareness, based on precise, concrete information', which Malaguzzi used to define democracy in 1959 [17.59]. His reference to the warm rich debate that absent parents had missed in the first meeting testifies to this view.

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Legitimation given by Malaguzzi to the new role of teachers and parents comes together with a new conception of the child and the child's possibilities. He also assigns a non-subordinate role to families, in search of the cultural identity so urgently needed to give impetus to the new politics on childhood, which had been inaugurated with the birth of the *Comune's* schools.

Malaguzzi was a curious reader and tirelessly read authors of all nationalities with different professional backgrounds. Reviewing his work in this period (published and unpublished), references can be found to Jean Marc Gaspard Itard (physician, pedagogue and educator), Edouard Seguin (physician), Henri Wallon (psychologist, pedagogue and philosopher), Renè Zazzo (psychologist and pedagogue), all French; the Italian Maria Montessori; Jean Piaget and Édouard Claparède (psychologist and pedagogue), who were Swiss; the Americans Arnold Gessel (psychologist and paediatrician) and Jerome Bruner (psychologist); the German Kurt Lewin (psychologist); Anton Semenovyc Makarenko (pedagogue and educator) who was Ukrainian; and many others besides, testifying to Malaguzzi's impassioned and never ending research, sometimes following unfrequented paths.

During this period Malaguzzi appears to be mostly committed to research into defining and legitimising the cultural identity of the municipal *scuola dell'infanzia*. He is extremely interested, too, in the logical structure of thinking and the operational theories of intelligence put forward in studies by Jean Piaget. Referencing a scientific researcher of Jean Piaget's depth, who used innovative and original methods to reveal children and their knowledge processes, is surely a choice intended to give legitimacy to schools for very young children.

An example of Malaguzzi's interest in Piaget comes from 1966. '*L'educazione del bambino dai 3 ai 6 anni*' [The education of the child aged 3-6] was the title given to a series of public lectures held in Rimini in April/May 1966, to accompany a regional exhibition of 'expressive activities', such as drawing and painting. Malaguzzi contributed a lecture on 'The initiation of logical-mathematical thinking, according to Jean Piaget', excerpts from which are included in this chapter [31.67]. Malaguzzi felt obliged to justify choosing a non-Italian researcher as a focus for his talk on numbers in schools for 3- to 6-years-olds, and what emerges is his reaching towards 'the universality, the ecumenism of the culture of our time' – a warning still timely today in a period of conflicting fragmented cultures of identity.

There are several documents in this period on learning mathematics, ranging from professional development to conferences and public lectures. During these years

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Malaguzzi focuses on the idea that mathematics can be an area of learning for 3- to 6-years-olds, since the 'basic structure of mathematical conceptualisations are identical to the basic structures of thinking' [31.67]. But he immediately places this idea in a broader, more general context, stating that 'logical thinking is constructed and refined as much through the study of science, spoken and written language, drawing, art, music etc. as through the study of mathematics'. This line of thinking anticipated an inter-disciplinary discourse that emerged with complexity theories in the mid-1970s; it suggests a root for his theory of 'the hundred languages', which over time became an emblem of Reggio Emilia pedagogy, a theory in which children (human beings) are recognised as possessing many cultural possibilities, which can too readily be systematically denied and taken away by the culture of school and society.

Malaguzzi's deep interest in Piaget can also be related to his discourse in the previous chapter on psycho-pedagogy as a theoretical frame of reference capable of opening new scenarios for research and action in the childhood services being established at the time. How can psychologists work with pedagogy? The old diatribe between psychology and pedagogy finds Malaguzzi, as always, bringing together apparently opposed elements, choosing, re-interpreting, looking for concrete applications.

He appreciated and took from psychology the methods of observation. These, he believed, were capable of lifting from anonymity children whose identity had been devalued as incomplete and lacking because viewed and evaluated with an adult yardstick; and of discovering and presenting the dynamic processes of their maturation. But always taking a critical attitude to the core concept of developmental stages, supported in this stance by what he saw emerging from the work of teachers.

