

Pedagogic Alternatives in Italy after the Second World War: the Experience of the Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa and Bruno Ciari's New School in Bologna

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Abstract: This contribution explores the historical and educational context in Italy after the Second World War, focusing on the pedagogical and educational innovation of the *Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa* (*Educational Cooperation Movement*, MCE), founded to promote the techniques of Freinet, and in particular Bruno Ciari, teacher, politician and driving force behind national school renewal in Italy. Using printed sources and archives from the period, the paper looks at the social and pedagogical experiment developed by Bruno Ciari between 1966 and 1970 and promoted in the city of Bologna through «Pedagogic Februaries»; these involved a series of events, conferences and training initiatives, organised with the cooperation of key universities, targeting teachers and families in order to develop an innovative, shared school culture. From the *egodocuments* of a preschool teacher who worked with Bruno Ciari in the city of Bologna, we enter the heart of the renewal of teaching practices, highlighting the tormented process of change in the teaching profession, in favour of a school that would be a true alternative to the traditional model and open to the democratic demands of all society.

Keywords: History of education; Educational innovations; Educational practices; Early childhood education; *Educational Cooperation Movement (MCE)*; Italy.

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1. Society, school and pedagogic renewal in Italy after the Second World War

The Second World War left Italy in huge difficulty in many areas, including schools, many of which were destroyed or seriously damaged, and left many orphans and shoe-shine boys on the streets, with unemployment and poverty rife. In political

terms, the Italian Republic had fallen under the wing of the United States, thus exploring the split between Catholic and secular forces, set against the background of the international «cold war». The funds allocated by the «Marshall Plan» set the conditions for slow economic recovery, which reached its peak in the 1960s. During this time, Italy moved from a substantially agricultural country to a flourishing industrial nation, causing heavy internal migration towards the industrialised north, rich in employment opportunities which were unthinkable in the central and southern regions, dreaming of the material well-being which led straight to the «Italian miracle» (Scoppola, 1991; Crainz, 2003; Cardini, 2006). The industrial transformation also implied a slow but inexorable social change, Hollywood legends made their mark with the new forms of mass communication brought by newspapers, the cinema, the radio and the television, and a slow transformation of the traditional values on which the general Italian mentality of the time was based. The world of culture also came out of the shadows of idealism to embrace and spread the new currents of American pragmatism and pedagogic activism, along with the entry of French phenomenology, existentialism and personalism.

In scholastic terms, the newly enacted Constitution had not changed the system inherited from Fascism, leaving the situation basically unchanged until 1962, the year in which middle schools were founded for students from 11 to 14 years old. Maternal (*scuola materna*) and primary school teacher training remained substantially the responsibility of the Istituto magistrale (teacher training colleges) and the Scuole magistrali (teacher training schools) which were founded in the Fascist period in the 1923 Reform of Minister Giovanni Gentile, although with some changes in the following years (Ambrosoli, 1982; Alberti, Cardoni, 2004; Santoni Rugiu, 2006; D'Amico, 2010; De Giorgi, 2010; 2016; Susi, 2012; Ricuperati, 2015). Basic school education was still based on traditional system, with transmissive style classroom-front lessons, the use of textbooks and discipline governed with an authoritarian iron hand that was typical of the previous Fascist age. The academic pedagogic culture however started to wink an eye at French activism. Some innovative school experiences appeared in the 1950s, including the «Pestalozzi School-City» in Florence directed by Ernesto Codignola. While previously linked to the Neo-Idealist pedagogy of Gentile and Giuseppe Lombardo Radice, this now leaned towards the new political model of secular democracy and self-government, thanks to the increasing spread of John Dewey's pedagogy, of which the Faculty of Education at the University of Florence was one of the nerve centres (Cambi, Federighi, Mariani, 2016). The Catholic area saw the involvement of intellectual figures and educationalists, including Mario Casotti, Luigi Stefanini, Marco Agosti, Vittorio Chizzolini, involved in the Scholè group in Brescia and promoters of a democratic school but with a spiritualist orientation, linked to the Christian activism of Eugene Devaud. On the other hand, the Marxist area developed its pedagogic renewal with the publication of Antonio Gramsci's «Quaderni del carcere», which offered innovative food for thought along with the development of a commitment to middle school reform in the late Fifties (Pruneri, 1999). In this pedagogic framework, Maria Montessori also returned to Italy, relaunching her pedagogy and the national Opera Montessori in the country after it had been left aside in the Thirties, without however

managing to act in terms of widespread renewal across Italy, except in some areas which were more sensitive to this complex and costly methodology.

