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## Pedagogy

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You can reach Reggio Emilia from Bologna in less than an hour. The road traverses the fertile river valley of the Po, following the line of the ancient *Via Emilia*, the Roman road that crossed the region from east to west. This is the route that Bruno Ciari and others would have taken when he returned from the Second World War with a mission to revolutionise the schooling of their home district.

Half a century on, Reggio Emilia has one of the world's most renowned early years systems. Educationalists from all over the world have followed the *Via Emilia* to seek out and wonder at the opportunities provided for the children of that region.

In 1991 *Newsweek* stated that if you had to choose anywhere in the world for your children to begin their schooling then Reggio Emilia would be the best choice. Jerome Bruner, following a visit, wrote:

I was not prepared for what I found. It was not just that they were better than anything I'd ever seen ... What struck me about the Reggio pre-schools was how they cultivated imagination and, in the process, how they empowered the children's sense of what is possible. But the more I observed, the more I realised that this was not coming out of some abstract theory or inspiration about pedagogy. Rather it exposed something deep about Reggio itself, something 'molto reggiano'.<sup>1</sup>

The journalist Furio Colombo provided a further perspective:

There is a place in the world where the talent, imagination, and professional skill dedicated to industry or science are dedicated instead to young children. A place in which the same people have worked together for years to refine their experience, and the children are stimulated to express every aspect of their unimaginable resource.<sup>2</sup>

Pedagogy, or *pedagogia* in Italian, was at the heart of the reform movement that Bruno Ciari set in train. It therefore seems a good starting point for our exploration of contemporary ideas about learning and teaching, and the relevance of these ideas to teachers in the twenty-first century.

Ciari's first pedagogical experimentation was in the village school at Certaldo, but rapid promotion to becoming Director of the local school district gave him

the opportunity to rethink the concept of early years education. An holistic concept of pedagogy was at the core of his thinking. Parents, as well as teachers and children, were seen as central to the educational process. Pedagogy, therefore, went beyond the particular skills of individual teachers. Children were viewed as strong and rich personalities with a natural curiosity to be exploited in the varied settings of school and community life. Co-operation and communication were seen as crucial and buildings and classrooms were built to exploit this. Teachers worked in pedagogic teams with the support of a pedagogical co-ordinator or *pedagogista*. Observation and research and the need for children to engage in a continuous process of discussion, interpretation and presentation of their work were together seen as key to pedagogical success.

Ciari's ideas were sufficiently powerful for Reggio Emilia, subsequently led by Loris Malaguzzi, to set up a network of schools and centres for 0–6 years with the aim 'to promote children's education through the development of all their languages: expressive, communicative, symbolic, cognitive, ethical, metaphorical, logical, imaginative and educational'.<sup>3</sup>

Ciari's vision was strongly rooted in a wider history of ideas about pedagogy and schooling. He had previously met Maria Montessori, who in the early years of the twentieth century had formulated a pedagogy that embraced the total learning environment of the child and classroom. For Montessori the worlds inside and outside the classroom needed to be brought together and understood when nurturing children. Again, pedagogy had to be understood in the total setting of each learner and school. Montessori railed against the classifications and gradings of children that were such a feature of newly emergent, 'free and compulsory', basic education systems. She became convinced that many children who were labelled as 'low ability', or even 'unteachable', could, given the right pedagogic setting, achieve much more than societal expectations suggested. Thus Maria Montessori found practical ways of demonstrating what could be done. As Director of a school for children with perceived learning disabilities, attached to the University of Rome, she showed how those formerly labelled as 'deficient' could compete successfully with their peers in the main school system.

Reggio Emilia represents one starting point for exploring pedagogy, but there are others. In North America, quite some time before Ciari's reforms were taking root, John Dewey was beginning revolutionary work that was a reaction against the traditional US educational framework of memorisation and recitation. Education is not the preparation for life, it is life itself, he argued. Like Ciari and Montessori he also challenged the prevailing orthodoxy that saw little educational future, not as in the context of a largely peasant population, but for students living in a newly industrial age. Using radically new approaches Dewey, with his wife, Alice Chipman Dewey, launched the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools where he was able to actualise his pedagogical beliefs in a series of educational programmes founded on the principles of hands-on learning and exploration. By 1904, after eight years of intense and creative pedagogical work, the Laboratory School had become, many argued, the most interesting experimental venture in American education. It had also become



a centre for other scholars of various fields to meet together to analyse and discuss solutions to the most pressing intellectual and social problems of the time.

For Dewey, the role of the teacher was not to impose on children irrelevant tasks that would be potentially useful a decade later, but instead to identify as child's interest, organise learning activities around its immediate and proximate use, then and each step by step move the process in the desired direction. All so-called 'traditional' subjects such as reading, writing, history, spelling, arithmetic and science, were connected with each other. Dewey saw value in the methods of subjects and disciplines, but he also saw motivational energy coming from a cross-disciplinary approach to curriculum design. Dewey himself promoted the idea that intelligence was an instrument for overcoming obstacles in one's life, and so the focus of the Chicago Laboratory School zeroed in on how to close the gap between thought and action. By having such a focus, the school became the centre for Dewey's educational philosophy, set out in works such as *The School and Society* (1899), *The Child and the Curriculum* (1902) and *Democracy and Education* (1916). The teachers of the Laboratory School, Dewey argued, started with question marks rather than fixed answers.

