

# «In 1895, in a damp old sacristy in Mompiano...». The image of the Agazzi infant school on Italian national television

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**ABSTRACT:** This study examines the documentary *Il significato attuale del metodo agazziano* [*The Contemporary Meaning of the Agazzi Method*], broadcast by Rai in 1979. After outlining the key stages in the early childhood education experiment conducted in Brescia by the sisters Rosa and Carolina Agazzi, with the support of their mentor Pietro Pasquali, the research reviews the historical backdrop to the decision to use television to introduce the Agazzis' educational project to a wider and more diverse audience than that previously targeted by the specialist literature. Further analysis is devoted to how the television program presented and interpreted this piece of national history, and how it proved largely successful in bridging the gap between past and present. Overall, the study draws out the vivid image of the Agazzi infant school conveyed by the documentary while prompting reflection on various aspects of school memory.

**EET/TEE KEYWORDS:** Early childhood education; Pasquali-Agazzi method; Television; Collective school memory; Italy; XX Century.

## 1. *The Agazzi method in the first half of the twentieth century*

Initially emerging with little fanfare at the end of the nineteenth century, the early childhood education experiment pioneered by Rosa and Carolina Agazzi at their rural infant school in Mompiano (Brescia) gradually garnered greater support and recognition<sup>1</sup>. As is well known, the Agazzi sisters' method

<sup>1</sup> On the Agazzi sisters and the method they devised, see, among others, M. Bagnalasta Bàrilaam (ed.), *Rosa Agazzi nella cultura pedagogica italiana e nella realtà educativa della scuola materna*, Brescia, Istituto di Mompiano «Pasquali-Agazzi», 1995; M. Grazzini, *Sulle fonti*

drew on the work of Froebel, which they reinterpreted to align with the new concept of childhood that was emerging in the late 1800s and early 1900s and stripped of its underlying mysticism and immanentism. Indeed, their approach revolved around the belief that children should actively participate in school life<sup>2</sup>. The model of infant school that the two sisters developed and implemented in Mompiano was designed to fulfil children's need to be active, play, learn, explore, and spend time in a nurturing and calm environment. It was also intended to instil habits of cleanliness and order and to foster independence.

From the early twentieth century onwards, the reformist ideas of the Agazzi sisters began to feature more strongly in the educational and pedagogical debate, largely due to the tireless commitment of their mentor, Pietro Pasquali<sup>3</sup>. As the head of Brescia's elementary schools and kindergartens, Pasquali not only authored several works on the leading principles of the Agazzi educational approach<sup>4</sup>, but he also played a crucial part in getting the Agazzi's kindergarten recognized by the Public Education Ministry. As a member of the Commission set up by Minister Luigi Credaro in 1910 to plan a complete overhaul of early childhood education institutions, Pasquali made a key contribution to drafting the first Italian government program for infant schools, helping to ensure that it reflected the Agazzi sisters' ideas<sup>5</sup>. In keeping with the reformed Froebelism implemented by the Agazzis, this document reiterated that infant schools were not schools in the traditional sense, but rather «maternal» educational institutions, where education was defined as «a set of actions, care, and

*del Metodo Pasquali-Agazzi e altre questioni. Interpretazioni, testi e nuovi materiali*, Brescia, Istituto di Mompiano «Pasquali-Agazzi», 2006; Id. (ed.), *Rosa Agazzi. Epistolario inedito (499 documenti, 1882-1950)*, Brescia, Istituto di Mompiano «Pasquali-Agazzi», 2015.

<sup>2</sup> On this, cf. R. Mazzetti, *Pietro Pasquali, le sorelle Agazzi e la riforma del fröbelismo in Italia*, Roma, Armando, 1962.

<sup>3</sup> For further background on Pasquali, see S.S. Macchietti, *Pietro Pasquali tra scuola e società. Dall'ultimo Ottocento al primo Novecento: intuizioni e proposte di un educatore*, Brescia, Istituto di Mompiano «Pasquali-Agazzi», 1984 and the entries curated by M. Morandi in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 81, 2014, <[https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/pietro-pasquali\\_\(Dizionario\\_Biografico\)/?search=PASQUALI%2C%20Pietro](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/pietro-pasquali_(Dizionario_Biografico)/?search=PASQUALI%2C%20Pietro)> (last access: 30-07-2024) and by M. Brunelli, S. Macchietti in G. Chiosso, R. Sani (edd.), *DBE. Dizionario Biografico dell'Educazione 1800-2000*, 2 voll., Milano, Editrice Bibliografica.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. P. Pasquali, *Il nuovo asilo. Guida per le maestre e le madri nell'educazione della prima infanzia sulle tracce dell'asilo di Mompiano*, Brescia, Angelo Canossi e C., 1903 e Id., *Il nuovo spirito dell'asilo*, Milano, La Voce delle maestre d'asilo, 1910.