In the meantime, in 1946 Margherita Zoebeli reached Rimini, sent by the *Soccorso Operaio Svizzero*, at the request of the mayor of the city which had been devastated by the war, leaving many young orphans. Zoebeli set up the *Centro Educativo Italo Svizzero* (Swiss-Italian Centre for Education, CEIS), which became an original synthesis of the ideas of Celestin Freinet and the psychoanalysis of Alfred Adler, however adapted to the specific context of the city and open to the active educational methods of the *Centres d'entraînement aux Methodes d'Education Active* (*Training Centre for Active Education Methods - CEMEA*). The CEMEA had been set up in 1936 at the initiative of Gisèle De Faily in France to train summer camp staff and promote active education (Libretti Baldeschi, 1996). Rimini was a meeting place, training many educators and teachers who wished to overcome the traditional school setting in favour of active education (De Maria, 2012; 2015). From here, in 1951, in the town of Fano, the *Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa* (*Educational Cooperation Movement – MCE*) was born, inspired by the ideas and techniques of Celestin Freinet. The group of teachers involved in the *MCE* – Giuseppe Tamagnini, Aldo Pettini, Albino Bernardini, Mario Lodi, Fiorenzo Alfieri, Loris Malaguzzi and Anna Fantini – worked to promote training events, teaching practice and a network of connections across Italy. This marked the spread of Freinet's pedagogy in the country after the Second World War, using the techniques of free text, block printing, inter-school correspondence and cooperative and democratic education in primary schools.

Generations of teachers were trained around this group, the history of which has yet to be reconstructed in historiographic terms in Italy (Tamagnini, 1965; Alfieri, 1974; Bini, 1977; Pettini, 1980; Laporta, Mele, Rizzi, 1994; Rizzi, 2015; 2017; Bellatalla, 1991; 1999; Bandini, 2013). The figure of Bruno Ciari (1923-1970) stands out among them. Born in Certaldo (Florence) in 1923, Ciari had gained political experience as a partisan and later among the ranks of the Communist Party, also holding the position of councillor for education in Certaldo from 1952 to 1960. Having studied at the Faculty of Education in Florence with Ernesto Codignola to the ideas of Dewey, he became a state primary school teacher and later joined the *MCE*, contributing to the recovery of the Deweyan ideas among the – clearly Anti-American – Italian Communist Left area. He was one of the leading figures in the spread of Freinet's techniques in Italian primary schools, and wrote for the *MCE* journal «Cooperazione educativa» and the journal «Riforma della scuola» linked to the Communist Party, and later in 1961 published the book *Le mie tecniche didattiche* in which he described the forms and methods of educational practice focusing on the method of research, working groups, free text techniques, printing and inter-scholastic correspondence applied to all fields of knowledge in schools. In 1966 Bruno Ciari was called to head the municipal educational institutions in Bologna. In terms of educational and school policies, it was an intense but also short-lived period: Ciari died on 27 August 1970 from a serious illness, after just five years.

2. Bruno Ciari in Bologna and popular pedagogy

When Bruno Ciari came to Bologna in 1966, he found an enthusiastic city packed with initiatives. After the Second World War the city was run by the Communist Party, governed by the mayor Giuseppe Dozza from 1945 to 1966. In two subsequent back-to-back mandates, Dozza's government outlined the city's reconstruction policies (Baldissara, 1994; Lama, 2007) focusing on public participation, transparent procedures, a balanced budget as well as administrative autonomy from central government and a certain autonomy from the central committee of the Communist Party. The various councillors for education in office after the war reorganised the municipal school service, particularly in terms of educators and after-school services, summer camps and infant schools, and some of these experimented the Montessori method and the method of the sisters Rosa and Carolina Agazzi (Righi, 1979; D'Ascenzo, 2010; D'Ascenzo, Ventura, 2013; Campioni, Marchesi, 2018).

On the wave of local social and political commitment to children and adolescents, in 1962 the new councillor for education Ettore Tarozzi had promised the so-called «Pedagogic Februaries». This was a set of events, congresses and conferences organised by the Municipality in February each year, involving the whole local community to raise public awareness of the issues of school, education, school-family relations as well as education to peace. When on 22 April 1966 the Municipal Council appointed Bruno Ciari as Educational Director of the municipal educational institutions, Ettore Tarozzi put him in charge of the organisation of the Pedagogic Februaries and the introduction of Freinet's techniques into infant schools, along with the idea of popular school not only because it was extended to the whole population but it was also managed together with the population, based on the idea of the social management of schools (Catarsi, 1982; 1992; 1999; 2001; Covato, 1981; Bellatalla, 1991; 1999).