Both Reggio Emilia's example and the work of John Dewey caught the imagination of the world. It is no coincidence that Ciari, Montessori and Dewey all faced controversy and experienced political pressure.<sup>4</sup> Each saw a new approach to pedagogy as representing something much greater than a more effective approach to teaching.

With their vision of teaching came a new view of learners and learning and a new framework within which to conceive the relationship between teacher and learner. In this way they saw pedagogy as going beyond the specific skills of the teacher to embrace the wider purposes and beliefs that surround and

impact upon all pedagogic settings. It is this broader vision that we seek to explore.

We start with the premise that good teachers are intellectually curious about pedagogy. Such curiosity requires an examination of values and beliefs as well as the strategies and techniques the teacher deploys. It is this that makes pedagogy inevitably contested, although the forms and strength of such contestation vary over time and in respect of place. In most education systems there are endemic clashes between the perceived polarities of 'traditionalists' and 'progressives' in thinking about pedagogic theories and practices. At times this can generate all the intensity of an ethnic, sectarian clash and such debates can go way beyond the professional world of formal educators. The media in turn recognise that an increasingly literate and knowing populace has an interest in such affairs that were unknown a generation or two earlier. We recognise the validity of the debate here but we would want to question some of the ways in which the terms of reference are set.

A distinction is often made between pedagogy and education.<sup>5</sup> This is more than mere semantics, although the words do have different Greek and Latin derivations. Pedagogy comes from the Greek *paidagogos* (the leading of the child/slave), whereas education comes from the Latin *educare* (to bring up or nourish). The discourse of education, we want to argue, is more likely to be descriptive and normative, whereas pedagogy invites us to recognise the multiple and various dynamics of scenes of learning and teaching. Henry Giroux<sup>6</sup> has pointed up such differences. Highly pragmatic and behaviouristic in both its assumptions and practice, the field of education has historically always viewed theory as something of an unnecessary intrusion. In distinction pedagogy is a mode of engagement with the social process – or rather with social processes. This in part helps explain its relevance to literacy and cultural studies, feminism, philosophy and political theory, where the notion of pedagogy has invited attack particularly from conservative quarters.

This distinction between education and pedagogy has also informed the debate about the place of pedagogy in preparing teachers. More than twenty years ago Brian Simon, the educational historian, wrote a highly influential article under the title 'Why No Pedagogy in England?'<sup>7</sup> Although specifically addressing the English context, his analysis was also highly relevant to North America.<sup>8</sup> In this article he argued that the social class-related reverence for the 'amateur' infiltrated the school system through the public schools in forms that effectively closed out intellectual curiosity around the concept of pedagogy. Simon's critique then explored the wider social and political context in which pedagogy operates. The demise of pedagogy in England – in his terms 'the end of the systematic study of the teaching process' – was signalled, he contends, as early as the 1920s. Its cause he puts down to an increasing emphasis on categorisation and selection and particularly the then ascendancy of psychometric theory and convictions about the measurement of ability. Simon argued for a science of teaching, creating a body of general principles that would inform all the settings in which learning and teaching take

place. Here Simon was greatly influenced by Lev Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist whose work only became internationally known in the middle of the last century. For Vygotsky pedagogy had to be oriented not towards the yesterday of development but towards its tomorrow. What the child can do today with adult help, he said, he will be able to do independently tomorrow. And, for Vygotsky, the only good teaching is that which outpaces development.<sup>9</sup>

This resonates with Montessori's or Ciari's idea of refusing to make predictive judgements about children's potential abilities. Brian Simon was a lifelong campaigner against the categorisations of children promoted by many education systems. He was against streaming or tracking and in the English context he was one of the earliest critics of the system of selective secondary schools introduced in 1944.<sup>10</sup>

But Simon also had a rigorous view about the need for structure in learning and he was critical of some progressives who had argued for a pedagogy of individualisation. For Simon, if teaching is based on the idea that each child requires a specific pedagogical approach, then the construction of an all embracing pedagogy, or general principles of teaching, becomes an impossibility.<sup>11</sup> We share this view, not only because of the constraints imposed in many pedagogic contexts by resources, buildings, classrooms and learner numbers, but also because learning and teaching, we believe, are in essence social processes. One learner needs other learners and while individualisation may have a place in building pedagogic settings, it cannot in its own terms provide an effective pedagogy.