<sup>5</sup> In the spring of 1912, when presenting his draft measure to the lower house of parliament, Credaro explained that the document included instructions for promoting the application of the Froebel method in infant schools, suitably revisited in light of the Agazzi sisters' experience, cf. T. Pironi, *Il contributo di Maria Montessori al rinnovamento della scuola dell'infanzia in Italia nel primo ventennio del Novecento*, in A. Ascenzi, R. Sani (edd.), *L'innovazione pedagogica e didattica nel sistema formativo italiano dall'Unità al secondo dopoguerra*, Roma, Studium, 2022, p. 177. In relation to these programmatic guidelines, which were ultimately approved via Royal Decree No. 27 of 04 January 1914, cf. F.V. Lombardi, *I programmi della scuola per l'infanzia in Italia dal 1914 al 1969*, Brescia, La Scuola, 1970, pp. 27-39, 113-193.

activities, [as] an everyday field of patient and caring action, rather than as a place for intellectual training and teaching»<sup>6</sup>. In light of these principles, the government program allowed much scope for «maternal education», practical life skills, and moral and social education<sup>7</sup>. The endorsement of the Agazzi method at the ministerial level was reaffirmed a few years later when Giuseppe Lombardo Radice incorporated it into the new early childhood education program that flanked Giovanni Gentile's 1923 school reform<sup>8</sup>.

During the 1920s, the history of the Agazzi movement was significantly influenced by the support of Catholics, who had previously maintained a reserved stance toward it<sup>9</sup>. After separating it from its secular and positivist origins, they reinterpreted it through a Catholic lens and adopted it as a model for their own infant schools<sup>10</sup>. Thanks to extensive dissemination efforts by the publishing house La Scuola<sup>11</sup>, in collaboration with the Italian Educational Association (Aei)<sup>12</sup>, alongside support from the government of the day, the

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192, italics in the original.

<sup>7</sup> Specifically, in relation to the «maternal education» so highly valued by the Agazzis, the members of the ministerial committee explained that this kind of schooling should be focused on instilling «habits of cleanliness and order as well as practical skills». They emphasized that these aims constituted «the primary, and indeed the fundamental, program of the poorest public kindergartens, in both rural and urban areas»: *Istruzioni, Programmi e Orari per gli Asili infantili. Approvati con R.D. 4 Gennaio 1914 n. 27*, Brescia, La Scuola, 1915, p. 27.

<sup>8</sup> In the ministerial order of 11 November 1923, implementing Royal Decree No. 2185 of 01 October entitled *Ordinamento dei gradi scolastici e dei programmi didattici della scuola elementare* [*The Organization of Elementary School Grades and Curricula*], it was specified that the previous elementary school program had been repealed. However, there was no mention of changes to the kindergarten program, hence the 1914 program remained in effect for infant schools. In the 1923 decree, the guidelines for kindergartens were reduced to a few brief lines and were presented in conjunction with the guidelines for elementary school, for which infant school was now designated as the «preparatory level». Lombardo Radice himself noted in a preface penned in 1933, when the 1914 programs were republished, that these had been endorsed by Minister Gentile in 1923, cf. *Istruzioni programmi e orari per gli asili infantili e i giardini d'infanzia*, ristampa con prefazione di Giuseppe Lombardo Radice, Roma, Associazione per il Mezzogiorno editrice, 1933, p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. F. De Giorgi, *I cattolici e l'infanzia a scuola. Il «metodo italiano»*, «Rivista di storia del cristianesimo», vol. IX, n. 1, gennaio-giugno 2012, pp. 71-88, specifically pp. 74-76.

<sup>10</sup> To grasp the importance and implications of this development, it is important to note that in the early 1900s, the majority of infant schools – approximately 75% – were run by charitable institutions or by church bodies on behalf of private patrons. Furthermore, the involvement of female religious congregations in early childhood education remained substantial throughout the first four decades of the twentieth century, cf. R. Sani, *L'educazione dell'infanzia dall'età giolittiana alla Carta Bottai*, in L. Pazzaglia, R. Sani (edd.), *Scuola e società nell'Italia unita. Dalla legge Casati al Centro-sinistra*, Brescia, La Scuola, 2001, pp. 240-241.