Tarozzi and Ciari's political beliefs, and the need to place Bologna in the spotlight as an exemplary and cutting-edge «red» municipality in the Italian political and school panorama, were the driving force for promoting educational innovation and collective participation in the issues of popular education. Of course, this came with some difficulties, as Ettore Tarozzi wrote many years later

when he came to work in Bologna, this democratic municipality supported by left-wing forces for so many years, Bruno didn't just come to plough a fertile field. He also found some areas of shadow, some difficulties, stones and boulders, sometimes on the political front too. They were difficult years, in which the optimism of good will often came up against the pessimism of reason, with those strict laws on the financial availability of budgets, years in which, for example, the political forces governing the city argued over whether some social services – as the municipal schools were called at the time – should be continued, or if on the other hand the municipal resources should be used for the economic development of the city. It was not a theoretical discussion, but a discussion with immediate effects on reality, on everyday practice, on means and instruments, and Bruno was deeply and politically committed to winning the

hypothesis of the municipality's continued commitment to keeping the schools going, in terms of both quantity and quality (B. Ciari Study Centre, 1972, p. 61).

Ciari used the tried-and-tested instrument of the Pedagogic Februaries to promote the municipal school and education policies, broadening the theme of the relationship between the schools and society with closer relations between the local people and the schools in the discussion, design and management of the services. For Ciari

the «February» was not a centralised event run for prestigious purposes, and neither did he wish to create a new sector-specific initiative run for education «technicians» and professionals. Of course the initiative involved all specialists (doctors, psychologists, neuro-psychiatrists, social workers, teachers, headmasters...) but also targeted other interlocutors and stakeholders: tram drivers, metal workers, housewives and office workers; it was addressed to all workers, to the masses, the periphery, not with the aim of enlightenment or indoctrination or even simply information, but strived for an active presence, with original and critical «grass roots» contributions. This idea of February already embodied the fundamental idea that the problem of education could not be resolved behind the closed doors of the institutions, promulgating their knowledge within, far from the real problems of the world: education is a problem of all society, and schools should rather be a place for meeting, common debate and joint creativity. Specialists must look beyond the rigid shell of the classroom or their own field of work, society must penetrate the sanctum of education, with full rights. No longer closed doors, no longer lowered shutters (Ciari, 1969, p. 23).

From here came the widespread involvement of families, parents, school staff on all levels in the debates, conferences, round tables in the districts on educational and school issues, in those 'hot' years of student demonstrations, fighting for the values of participation, cooperation, co-management, which today is known as «active citizenship».

Ciari fought a battle for all-day primary schools, from 8.30 in the morning until 4.30 in the afternoon, understood as the organisation of school time which could overcome the previous «parking» formula of after-school clubs and educators, aiming to become an opportunity for educational workshops open to the territory and environment outside the school. This was a new formula, which went beyond traditional classroom-front teaching and the silence of the pupils, replaced by active, democratic, cooperative schools with renewed techniques for teaching subjects, on which the Educational Cooperation Movement had been conducting in-depth research for some time and which Ciari himself had acknowledged as a teacher in his writings.

All-day education was just one of the aspects of an even more dynamic vision of schools that Ciari included in an overall renewal of compulsory education, rethought also in terms of its internal division of the 3-14 age band: a compulsory school which could revise basic schooling for the population, reducing initial cultural and social

inequality and offering equal opportunities for learning and for life. From here, the design of compulsory schools which underlined the role of schools in the three-six age band, which precisely in the years of the Pedagogic February began to be called no longer «scuola materna» (*maternal school*) but «scuola dell'infanzia» (*early childhood school*), despite the law which introduced state maternal schools in 1968 and subsequently the Guidelines of 1969 which continued to call them «maternal school».

This was an overall rethinking of educational and school policies of the whole Council, probably, which in those years led the Department for Assistance, run from 1967 by Adriana Lodi, to fight a fervent battle – initiated by her predecessor Beltrame – for nursery schools (*nido*) in Bologna for children aged zero to three years, and later in Italy with Law no. 1044 of 1971 (Campioni, Marchesi, 2014).