Malaguzzi aspires to a transition from more experimental science to school experimentation, a process giving pedagogy new life but struggling to make the transition into the reality of school. There can be no doubt of his multifaceted personality, persistently striving to make ideas and desires into reality. The building of beautiful and culturally important schools was certainly one of these desires, and the reason he followed these projects so closely, including their construction. There is a series of documents sent to the Mayor, the *Assessore* and municipal technicians during work on building the *scuola dell'infanzia* Diana, suggesting among other things the creation of an *atelier* environment in the school gardens (and highlighting how important he considered its presence) [36.69], and reminders about keeping to deadlines in carrying out the plans [32.67].

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In a document from March 1968 [33.68], Malaguzzi gives an effective synthesis of the research into cultural identity for the new *scuola materna* – that ‘many people would like to call *Scuola dell’infanzia* with good cause’ – inspired by ‘a modern humanism, originating from the essential basis of Piaget’s discoveries’. The publication is a sort of manifesto in the simple direct language Malaguzzi knew he possessed, despite more often being complex, metaphorical and evocative. All the themes developed over the following years in the experience of Reggio Emilia’s municipal schools emerge here. It is a sort of list in which Malaguzzi briefly describes conditions for a good school: engagement with families, professional development for personnel, the value of the environment, a richness and variety of stimulus, pedagogical conferences for parents, education exhibitions, observation notes entered in teachers’ notebooks, the direct creation of educational materials, study conferences with participants from different cities, connections with the society and culture of the times. Once again he is not afraid of giving clear indications: no to scholasticism, but yes to the importance of observing, stimulating, annotating, reproposing, examining. He identifies an evolving university in the quality of the teachers’ everyday work (in his opinion the pedagogical work in Reggio Emilia’s schools was a ‘true university’, that is to say a true and authoritative place of learning), and calls for ties with primary school.

Clearly in this piece he is concerned with reassuring the city, which is not yet used to schools for young children, through his statements on integrating innovation and tradition, and through his cautious and somewhat classificatory attitude towards the capacities of 3- to 6-year-olds. This concern was present in his Rimini talks of 1966 and 1969 [31.67, 38.69], and he raises it here again when he declares the importance of providing differentiated spaces and activities, especially intended to safeguard the youngest children, assigned with mats as spaces and modules for play and work. Although he had great negotiating skills, Malaguzzi was not a man of compromise, but had clear positions he declared with great force. So the care taken not to explicitly oppose traditionally entrenched ideas, instead integrating them into a new system of values and organisation being defined, was probably necessary to keep open channels of dialogue through which the experience could continue and expand.

Another theme proposed by Malaguzzi of great interest today is the organic journey between a *scuola materna* and elementary school: ‘the *scuola materna* connects with the school that follows in spirit and in fact . . . [effectively finding] its pedagogical identity in this proper and necessary organic unity, without in any way belittling the features of its profound and authentic originality’ [33.68]. Malaguzzi had already imagined this project in 1968, but unfortunately in Italy it has never been completed, in spite of several ministerial circulars written on the subject. ‘Organicity’ –

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wholeness – and unity are cross-cutting themes running through the new concept of the child, the idea of involving families, the connections between school and society.

All these issues are raised again in a clearer more extended way in Rimini in 1969, when Malaguzzi examined teachers' cultural and professional background together with an analysis of the real pedagogical situation they worked in [38.69]. The reflection starts from the conviction that children's health and wellbeing are closely tied to those of teachers. His accurate and vigorous analysis makes a defence of the teaching profession, not to preserve the *status quo* with a corporative vision, but to denounce existent situations and propose structural and organisational change: to reduce the child–adult ratio; to abandon the concept of care and offer children and adults new learning objectives; and, above all, to work in groups so as to lead teachers out of isolation.

Malaguzzi was a convinced advocate that the *scuola dell'infanzia*, more than other schools, must look to the future, and that it can be the lever for change and quality in future schools. He also denounces the fact that families often have a minor role in schools; in his opinion it is necessary to reconsider families as authoritative interlocutors and bearers of important experiences and competences, making a precious cultural contribution. Already we have a clear glimpse of the framework and humus of the cultural manifesto Malaguzzi wrote shortly before his death, *Una carta per tre diritti* [A charter of three rights], in which he proposes that the rights of children, teachers and families are indissolubly woven together in schools, and in an education that aspires to call itself such.

