

## **If the Eye Leaps over the Wall | Researching new paradigms for education**

**Dr Penny Hay, Research Fellow, CCCI**

**Reggio Emilia 20 - 22 February 2020**

*“To make a lovable school, industrious, inventive, liveable, documentable and communicable, a place of research, learning, re-cognition and reflection, where children, teachers and families feel well - is our point of arrival.”* Loris Malaguzzi

**Loris Malaguzzi** (1920-2020) was a central figure in the Reggio Emilia approach in Northern Italy. I was lucky enough to attend an international research conference celebrating his work and contribute to a contemporary debate in relation to his legacy. The conference, for the centenary of Loris Malaguzzi’s birth, proposed that together we seek to *understand all the issues central today in debate, discussion and reflection that transcend the situation of childhood and instead affect human beings, relationships, women, formative experience, inter-personal relations, culture, and gender culture.* (Loris Malaguzzi, *If the Eye Leaps over the Wall* Exhibition, 1981)

In his commentary to *If the Eye Leaps over the Wall* exhibition Loris Malaguzzi wrote, *“our hope is that the eye, taken figuratively both as a symbolic eye, summoned here to see and understand the new cultural roles which seeing and images have in contemporary society and as a conceptual figure which embraces all the problems of the growth and development of both child and adult, will have the strength and the will to leap over the wall. The wall, that is, of incongruence, of banality, of old rules, the rigid packaged concepts and the elusive, atomised, and rhetorical actions which still cluster around the image of human beings and the project of educating children.”*

International colleagues participated in a series of reflections on various areas of research:

### **1.The right to rights**

An ecological vision of human beings

### **2.The right to subjectivity**

The hundred languages give value to the plurality of knowledge processes

### **3.The right to research**

Interdependency in educational contexts between theory and practice

### **4.The right to competence**

Children and adults as participatory subjects in the construction of culture

### **5.The right to beauty**

The ethics and aesthetics of knowledge processes

I was part of the *‘The right to research’* seminar focusing on the interdependency in educational contexts between theory and practice. Invited keynote speakers included Peter Moss, Emeritus Professor of Early Childhood Education at University College London, Institute of Education, and Gunilla Dahlberg, Emeritus Professor of Education at Stockholm University, Department of Child and

Youth Studies, who are both members of the Scientific Committee of the Reggio Children, Loris Malaguzzi Centre Foundation. This was also an opportunity to share our work at Bath Spa University, and in particular our research with House of Imagination (previously 5x5x5=creativity) and Forest. of Imagination.

As academics and creative professionals, we know that the relationship between theory and practice in research poses individuals and society with fundamental and ethical questions, requiring responses that are capable of weaving knowledge with imagination, of shifting points of view, and extending the horizons of experience. Loris Malaguzzi stated *'Research and experimentation are moments of decisive importance in all senses: we need to go there fully aware ...Controlling what we are attempting and doing has to be done not only with the people who work in schools but above all with families and the people, with humility and an absolute respect for democracy.'*

Re-founding the concept and praxis of research, experimenting with previously untried strategies, was the path taken by colleagues in Reggio Emilia to construct a new and different idea of education, one that prioritises human beings' way of knowing through research as a right, with a tension of knowledge towards the new and unknown. Guaranteeing the right to research is an ethical and political choice, one that gives centrality to human beings as relational subjects, inter-dependent and connected by the fabric of relations every life brings with it. Research therefore becomes the tension of possible futures that every human being carries within them, a renewable source of wonder that corresponds to the right to life, to beauty, to consideration, to change and to knowing.

Peter Moss discussed the problematic 'language of evaluation' or 'quality'. He suggested that the 'language of performance management' is based on a neoliberal view of education with a distinctive identity and image of 'services' i.e. technologies producing a prespecified commodity or outcome, ignoring issues of complexity, context and problems of replicability and one which produces reductive and simplistic results. These 'mechanistic methodologies'- checklists, templates, strict protocols and rules - are top down, reductionist, dysfunctional, and side-line alternative ways of learning.

This contrasts strongly with the Reggio approach which has a particular pedagogical identity, including the image of the child, democracy, cooperation, subjectivity, uncertainty, wonder and inter-connectedness as values, research and experimentation. Peter argued that we need a 'language of evaluation' that is commensurate with Reggio Emilia's distinct identity – to evaluate ethically, adopting an 'ethics of an encounter'.