In Bologna Ciari found that the number of maternal schools was already increasing, with plenty of related research and educational experimentation, promoted during the previous years by the Department for public education. However he did not have total faith in the Montessori method, and coming from the Educational Cooperation Movement he was driven to researching a different school, «with a new approach», able to adapt the Freinetian methods and techniques of primary school to the specific character of infant schools for the 3-6 years on one hand and to renew the democratic and social management of schools on the other. He did not intend to continue along the previous path, which favoured two spheres (the Agazzian and the Montessorian) alone, but aimed to propose «a new and complete experimentation in infant schools (from 1966-67); he started this concretely in primary schools (from 1968-69); and indicated it should be adopted in middle schools (from 1965-66); he also felt that it should be investigated also for nursery schools» (Righi, Bonomi, 1982, p. 32) Blending it with the public debates of the Pedagogic Februaries and the works of the Educational Cooperation Movement.

Between 1966 and 1970 the Pedagogic Februaries were mainly devoted to the issue of the new infant school, with study meetings, round tables, the presentation of various experiments on the «new approach», seminars for the production of specific teaching material, working groups on play, singing, drama, readings and textbooks but also public debates on issues relating to school and education in those years, the complex years characterised by the *economic boom*, the increasing number of compulsory and secondary schools, as well as the application of the 1962 middle school reform, the issue of state maternal school Guidelines in 1968, Don Milani's *Lettera a una professoressa* and the student protests of 1968.

In the sixth Pedagogic February (1967) an important national conference was held in Bologna on public infant schools, which saw the participation of educators, teachers, headmasters and headmistresses, parents, pedagogists, psychologists, architects and representatives of civil society on institutional issues of infant schools, on pedagogic-educational aspects, as well as organisational, psychological and social aspects. Several common aspects on «new approach» infant schools emerged from the works of that Commission that Ciari wanted to promote: school days possibly of 8 hours, maximum 15 or 20 children per class, uniform age groups in each class with systematic openings between classes, full-time class teachers and educators working on a shift basis between the morning and afternoon, renewed or new school

buildings and furnishings suited to the central idea of the democratic and social management of schools, full involvement of the families in the choices, introduction of new non-structured materials (games with water, sand, stones, vegetation) and equipment suited to developing postural motricity and coordination, as well as the innovative

use of structured materials (Dienes blocks, appropriately enlarged Cuisenaire-Gattegno rods, multi-base blocks etc.) which, after a period of free play, are used to acquire certain concepts and abilities: the first testimonials of their use in infant schools seem positive, although their experimentation is still in its early stages (Righi, p. 174).

Which thus bear witness to the presence of a material culture of the new school and the new school culture (Escolano, 2007; Braster, Grosvenor, Del Mar Pozo Andrés, 2011; Meda, Badanelli, 2013; Meda, 2016) based on new aids and instruments linked to logic and mathematical educational research which school historiography still needs to investigate, perhaps because it focuses above all on the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Psychological and social teacher training was also promoted, along with the creation of a 'bulletin' or journal, for the critical review of existing play materials and for the design, creation and prototyping of new materials (Righi, Bonomi, 1982, p. 250). In terms of educational programming, thought on «new approach» infant schools borrowed from the *MCE* methodology the underlying approach aiming to develop children's positive, stimulating and liberating attitudes towards knowledge. In terms of logic and mathematics, the references to Jean Piaget's genetic epistemology for forming the concept of numbers, along with Zoltàn Paul Dienes' logic blocks and other materials were crucial, while the observation of changes in the natural environment and expressive and linguistic education were central to the scientific area. In the latter case it was fundamental to observe the children's writing skills, the conversations in class, the emergence of a model-sentence or word on which to work together, and the writing of a class diary using block and screen printing techniques, without ever focusing on the risk of acquiring the concepts learned in primary school too early on.

In the meantime, Law no. 444 of 18 March 1968, which established state maternal schools, required public opinion to pay closer attention to the role and identity of preschools for the 3-6 age band, increasingly accelerating the debate on the revision of the whole compulsory school system. A few days following the issue of this national law, in the Conference entitled «Compulsory school. Tradition and renewal» during the seventh Pedagogic February in Bologna, the document *For the reconstruction of basic school* was published by the Department of Public Education in Bologna. The definition of a «new approach» infant school thus required two types of experimentation, one educational – with new techniques and materials which came from the *MCE*, but also from the research on educational psychology – and one relating to school organisation and management, both closely intertwined. The sense of this intertwining was skilfully defined by Ciari himself in a work from 1969

which defined his pedagogic line in the context of Bologna, illustrating the traditional Agazzian and Montessorian models