The mixing of languages and their concurrent presence, which had already been theorised and distinguished, can be found in a 1969 document [35.69], where the idea that 'without experience thinking is not nourished' [31.67] becomes reality. It is a particularly important piece, first and foremost because perhaps for the first time educational experience with children aged 3 to 6 years is reported in a document where reference theories and educational choices are made clear. What it gives us, Malaguzzi warns, is not *the* itinerary but one of many itineraries for 'orienting the walking together, the growing together'. We can also identify in this piece the re/ search for a project thread, feeding the children's motivation and offering them the possibility to be protagonists, not only of single situations and experiences but in the development of the work. The idea that a school is a permanent exhibition of 'precious documentation [that] grows with the story and requires ordered planning inside and outside the classroom' is to our mind the germ of an idea that would be developed over the years to come. The motivation for documentation here is not

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only the need to legitimise the *scuola dell'infanzia*, making experience with children visible to parents and citizens, but also the offer of 'a constantly available stimulus to children's memory and reflection'.

The theme of organisation is taken up again and we read: 'organisation does not mean systematisation, neither does it mean simply adding'. Rather it is a means of comprehensive renewal capable of giving children and adults new conditions, so that the 'occasional, dispersive and spontaneous' are not given too much room. Finally, the piece is a synthesis of evaluation, an impetus to continue methodological experimentation and differentiation in the increasing number of *scuole comunali* in the city in 1969.

On the bond between school and society Malaguzzi asserts forcefully that 'the fate of papers, particularly Education Papers, is to go over the head of reality and present proposals that often do not get beyond paper' [38.69]. The *scuole dell'infanzia*, by contrast, must be rooted in the society and the culture of their time.

*Scuole dell'infanzia* need alliances, and Malaguzzi was a great weaver of relations. Readers will find evidence of this in the letters of widely differing tenor included in the selection: letters to *Comune* surveyors, to the Mayor, to the Olivetti Company, to intellectuals of various nationalities. All these communications have the purpose of creating precious alliances, that can help give form and legitimacy to this new experience of the *Comune*-managed *scuola dell'infanzia*.

Part of this alliance-building is the project of parent participation, which was essential for giving strength to *scuole dell'infanzia*, generated by the idea of the unity of children's experience and the idea of democracy, both so strongly rooted in Malaguzzi, in the city and in the region of Emilia-Romagna. In Rimini in 1969 Malaguzzi pointed out the risk of schools having a subordinate and marginal conception of families, the result of excluding the real outside world in which children live. This thinking is also the fruit of his relationship with Ada Marchesini Gobetti (see Chapter 1, n.44), founder and director of the *Giornale dei genitori* [Parents' Journal] and an important reference at the time for many parents looking for a new definition of their role in school and society. In 1969, when *Comitati di Scuola e Città* were created in Modena, where Malaguzzi was a pedagogical consultant, their purpose and structure were very different from those of Committees then existing in state schools, whose rhetoric of collaboration and dialogue Malaguzzi denounced as condescending, passive and disguising negative attitudes. He explains that choosing the term *Città* [City] for inclusion in the name of the new management bodies is an

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invitation to broaden the vision of childhood beyond school, and to keep in mind the unity and complexity of children's identity and experience [27.69].

Already we can see the maturity of a project still living today, proposing *the scuola dell'infanzia* (and later the *nido*) as places producing culture and democracy, and reconciling the different places that figure in children's lives.