<sup>11</sup> For further historical background on this Brescia-based publishing house, which is still in operation today, publishing schoolbooks and developing resources for teacher training and professional development, see L. Pazzaglia (ed.), *Editrice La Scuola 1904-2004. Catalogo storico*, Brescia, La Scuola, 2004.

<sup>12</sup> This Catholic association adopted the Agazzi approach in its own training schools and

early 1930s saw a veritable «triumph» of the Agazzi method<sup>13</sup>. Backed by the Ministry of Public Education both during<sup>14</sup> and after<sup>15</sup> the Second World War, the Agazzi approach continued to strongly influence the programmatic directives for kindergartens, remaining prominent at least until the *Orientamenti per l'attività educativa della scuola materna* [*Guidelines for the Educational Activity of Maternal Schools*] of 1958<sup>16</sup>.

kindergartens, cf. A.M. Ferrari, *L'Associazione Educatrice Italiana e il metodo delle Sorelle Agazzi*, in *Rosa Agazzi a dieci anni dalla morte*, Brescia, La Scuola, 1961, pp. 57-58.

<sup>13</sup> La Direzione, *Il Corso Agazzi e la diffusione del Metodo Agazziano*, «Pro Infantia», a. XX, n. 21, 26 marzo 1933, pp. 529-533, citation on p. 529. On these issues and, more broadly, on the role of La Scuola journal «Pro Infantia» (later «Scuola materna») in disseminating the Agazzi method, of which the periodical described itself as an «exhibitor and promoter» (L'Amministrazione e la Direzione del Pro Infantia, *Il «Pro Infantia» nel nuovo anno scolastico 1929-30*, «Pro Infantia», a. XVII, n. 1, 10 ottobre 1929, p. 1), cf. R. Bressanelli, *L'«intrapresa ardita». La rivista per gli asili «Pro Infantia» nel suo primo ventennio di vita (1913-1933)*, Lecce, Pensa MultiMedia, 2023, pp. 237 and ss. The success of the Agazzi method during the late 1920s and early 1930s is borne out by the fact that in the 1929-1930 school year, not only was the Agazzi method included for the first time among the educational approaches envisaged in the ministerial survey of infant schools, but it also emerged as that most widely implemented. Out of 9,546 early childhood education institutions, 2,219 reported using the Agazzi method, 1,458 followed the Froebel method, 1,283 the Aperti method, and 422 the Montessori method, while 4,164 were classified as «other types»: cf. G. Chiaromonte, *Gli asili infantili nell'anno 1929-30*, «Annali dell'istruzione elementare», vol. VI, n. 5, ottobre 1931, pp. 17-31, citation on p. 27.

<sup>14</sup> Suffice it to recall that on 06 December 1941, Minister of National Education Giuseppe Bottai – while presenting the Agazzi sisters with the «Stella d'oro al merito della scuola» [Golden Star Award for Merit in the School Sector] in Brescia and recognising the value of their work, which he described as «a brilliant, happy foretaste of the Italian school system as defined by the Schools Charter» – stated: «Nowadays, when one speaks of Italian schooling, one means Agazzi schooling and vice versa»: *Il Ministro Bottai premia l'opera di Rosa e Carolina Agazzi*, «Scuola materna», vol. XXVIII, n. 9, 24 dicembre 1941, p. 179.

<sup>15</sup> In June 1950, during the National Maternal School Days held in Brescia, Trento, and Trieste in honour of Rosa Agazzi, Minister of Public Education Guido Gonella declared: «The Agazzi method is, and must remain, the method of the Italian infant school system. We recognize the Agazzi method as the method for Italian kindergartens due to its own intrinsic value and the current de facto situation. The only valid and effective method, indeed, is that which is embraced by the teacher with conviction, sensitivity, and unceasing creativity. This is precisely what has occurred with the Agazzi method», cf. G. Gonella, *Il metodo che la scuola materna italiana si è scelto*, in *In memoria di Rosa Agazzi*, a special edition of «Scuola materna», vol. XXXVII, n. 10-12, 30 aprile 1951, Brescia, Centro Didattico Nazionale per la Scuola Materna, 1961, p. 158.

<sup>16</sup> Although these *Guidelines* (published in Presidential Decree No. 584 of 11 June 1958) made it clear that they did not «mandate one particular educational method over another» (Lombardi, *I programmi della scuola per l'infanzia in Italia dal 1914 al 1969*, cit., p. 235), their «evident Agazzi influence» may easily be inferred from their insistence on the practice of everyday life skills as well as their inherent critique of schoolishness and corresponding emphasis on play, hands-on learning, spoken language, drawing, and singing, cf. E. Catarsi, *L'asilo e la scuola dell'infanzia. Storia della scuola «materna» e dei suoi programmi dall'Ottocento ai giorni nostri*, Scandicci (Firenze), La Nuova Italia, 2000, p. 233.