the pedagogic line of the new infant school, which has been concretely experimented, sees the school as an «environment that is not continuous to that of the family, but *alternative to it*». This concept criticises the traditional Agazzian concept, by which maternal school should continue to extend the education work of the family, moulding itself on this and remaining close to the home environment. The essential meaning of this approach, beyond all nebulous theorisation, lies in the idea of *leaving things as they are* for the child and his world. On the other hand, Montessorian pedagogy invented an alternative model, which opposed that of the family in its structure, contents and materials; the model was however born with the connotations of excessive artificiality, rigidity and above all the substantial closure towards society, which should not be allowed to destroy what school is able to edify (when it can). Moreover the culture underlying the Montessorian method (and I do not refer to any of its ingenious pedagogic intuitions) started out with utilitarian purposes, aiming to make the children develop the traditional instruments of the «three Rs» and rote learning. Today, the Montessorian curriculum appears totally extraneous to the conquests of more advanced science and culture. (Ciari, 1969, p. 24)

And the new infant school model, defined as truly alternative

the new infant school sets out as a social and cultural model, as a critical and constructive alternative to the family model, yet fully involving it in a joint task. Without resorting to scholasticism, but setting the conditions for the children's autonomous conquest, the culture it proposes tends to develop the abilities of abstraction, generalisation, concrete practical skills at most, cutting away the deepest roots of classist selection. Cultural acquisitions are never separated from emotional and affective dimensions, and particularly from the political-social values we have mentioned in relation to the adult collective and the birth of a 'group consciousness'. The cultural elements never have their own worth but are seen within an organic framework founded on the child's motivations and the political and pedagogic perspectives of adult operators. But infant schools can never be an end unto themselves. They must be the first necessary grade of compulsory school that has to be totally rebuilt, and which should go obligatorily from three (or, temporarily, five) to sixteen years of age. Everything said for infant schools also stands for the subsequent grades. After all, the groups of parents who experienced participation and management at infant school level demand the right to continue this experience in primary school too, claiming the continuity of the approaches that embodied this value for their children (Ciari, 1969, p. 25).

The dimension of social – i.e. democratic – management of schools was the other central element of the «new approach» school, understood as the democratisation of the managerial and organisational process of schools, with a new involvement of

families inside the schools, as agreed and politically supported also by Councillor Tarozzi in the Municipal Council in 1969

families become fully-fledged members of the school, participating in the study and solution of its educational problems and at times even teaching issues, the role the family institution, with all its new connotations, can play in the present time is recognised. In the joint management of teachers and parents, basic problems to be tackled and solved become key, such as grassroots democracy, the economic and financial issues, and pedagogic aspects; these are the topics of our most authentic work in one of the newest moments of renewal, this fascinating and stimulating time that involves an increasingly vast world both inside and outside school (Bologna Municipal Council Deeds, 13 October 1969, spoken by Tarozzi).

Social management however also concerned the internal operations of teaching and auxiliary staff in schools. After the initial experimental phase between 1966 and 1969, particularly after the city was twinned with the city of Zagreb (1969), the concept of «pedagogic collective» was born, consisting of teachers, caretakers and other school staff who had to define the school programming and initiatives, and monitor the work, as a group; the value of the group itself became central, however being able to avoid the logic of the strongest or personal disinterest towards the institution and their own educational role.

The social management proposed by Tarozzi and Ciari was a truly innovative vision of society and school in Italy's schools, not only in infant schools, extended to the whole collectivity of the municipality of Bologna, as a both political and educational project, in which the Council recognised that the task of politics, and the local authority, the Municipality, was precisely that of fostering the exercise of democracy and the democratic management of school institutions everywhere, thus also in the schools themselves. This was a broader and more complex «popular pedagogy» which aimed to mediate between Deweyan active and democratic school – understood as active participation, cooperation between different groups, constant dialogue – and the emancipation of Gramscian subordinate groups, in an ongoing political and cultural dialectic, in which above all the working classes were not mere recipients of a school dictated by bourgeois power but rather promoters of a participatory, high-quality school for the masses. From here the idea of education and school as a social place of action for pupils, families and teachers, in a vision of the social management of the educational and school process, understood as the process of political participation in the management of schools. Flexible teaching and learning contents, the participation of all school stakeholders (pupils, parents, teachers, school staff) in the planning and direct management, promotion of self-management in each specific school group (infant school, activity camps and summer camps, etc.) were not however understood as spontaneous episodes but required constant, joint and participatory planning; in this sense, social management was understood as the activation of democracy in the method and purposes, where the teachers were understood as the driving force of this political and educational

action: a truly «high» teaching skill, and ahead of its time in schools in Italy and beyond. In 1969 Ciari stated that

where the new pedagogic line has taken its first steps (in a dozen infant schools, and probably more in '69-70) group life and self-management now constitute a reality, which has yet to grow and strengthen, but which today represents an irreversible fact. Nobody underestimates the difficulties of this process, precisely because it tends to fight and overcome old habits and structures which every one of us has developed by living and growing up in a certain way in traditional schools and society (Ciari, 1969, p. 2).