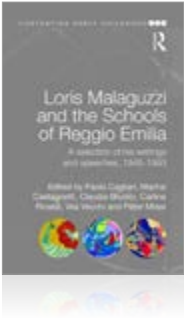


# 4

SPEECH BY LORIS  
MALAGUZZI, REGGIO  
EMILIA, APRIL 1989

## 4 :: SPEECH BY LORIS MALAGUZZI, REGGIO EMILIA, APRIL 1989

DOCUMENT 92.89 (TRANSCRIPT FROM THE ORIGINAL AUDIO  
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The following is excerpted from  
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**Editor's note:** This speech is described as being given at the Marzo–Aprile Pedagogico, which may have been a period of events on educational topics open to all educators, parents and other citizens.

### *OUR CHILDREN: BEAUTIFUL HEADS RATHER THAN HEADS FULL*

My thanks to Eletta and all the friends who over the course and turning of time have contributed to this very long spiral [the history of Reggio Emilia's municipal schools]. It is a spiral that has grown over time and changed over time, a very long journey in history that has gone through moments that were not always in a straight line but has always had on its side a capacity for coherently keeping to the trajectory, to the sightline.

It is a long story, and the generations are changing, and I do not know how much these memories can be shared. Young teachers entering now probably do not live the same things, with memories of the kind we carry within us. In many ways these are extraordinary memories, and we certainly should be recounting them in much more documented ways, more written ways I mean, writing the phases of these memories, their moments, their origins. I think the original hallmark is a hallmark we still have, and I think it has been shared over the years, with a memory that has never lost its capacity for selecting out the things that are worthwhile from things that are not.

Our story was born some days after Liberation. It is a long ago era, but an era we still feel inside us. It is a story that was born of an intuition in people less disposed in some ways towards what I would call the current culture. It was born based on an intuition, on concreteness, on a hope and a utopia, which meant they started without anyone else suggesting things to them, they started building their school in Villa Cella. It was not their school – in a certain sense yes it was, but more than that it was the school they wanted for their children: a kind of redress, a redemption, a strong creation, strong with the hope an initiative of this kind could contain within it. And working on Saturdays and on Sundays – they were labourers, and land workers, they were factory workers, and the women were labourers too; so in the space of a few months, working Saturdays and Sundays, they built the school. It was a school born absolutely just like that, the way a mushroom can grow by surprise, without anyone suggesting anything to them and without any guidelines from anywhere.

And I still remember the conversation: on the one hand their very thick dialect and on the other how incredible that the conversation should take place between me

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and some of these women cleaning bricks. There. To my mind this is probably the font that contains the great generative strength that is capable of leading to different shores in children's education. It was felt so keenly by these people, participating so much, and was something the official culture was only just beginning to glimpse. To my mind those bricks, taken from bombed out houses, cleaned one by one, made into a building, give exactly the sense of the journey we have made. One bit at a time.

These were times of a great flowering, and even schools could be set up without being ordered: they were all on the city outskirts, especially in the poorest parts. When I say poor I am referring to a very great poverty, really very deep, on a very great scale. So the schools of Sesso, Massenzatico, Foscatò, Masone and Santa Croce were born. They were created through direct self-management and their great problem was one of survival. Hopes were many, but hope only just managed to weave in with questions of an economic and financial nature. The problem was to ensure the survival of the schools and the survival of hope: above all the survival of the children.

I know diets today are under discussion. At that time there were no special diets, diet was cyclical and we progressed according to the season. We always ate eggs, which were offered to us by farmers, and chestnuts when there were chestnuts. The menu was the sign and the cross of a great generosity. Recounting these episodes, which today would seem absolutely incredible, there is a point where I would like to halt the memories, because I know that when memories return they re-invent themselves in some way, and I really do not want to re-invent anything.

So then, the story of schools for [young] children in our country is a story interwoven with many events, and many vicissitudes I will not discuss too much. However historically and politically it is a very strong affair. You all know that the issue of whether to create *scuole materne* or not moved forward slowly [. . .]. The struggle lasted eight years, and really it began two years before that, so from 1958 to 1968 there was a Parliamentary battle that was essentially on the right of the State to have its own *scuole materne*.