Instead, Peter proposed a 'complexity paradigm', fitting for people and processes that are uncontrollable, harder to measure, unpredictable, and with non-linear logic towards emergence - a 'methodological pluralism', creativity in adopting, adapting, and combining multiple methodologies and methods, with participation and reflexivity at the heart of the process: self-critical epistemological awareness reflecting on one's own behaviour, interactions, framings, categories, and mindset. Importantly this raises the profile of the visual and tactile for presenting and analysing complex realities and involves processes of dialogue and co-construction of meaning. Making these processes visible through multiple forms of documenting is central to the approach - sharing interpretation (meaning making) through listening, dialogue, reflection and negotiation, undertaken in democratic relationship with others.

Gunilla Dahlberg expanded on the nature of pedagogical documentation as a transformative force for taking care of the potentialities already immanent in preschools and schools, *'making change happen through a process of research'*. She talked about the *"the researching child and the*

*researching teacher*” (our book is called *‘Researching Children, Researching the World’* Bancroft, Fawcett and Hay 2008 and based on the principles of Reggio Emilia). Listening, pedagogical documentation and *‘progettazione’* (a process of experimenting and research, in which children and pedagogues create a problem before they search for solutions) are central themes.

Gunilla contested that we are subtracting and reducing the world instead of deepening and expanding the world – and at the same time taming children’s desires and potentialities. She talked about how there is a growing interest today for the more subtle and dynamic processes of life, a dissatisfaction with the dualistic thinking in which mind and body, subject and object, self and other are seen as separate entities - excluding so much of human experience. Instead she proposed that practice can intensify theory and vice versa. Gunilla quoted Daniel Stern *‘All learning and all creative acts begin in the domain of emergent relatedness.’* stressing the importance of tuning in together with the child. In discussion with colleagues there was also a common interest in the *‘here-and-now’*, focusing on the *event, movement, relation* and *affect* (I fell down the Deleuze Guattari, rabbit hole right in the middle of my PhD but never got out). When we open ourselves to *‘affect’*, something new is brought into motion, a new experience and a new becoming. Affect and vitality are the base for our connection and interdependency with other human beings and nature, to art and aesthetics.

Gunilla shared three constructions of pedagogical documentation as research creations – as a base for formative assessment, as a tool for challenging dominant discourses and as a transformative force for *‘taking care’* of the potentialities already immanent in children. So, in choreographing learning environments we are able to make this learning visible. We had the opportunity to visit Reggio Emilia’s schools for children 0-6 years and the Remida-Creative Recycling Centre. While I have visited Reggio a few times before, there is always something new to learn from colleagues and settings – not least the beautiful environments that never fail to surprise you, my eye was certainly leaping over the wall.

For example. these children are bringing forth something totally new – something we have never seen or heard before.



One of my highlights was witnessing Reggio's project 'Imagine a Forest' and the serendipity with Forest of Imagination.



Focusing on these potentialities creates new *power to act* for both the children, pedagogues, parents and researchers and gives us, and the children, a new understanding - a new meaning of existence – a new quality of life. Liane Mozère stated “We have to take advantage of the extraordinary small, unexpected and playful struggles for life that the children carry out. Otherwise, the children and everyone else involved are not given the opportunity to develop their power to act”. This is what Loris Malaguzzi called an ‘aesthetic vibration’. ‘No Way. The Hundred Is There’ is a manifesto of the Reggio Emilia Approach written by Malaguzzi that voices the idea, central to this educational philosophy, that children are bearers of a hundred languages.

## NO WAY. THE HUNDRED IS THERE

The child

is made of one hundred.

The child has

a hundred languages

a hundred hands

a hundred thoughts

a hundred ways of thinking

of playing, of speaking.

A hundred always a hundred

ways of listening

of marvelling of loving

a hundred joys

for singing and understanding

a hundred worlds

to discover

a hundred worlds

to invent

a hundred worlds

to dream.

The child has

a hundred languages

(and a hundred hundred hundred more)

but they steal ninety-nine.

The school and the culture

separate the head from the body.

They tell the child:

to think without hands

to do without head

to listen and not to speak

to understand without joy

to love and to marvel

only at Easter and Christmas.

They tell the child:

to discover the world already there

and of the hundred

they steal ninety-nine.

They tell the child:

that work and play

reality and fantasy

science and imagination

sky and earth

reason and dream

are things

that do not belong together.

And thus they tell the child

that the hundred is not there.

The child says:

No way. The hundred is there.

Loris Malaguzzi (translated by Lella Gandini)

Although I had arrived via train, I had the pleasure to make the journey back via Bologna airport with Peter and Gunilla, just before the crisis hit Northern Italy. On reflection, these conversations can never be underestimated and we remain in touch.