To achieve this complex project, teacher training was a central issue, and Ciari and the Department of Education paid close attention to this. No longer short courses on a variety of topics yet with no overall design and which often served only to gain a higher score in the ranking lists of public competitions, which had been common since the Fifties. The Department directly promoted training for municipal teachers and education service and school staff. Residential courses in Cesenatico, seminars, refresher courses on logic, linguistics, mathematics, astronomy, dietary issues, psychology, singing, dance, expressive activities and teaching techniques of the *MCE* were frequently organised for teachers by the Department in cooperation with the University of Bologna and the Educational Cooperation Movement, like those run by Professor Raffaele Laporta, Anna Fantini, Mario Lodi and Giuseppe Tamagnini on free texts, block and screen printing and other expressive techniques in line with the *MCE* in 1968 (D'Ascenzo, Ventura, 2013).

Ciari's death in 1970 was inevitably a tough blow for this path of pedagogic, educational, political and social renewal. The Councillor for Education Ettore Tarozzi, in office until 1975, preferred not to replace such a charismatic and important figure, who at the time seemed irreplaceable. It was more prudent and appropriate, precisely in order to continue the work of Ciari and Tarozzi, to strengthen relations with the Faculty of Education in Bologna, and a new management formula was identified with the birth of the team consisting of members of both the University and the municipality. Ciari was thus the last director of educational institutions in the history of the Municipality of Bologna. With a view to continuity, however, Ciari's closest colleagues continued to work in the various areas of experimentation, which led also to the establishment of the «Bruno Ciari study centre», which only later moved to Certaldo.

3. Ciari's popular pedagogy in teaching practices

Training, refresher programmes and new educational planning run by Ciari's Department directly involved schools at grass-roots level, and in particular some teachers who chose to participate in this pedagogic and social innovation. Among these, worthy of mention is Virginia Predieri, a teacher at the «Tommasina Guidi» infant school which both Ciari and Tarozzi's children attended. Through Virginia Predieri's professional biography, already reconstructed elsewhere on the basis of autobiographical and other documentation, it is possible to capture the interior

dynamism, the authentic pedagogic labour of the ongoing transformation of teaching marked by the arrival of Ciari. Virginia Predieri was one of the many infant school teachers who had lived through the persecutions of Fascism and the war, who wanted to build a new world and become emancipated through work. A supply teacher in the municipality of Bologna, she had obtained many certificates by attending a wide variety of training courses in the Fifties and Sixties, including those on Agazzian and Montessorian methods. Ciari's arrival marked a slow yet inexorable transformation of her being a teacher and her educational practices, which she herself described later as an aware pedagogic and educational choice, based on an in-depth reflection documented in the egodocuments as sources (Ascenzi, Patrizi, 2016; Janes-Cabrera, Meda, Viñao, 2017) and still today of extraordinary value for the reflective practices of teachers (Schön, 1993; Perrenoud, 2002; Altet, Charlier, Paquay, Perrenoud, 2006)

the motivations for a pedagogic-educational choice must be sought in one's own history as educator and in the development of one's own professional skills. After many years of teaching, it is hard to talk of the first uncertainties, I know that I had many, and that I overcame them with fatigue, through my work and by checking what I did. But there is still one difficulty that I come across during my work, and which at the start troubled me for a long time: the fear of not being able to establish a relationship with the children. When I began teaching, I continuously analysed my way of talking, my way of acting. I often wondered «who knows if the children have understood me, who knows if I am able to understand their needs?» These uncertainties made me lose sight of the whole discourse on the purposes and motivations of my work. What is the point of setting purposes when you have no certainty of communicating and understanding? Indeed, it seemed that I couldn't build anything, I said to myself, «I have to find the right way to establish a relationship» and in the meantime I felt as if I was dumb, talking only to myself.