In 1966 Moro's government fell over this issue, which means *scuola materna*, schools for little ones, little schools, school for the wee ones was a very significant crossroad, very difficult to deal with. Perhaps we should not marvel more than necessary at these crossroads in history. At that time it was a historical crossroad. Past experience had led to an absolute monopoly of [Catholic] parishes in early years education with situations we can hardly criticise. We have to give due consideration to the work the parishes did, just as it is important to acknowledge the great amount of voluntary

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work in schools in the humblest parts of the city. This [voluntary work] seems to be disappearing today, when we consider the way things are going, how things are moving forward, how they are progressing. However this [kind of work] remains a great opportunity for culture, not only for existential and human adventure.

The country was being rebuilt and many meanings became grafted onto the issue of schools for young children during the reconstruction, and were also grafted onto changes in the organisation of the family that began to emerge at this time and were unstoppable in the 1960s and 1970s, and from 1970 to 1975 – I think this was the great time of movement, though the later changes are probably still ongoing and so it is difficult to determine its trajectory. However, more than anything else the issue was connected with changes in the meaning of education, and this problem was social in nature and administrative in nature: it was a problem that was political and cultural in nature. It was a huge issue. Consider that when we [the municipal schools] were born, officially in 1963, all the other schools that had been invented, that had sprung from the people's invention, had fallen behind, or fallen in action. Some managed to resist until 1967. The *Comune* finally managed to municipalise them in 1967, and bring an end to this great odyssey of extremely difficult survival that was the hallmark of the birth of these somewhat irregular and alien creatures.

In 1963 we [the municipal schools] were born. I will not tell you how but obviously we were born after fortunately overcoming long, strong and obstinate opposition, since the *Comune* could not be allowed to directly manage educational affairs. This is an important issue I have always fought for personally and most determinedly. It was a great opportunity for the historical left. The historical left has always been very backward on the issue of understanding education, and above all on understanding childhood. So this was an absolutely radical turning point in the long tradition of struggle and politics. To me it seemed essential, and of vital importance, that together with the issues of administration [by the *Comune*], there should also be a presence [by the left] in the facts of education, in the fact of being part of understanding and managing, of a capacity to grow awareness on the very delicate and very important issues of children's early education.

The Robinson school [first municipal school opened] was born, and I would just like to say the name was not plucked from the air. It is a name that is well-meant, giving centrality to the adventures of a man, to the adventures of the birth of an institution, for the first time taking place with a sufficient guarantee of survival behind it. [. . .] However I want to tell you that curriculum design began immediately with teachers – and this to my mind is one of the most important things – curriculum

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design that today perhaps would make us smile, legitimately I think. But at that time it was something completely new, especially in the education of young children and in schools for young children, something completely new that one could design [an education], that one could attempt to leave behind daily improvisation, the improvisation of minute-by-minute, and attempt to re-construct something more monitored, more monitor-able, something longer, with more intersections, more combinations that could be re-combined. Above all it let teachers – the very first teachers – go from nothing to something. Because the secular experience of schooling and of a [school] service was absolutely virgin territory. So I remember from the start that interwoven with the birth there was this first conscious germ of rigorous application, as far as it was possible, of what I would call an educational design.

The school was born in 1963 when the battle in Parliament [over public provision of schools for young children] was at its most tense, and the battle continued for five years. However I do not want to remember the Robinson, which has its anniversary this year: we send our best wishes and congratulations. I wanted to remember the way the city of Reggio Emilia was continuously intersected by the planning of research and cultural events. In 1963, at the same time the Robinson school was born, we organised a conference in Reggio Emilia that was incredible because it was on a theme that is still underway; research and debate on this theme are still ongoing. The conference was on the relation between psychiatry – it was called psychiatry then – between psychology and pedagogy, and it is still a current theme. The conference anticipated by years the appearance of reflection on these themes. Themes that are still asking to be interwoven, and where the lack of this weaving, for people attending to work like ours, is something we feel and suffer.

In 1966 we held an international conference, the first international Italo-Czechoslovakian conference. It was a highly successful conference and all the most illustrious names in Italian pedagogy were present, from De Bartolomeis to Visalberghi, Borghi. This was an event that marked the city of Reggio Emilia as already having a vocation for culture, for research on a cultural level.