We began this chapter with Reggio Emilia. Recently one of our students posed the question, 'If Reggio Emilia is so outstanding, why has it not been replicated, at least across the western world?' This is a good question and, after some thought, we gave two related answers. First, there are other parts of the world that are trying to emulate the world that Ciari and his colleagues created. Individual groups have created schools that have adopted the Reggio Emilia approach.<sup>12</sup> And aspects of the Reggio Emilia approach have been incorporated into the ideas of some school districts.<sup>13</sup> However, the formal structures of schooling are not easy to change. A few years ago Herbert Kliebard looked at the teaching in one mid-western state of the USA.<sup>14</sup> He analysed the curriculum and organisation of the one teacher school that had existed in the early years of that community and he showed how the project-centred model of curriculum and pedagogy, idiosyncratic at times but inspirational in the memories of the children, had given way to an almost industrial approach as numbers boomed and legislation was passed about compulsory schooling. What he demonstrated was that a form of regimentation had come to dominate schooling as the size of provision and its associated bureaucracy had grown. Large-scale school provision seems to mitigate against considering, let alone incorporating, the central tenets of the Reggio Emilia provision.<sup>15</sup>

We would argue, however, that as school systems grow and expand<sup>16</sup> the need for a humanistic, not mechanistic, pedagogy is becoming even more critical. This may take many forms, as the title of our last chapter, 'Pedagogies', illustrates. However, at its core pedagogy must have the purpose of power for

allowing children and others to forge their own ways and identities in our complex, knowledge-rich society.

We are wary of expressing from the outset a hard and fast definition of pedagogy, since we intend this book to unfold some of the debates and practices that over time have informed the development of this complex concept. A range of definitions already exists in contemporary literature,<sup>17</sup> although we have found that those who talk and write most deeply about pedagogy<sup>18</sup> also tend to avoid neat formulations summed up in a tidy phraseology. Nevertheless, we do hope, in the pages that follow, to convey our view of pedagogy as a dynamic process informed by theories, beliefs and dialogue, but only realised in the daily interactions of learners and teachers and real settings.

In the present day our experience as teachers and our engagement with the study of pedagogy have led us to a number of assertions. We want to identify these at the outset in order to make the preconceptions and values we bring to this task explicit and to form the basis for the structure of subsequent chapters.

Our first assertion, explored in Chapter 2 ('Settings') is that any understanding or theory of pedagogy must encompass all the complex factors that influence the process of learning and teaching. Our discourse is, therefore, wide ranging. In creating and sustaining pedagogic settings teachers crucially determine both the nature and quality of learning. Pedagogy is more than the accumulation of techniques and strategies, more than arranging a classroom, formulating questions, and developing explanations. It is informed by a view of mind, of learning and learners and the kinds of knowledge and outcomes that are valued.

Our second assertion is that within any pedagogical setting the mind must be viewed as complex and multifaceted. Within such settings a broad understanding of the human mind and cognitive science, as we understand it today, is a crucial aspect of teacher knowledge and it is this we will be seeking to explore further (see particularly Chapter 3, 'Minds') as we set out our contemporary understanding of learners and pedagogy.

A third assertion is that learning is a social process and thus it follows that any attempt to influence learning has to go beyond the characteristics of any individual learner to embrace all the influences that impinge on learning in their social settings. From this perspective Chapter 4, ('Learning'), considers the key notion of participation which emphasises a learner's location and sense of identity in the many overlapping communities and life worlds to which they belong. A social view of learning recognises that learning is ongoing in every aspect of our lives. It takes a broader view of learners' trajectories through the world – their sense of self, where they are coming from, where they think they are going, what sort of person they want to be.

Our fourth assertion is that the development of knowledge is inseparable from the process of participating in a culture of practice and we discuss this in Chapter 5 ('Knowledge'): the space in which the planned, enacted and experienced come together is at the heart of the science of pedagogy.

Our fifth assertion is that pedagogy needs to imaginatively consider the wide range of tools and technologies, both material and symbolic, that humankind has

developed to make sense of and shape the world in which we live. Language, for example, is one of the most fundamental of symbolic tools and its key role in learning is widely recognised. Yet physical artefacts and technologies of all forms are also crucial to knowledge building, as they extend our understanding and impact on the social context of our daily lives and activities. By extension, teachers will create toolkits specific to the purposes they require. Such toolkits can be wide ranging and imaginative, liberating the process of learning, while others can be narrow and inflexible, doing little to extend learners' development. We believe that an explicit understanding of this aspect of human development is critical to any discussion of pedagogy and this is argued in depth in Chapter 6 ('Toolkits').

Our sixth assertion is this. Pedagogy, we believe, must build the self-esteem and identity of learners (see Chapter 7 on 'Identity') by developing their sense of what they believe or indeed hope themselves to be capable of. Our analysis is therefore, as this assertion suggests, going to be forward looking. This book is not a catalogue of the ills of contemporary education, although these do exist. In respect of self-esteem, however, we do share Bruner's view that the management of self-esteem is never simple or settled and schools (and, therefore, teachers) are often rough on children's self-esteem.<sup>19</sup>

Our last assertion, which we revisit in our concluding Chapter 8 ('Pedagogies'), is congruent with our view about the liberating role of pedagogy: that pedagogic settings should create the conditions for reflection and dialogue as well as productive cognitive conflict. Developing habits of mind that are questioning and critical is central to pedagogic endeavours. Therein lies the power of pedagogy to transform lives.



*'Pedagogy must build the self-esteem and identity of learners': teacher educator Dr Nadia Gamal El Din praises Cairo primary students after a public presentation of their learning*