I played, I told stories, I had fun with the children, but this doubt remained. Then, little by little, above all when I stopped doing supply work and got my own position, the friendliness and participation of the children made me realise that my way of being and my language had changed, and I was able to communicate. For a long time I continued to consolidate my experience in seeking relationships, with readings, continuously modifying my behaviour, and checking what I and the children had managed to say and do together every day. In school life, relationships are what decide on the validity of being together. This also goes for our private life, in fact it is only once we have established a fair relationship that we give our consent, our trust and our friendship. Having acquired a minimal and relative confidence in the «adult-child» relationship, and I underline minimal and relative confidence, because this is a problem which is always present in the life of an educator, which is repeated every year, or rather to be more precise, every day. Often when I check the day's work, I wonder: Who knows if I understood «Andrea», if I was able to respond correctly to his need? In thinking back, sometimes I find that confidence, but others I find the certainty that the next day I have much to recover.

However, it is confidence enough for an educator to be aware that the «adult-child» relationship is an aspect of their profession, and must be continuously built and checked, by them, with their colleagues, with the parents and with continuous training.

Having achieved this professional responsibility, I began to ask myself many other questions. What are the purposes of my work? What objectives should I set for myself? Is it enough to tell stories, play traditional games, help the children with their needs, promoting only educational and socialisation objectives, or do I have to set other objectives? (D'Ascenzo, 2013, pp. 55-56).

And yet Predieri was already a trained teacher, ahead of her time, teaching in an avant-garde school that used the Montessori method

at that time I was fascinated by the Montessorian ideals. The evangelical concept of the making of a man who gives his whole self for the good of humanity, was a huge conquest [...] Another Montessorian intuition that gave me valid motivations for my work was the great value Montessori gave to the child's psychological, biological and anthropological life, underlining the great capacity of absorption in children aged 0 to 6 and the huge autonomy they develop in this period. From here, the importance of a stimulating environment and a perceptive education. «Senses serving the mind», thus the need to create the best conditions to allow children to more easily conquer their own autonomy and knowledge. Doing (Montessorian work) as a means for knowledge. The new school is also a school of «doing», but it is a different doing, closer to the reality surrounding us and to the needs of children, it is above all a doing all together (D'Ascenzo, 2013, pp. 56-57).

Meeting Ciari's popular pedagogy, the new readings of Piaget, Bruner and Vygotski were the foundations for an in-depth review of the Montessorian model too

when Bruno Ciari came to our school for the first time, he found a Montessorian class that was already open to experimenting the new working techniques. Indeed, drawing, dramatization and mimic interpretation of musical pieces had already been included. Thereafter, in this new way of doing school I found more valid pedagogic and political motivations for my profession. In contrast to the individualistic Montessorian concept, discovering that school can open up to the needs of children, with a broader vision, extending to the outside world and to society in a pedagogic and political choice, in which the foundations can be laid for future aware and democratic people, where every educator, citizen, parent can contribute to the making of a man who counts in the life of the country was, and still is, ten years on, the main motivation of the choice which profoundly changed my way of working at school (D'Ascenzo, 2013, p. 58).

Which led to a profound collective review of teaching practices

Ciari found a Bologna that was highly diversified in the implementation of these methodologies, and his interest initially focused on the Guidi School, which at that time was of Montessorian orientation; initially he was not able to involve the whole school, and so referred to just one class, where he enrolled his own children, Marco and Nicoletta. It was a very busy time for us, with meetings in which Ciari explained his way of understanding a school that for us was truly formative for children. Initially, the class at the Guidi School experimented the critical and dialectic debate on pedagogic and educational ideology. Therefore, a continuous exchange of views, which according to Ciari was an essential attitude for an educator. He greatly motivated us professionally, encouraging us in our pedagogic beliefs and offering us the means and methods for becoming familiar with other theories, thinking about different objectives and increasing our knowledge. We read many works with him: Piaget, Bruner, De Bartolomeis, Vygotski, etc. (D'Ascenzo, 2013, pp. 57-58).

The pedagogic-teaching research which took place during the school year of 1966-67 at the 'Guidi' did not aim to wholly abandon the Montessorian material but rather to extend its use, under the close direction of Ciari himself

in our class there was a new way of using the Montessorian material we had at our disposal. We agreed on recognising the importance of this material along with new techniques introduced, all wrapped up in a grand discourse of connection with reality. Then we worked in a heterogeneous class with 49 children (at the time the criteria for enrolling in school were very different, as the motivations supporting the school itself were very different). On average there were 45 children in the morning and around 38 in the afternoon. Almost every day Ciari checked what we had planned in advance, as this experimentation was to be extended to other schools once its validity had been recognised in practice. For us, the key theme for structuring the whole teaching discourse, and its consequent techniques, was to express oneself within the group relationship, individual experiences, experiences done together and cooperation. Therefore establishing centres of interest deriving from conversations or practical experiences, and from here producing perceptive materials as the initial technical phase for learning to read, nomenclature games, research, discovery, done also using thread counters, free texts, inventing languages, rhyming games, big picture books which become reading cards, recording the children so that they could listen to themselves, sensory and logic materials, Dienes blocks, Gattegno rods, classifications, relations, practical and verbal logic games, space and time games, topology games, rhythmic games, listening to music (D'Ascenzo, 2013, pp. 58-59).