In 1968 something extraordinary happened. For the first time, secular *comuni* from all over Italy came together in Bologna to reflect on issues of *educazione dei bambini* [early years education]. I remember it was an incredible occasion. To think that the secular sector was capable of rallying together on a theme that had never gone beyond theoretical statements, to [reach] a place where themes put down roots in very concrete reflection.

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In 1970 the first *asilo nido* was born in Reggio Emilia, one year in advance of [national law] 1044. Again this was something extraordinary, illustrating a capacity for translating into action things that might [previously] have remained on a level of ideas and thinking.

In 1971 we held a conference on social management [in early childhood services], two words worn threadbare today. However to speak of social management and family participation – real concrete participation, not participation preached or written in frontispieces – was again something very big and new in terms of experience at that time. It underscored – I would say it *re-scored* – the parental mark of the first schools [for young children], which I discussed with you earlier.

For the first time in 1971 we had the courage to organise a National Conference in our city; the first national study conference. The theme was very ambitious: ‘Experiences for a new *Scuola dell’Infanzia*’. It was the first time secular Italy had managed to organise a meeting of such importance and such vitality. Remember what transport and communication were like at this time. We thought 200 or 250 people at the most would come, and we would have been over the moon. We found ourselves at midday with 750 people from all round Italy, and some even from abroad. I remember we had to change the *Sala degli Specchi* venue in a great rush. Overnight we moved the exhibition that was on in the *Teatro Municipale*, and held the conference in the theatre.

Again it was an exceptional experience. The first time an attempt had been made to put together experiences from here and there – there were not many – that were capable of making a public statement directly related to the values of the newborn experience [municipal *scuola dell’infanzia*]. A book was produced. It is impossible to find the book now, it can only be found in libraries. However I believe it represented the first organic attempt in our country to give a voice, sufficiently concrete, sufficiently organic, to the issues of early years education.

In 1974 we even had a conference on Graphics [drawing and mark-making, see Chapter 5, n.14] and again it was an extraordinary conference. I am remembering it now because it was a little lost in there with my memories. It was an extraordinary conference because we not only invited psychologists and *pedagogistas* to discuss drawings (graphics), for the first time we also invited semioticians, and nobody knew what these were. And we also invited biologists, and no one knew what these were either or what they could do for us with this kind of theme. In some ways we anticipated many of the issues that are still open-ended in the field, and we will come

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back to those later. The question of biology on a level of professional development has yet to come: it has not registered yet, and it is still only half an issue.

In 1975 there was a large conference in Bologna. There was a strong attack in 1975 by Catholic forces on the radio, but we won't talk about that [actually in 1976; see pp.166, 277]. Again it became an episode in our history, an episode that can be explained very rationally, and I think they had reason to produce this kind of attack, concentrating especially on our city [of Reggio Emilia], which was seen as a sort of epicentre for an increasing phenomenon related above all to [educational] activity by *comuni*.

In 1963 [in the *scuole dell'infanzia*] we had two classes [of children]. At the end of the 1960s we had twelve. Between 1970 and 1975 we progressed to fifty-four classes. Think how extraordinary this trajectory was. This really was the [. . .] easiest season in many ways, and the most thrilling, because there truly was a capacity for word to become fact, for word to become bricks. And here we must remember our mayors, all of whom continued in a direction anchored to the values of this initiative, the kind of initiative we are trying to remember.

Then came another extremely important episode. In our opinion it was incredible that men could not be employed in the *scuola materna*. Not only was it sensible to feel this way, I would say it was an awareness, a feeling that a profession like this could not be denied to male teachers.

It was prohibited, **the employment of male teachers was forbidden** [by national law]. We broke the wall of resistance, we broke it [in 1972 in the *Comune's Regolamento*], and twenty days later a circular from the Malfatti Ministry [of Education] was on the desks of every Italian administrator based on our initiative, reminding them it was absolutely forbidden for any State administration or State representatives [e.g. state-run *scuole materne*] to open the doors to male teachers. This problem has still not been resolved, the problem of teaching for ever given over to women. The issue of teaching only being a job for women is not just about freedom of choice, it is an extremely complex issue that represents a serious obstacle for every man who comes forward wishing to teach in our schools.

This again is a very complex, delicate theme. So I would like to say that men did pass over the threshold with us. I remember the first men employed in the *asilo nido* and *scuola dell'infanzia*. It was a great event for us, and I think we were aware of it, but it was a great event for children too, and for families. It is something that, thinking back today – and we have fewer men today than we had then – was a sensational

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discovery, which pedagogical literature has not been capable of adequately remembering nor been sufficiently capable of highlighting as a necessity and opportunity for children who from a psychological and anthropological [human] point of view are very obviously asking for relations with both sexes, which are not partial and halved or forbidden.

Well I could go on with this history, but I think it is time to stop, except to remember certain things that are still alive inside us, alive in the sense we are still researching them, still realising them.

The problem of Social Management, despite crises in the collegial bodies, is something that has been maintained. And though it now takes different forms and has new difficulties it is still a cornerstone of our experience, which must not lose such a vital, fertile contact.

The problem of teachers' co-presence [having two teachers in each group]. If I were to tell you the adventures we had in order to obtain a measure like this! Fully aware that still today we cannot do education, and cannot even aspire to doing education if this principle is not included in a project or package. [This principle] is more organic, more extended, more systematic, and includes forms of organisation that are capable of letting pedagogical ideas and practice take their course.

The entrance of the *atelier*. The other day a [female] friend from another country said to me, 'We were amazed when you spoke of *ateliers* as a sort of desired turbulence stirred up in the schools.' And effectively speaking, the *atelier* was one of several measures capable of sweeping away tradition, sweeping away traditional organisation. We did not really know very well ourselves [what would happen], but we did know it was important to provoke a break, provoke some less convenient directions capable of breaking with the professional and cultural routine that we were interested in removing.

The problem of including **aggiornamento** [professional development] in our work contracts. If you think what this has meant in battles, not just here [in Reggio Emilia] but especially in other places. [ . . . ] This *aggiornamento* included in our working week, this [form of] social management, is something of extraordinary value.

In the same way our sensibility towards handicapped children was of extraordinary value. In 1970 we had twenty-five [of these] children in the *scuole dell'infanzia*. I mean the sensibility towards bringing in difference, fully aware of what we were doing, and of what would be produced in the way of the educational dynamic.



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However I believe this spiral of continuity that has existed relies above all on a level of theory, on a project of research, and this was elaborated during the journey, but in some ways it was already [there], sufficiently clear and aware inside us.

I do not wish to insist on these issues. The problem I would like to discuss this evening is another. It is to see instead how to further complete and push forward with our theorising and research, while taking into account all the mutability, all the changes, that have happened or are happening. Constantly keeping before us above all the fact that the children we have today are the children of the year 2000. To my mind this is something of a cultural and political nature that ought to tie us to a sensibility and extreme awareness.

We are working in difficult times, so mutable, so constantly changing for children, pushed beyond our capacity for prediction because the future today is difficult for us to govern. The problem of today's children is a great problem, requiring a great capacity for selection, for producing choices, for producing choices that break with the recent and distant past, and that hold within them at least the conditions of a possibility, of a possible trajectory, of seeing the future by keeping at hand everything the present gives us today. In the present there are many things, many complex things, many intersecting things, many good things, many things that are not good, many bad things. There are many chances, many possibilities, many positives and many risks. Our period is one of extremely rich elements, mixed with the possibilities of an extremely complex destiny.