Then entering into the detail of innovative and experimental teaching practices

we did an experiment by combining listening to music, painting and inventing stories. Expressive activities were stimulated in the children very often, offering a very wide range of techniques that could be used together: dramatization,

inventing stories, painting, drawing, collages, cutting out, puppets, observing and interpreting the environment, clay play, printing with different tools, etc. The expressive activities and observation of the environment were the basis for long research with the children, linked with the linguistic and logic activities. This arrangement was used as an intersection, aiming to create opportunities for working in uniform groups. Very soon this new way of managing the school involved other people who, through the dialectic relationship that Ciari had developed in us, and with their own skills, carried on the discourse of alternative teaching and pedagogic techniques. This was done in systematic meetings held at the Department and in periodic training courses (D'Ascenzo, 2013, p. 59).

This was not simply an experiment of new teaching material coming from the educational research of the time (sets, logic blocks etc.) but a much broader vision of the pupils, the school and the role of the teacher, as she told many years later

it was only much later that I understood the difference between these concepts and the other concept, proposed by Bruno Ciari, which was much closer to man's reality and true, unimposed needs. Man who makes himself, who changes reality with others in order to improve the life conditions of humanity, is a far more important achievement for human evolution. The scientific spirit that Montessori introduced in schools, both in the psychological observation of children and in the gradual, scientific formulation of learning processes, is still an excellent mental training for me today, for programming cognitive processes and developing teaching materials. What is new and true is the concept of teaching, which is closer to the interests of the children, consequently creating materials that are still scientific and gradual but which are continuously renewed in relation to the different needs of the children (D'Ascenzo, 2013, pp. 59-60).

Children's discovery thus became the discovery of the social world the child is surrounded by, a natural environment and a socio-cultural territory which, for Ciari and the activistic understanding of the Educational Cooperation Movement, had to constitute the essential educational place for teaching activities in the framework of a cooperative and democratic organisation of school life. And this was Virginia's understanding too

now it is the child and his social context which determines the planning and activities at school. The environment he lives in becomes the reason for school work and research. It is the child who indicates the topics that most interest him, and the teacher becomes the animator of the various educational and cognitive moments. In this way, a continuously evolving scientificity is born and develops, no longer pre-constituted materials of construction with fixed cognitive paths, but rather the teacher adopts continuous research to build materials that relate to the child's lines of work and learning processes. The same will happen for the children, who will get used to formulating research hypotheses for their arguments, following the discoveries they make by collecting things and using the materials, and who will reconstruct the route of their own discoveries. These

materials will be used to check the research done, and moreover will act as a stimulus for other research possibilities. (D'Ascenzo, 2013, p. 60).

We can see the lesson offered in John Dewey's work entitled *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (Cop. 1938), reread and interpreted by the MCE and by Ciari, in a concrete, practical and educationally possible manner in the school and social context of the time, as performed in those years in an exemplary manner also by Anna Fantini, Albino Bernardini, Aldo Pettini, Fiorenzo Alfieri and Mario Lodi at primary school level. Due to the circumstances he worked in however, Ciari was the only one to experiment these educational techniques in infant schools, adapting them to the emerging psychological and pedagogic indications of Piaget, Bruner and Vygotsky, finding their concrete mediation and inherent feasibility in the group of teachers who wished to cooperate with him, in an extraordinary synergy. Virginia also offered the extraordinary mediation of 'teaching in action', actively participating in all courses and meetings organised by the new director, supported by constant critical reflection

only once we are able to ensure responsible social management (a collective of school staff, parents and social forces) with no personalism, political or intellectual apathy, will we be able to truly foster renewal in schools (D'Ascenzo, 2013, p. 61).

Ciari's death was a shock for all. It saw the end of this innovative pedagogic and educational experiment and the end of the social management of schools. In subsequent years, teachers closest to Ciari, including Predieri, worked to open the «Bruno Ciari study centre» and maintain these new teaching practices in «new approach» schools, thanks also to the management and coordination of the Municipality and the Faculty of Education at the University of Bologna, thus establishing a highly innovative pedagogic and educational tradition which marked a kind of «Bologna Children approach», although perhaps still today a little too wrapped in legend.

4. References

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