CHAPTER

# 5

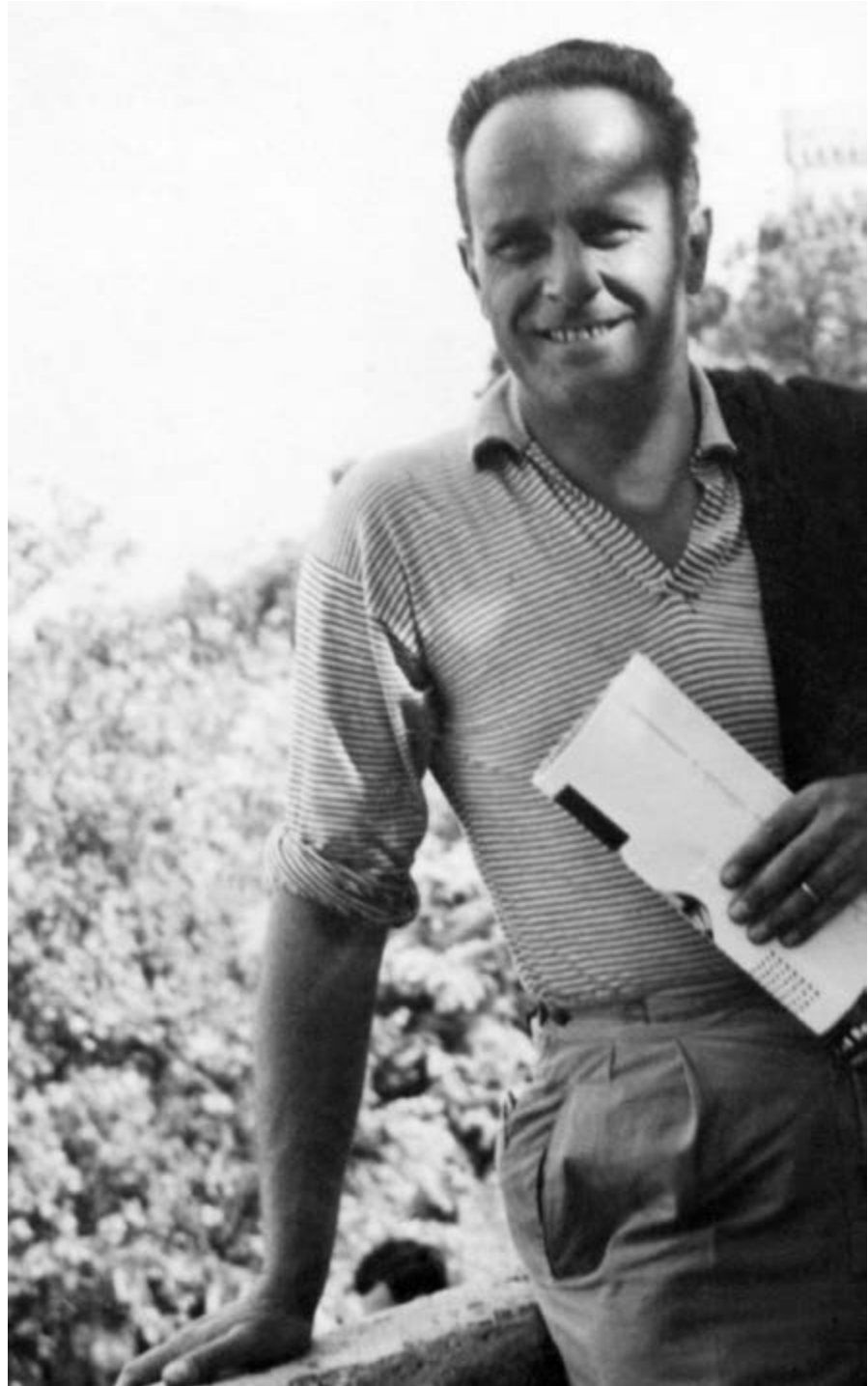
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Loris Malaguzzi, late 1940s

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Loris Malaguzzi, Renzo Bonazzi (mayor of Reggio Emilia from 1962 to 1976), Loretta Giaroni (Assessore for Schools and for Social Services of the Comune of Reggio Emilia from 1967 to 1975), Sala degli Specchi [hall of Mirrors], Municipal Theatre of Reggio Emilia, 1969



Professional development meeting at the *Casa dello Studente* [Student's Residence] Reggio Emilia, early 1970s

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Loris Malaguzzi, 1980s

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International Study Group visiting the Scuola comunale dell'infanzia Diana, Reggio Emilia, early 1990s