## 2. The crisis and revival of the Agazzi method

While the Agazzi method had demonstrated considerable resilience to socio-cultural changes in the first half of the twentieth century, it began to show signs of weakness amid the turbulent climate of the 1960s and 1970s. This decline was driven both by the void left by the death of its founders<sup>17</sup> and by the major political, social, and cultural changes affecting the Italian infant school sector during that period<sup>18</sup>. Specifically, following the publication of the 1958 *Orientamenti*, the issue of nationalizing infant school education became a central topic in political and education debates. After protracted parliamentary discussions, the state infant school system was set up in 1968<sup>19</sup>. The *Orientamenti dell'attività educativa nelle scuole materne statali*<sup>20</sup> [Guidelines for Educational Activities in State Maternal Schools] were published the following year and remained in effect until 1991<sup>21</sup>. While these guidelines – which were drawn up by a group of scholars from diverse cultural backgrounds, a pluralistic approach without precedent at the time – introduced significant innovations (such as recognizing the child as a social subject situated in a historical context<sup>22</sup>), they did not, in practice, represent a «clear and absolute departure» from the instructions previously in effect<sup>23</sup>. In relation to our focus of inquiry here, it should be noted that while the document specified that, based on the principle of educational freedom, it was not intended to interfere with «specific teaching choices»<sup>24</sup>, it did retain the distinctly Agazzian term «maternal school» and reflected certain «distinctive characteristics» of the Agazzi edu-

<sup>17</sup> Carolina and Rosa Agazzi passed away in 1945 and 1951, respectively; Pietro Pasquali had predeceased them in 1921.

<sup>18</sup> On the leading events in the history of Italian infant schools across the 1960s and 1970s, see Catarsi, *L'asilo e la scuola dell'infanzia. Storia della scuola «materna» e dei suoi programmi dall'Ottocento ai giorni nostri*, cit., pp. 235-323.

<sup>19</sup> For an account of the extenuating legislative process that led to Law No. 444 of March 18, 1968, see L. Pazzaglia, *La politica scolastica del centro-sinistra*, in Id., R. Sani (ed.), *Scuola e società nell'Italia unita. Dalla legge Casati al Centro-Sinistra*, Brescia, La Scuola, 2001, pp. 481-495 and D. Gabusi, *La svolta democratica nell'istruzione italiana. Luigi Gui e la politica scolastica del centro-sinistra*, Brescia, La Scuola, 2010, pp. 203-264.

<sup>20</sup> Presidential Decree No. 647 of 10 September 1969, *Orientamenti dell'attività educativa nelle scuole materne statali*.

<sup>21</sup> Ministerial Decree of 03 June 1991, *Orientamenti dell'attività educativa nelle scuole materne statali*.

<sup>22</sup> According to the *Indirizzi generali* [General guidelines] section of this document, its purpose was to «highlight the educational needs of the child and the social and pedagogical needs [...] that the infant school system [was required to] address» within contemporary society, cf. Lombardi, *I programmi della scuola per l'infanzia in Italia dal 1914 al 1969*, cit., p. 238.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238. After introducing this issue in a first section entitled *Finalità della scuola materna e carattere degli Orientamenti* [Purpose of Infant School and Nature of the Guidelines], the following section on *Libertà e responsabilità didattica* [Freedom and Responsibility in Teaching] clarified that: «The criteria for, and methods of, educational action cannot be

cational approach. It also suggested «certain focuses inspired by» the Agazzi method, although these influences were difficult to «identify on the surface»<sup>25</sup>.

Despite this state of affairs, during the 1970s – a period that saw the rise of theories of educational permissiveness and the proliferation of so-called «alternative» infant schools (such as those associated with the work of Bruno Ciari with Bologna City Council, or the project led by Loris Malaguzzi in Reggio Emilia<sup>26</sup>) – the Agazzi-style infant school began to face criticism. It was accused of «having sacrificed the child to orderliness [...], having failed to open up the classroom, to open up the school to the ‘social’ dimension, and having maintained a limited view of the ‘kindergarten’ as a family»<sup>27</sup>.

Recognizing that the Agazzi project was losing momentum amid these reservations, scholars affiliated with the «Pasquali-Agazzi» Institute – a «centre for research, documentation, and education projects» that had been set up in Mompiano in 1964 with a view to «keeping the Agazzi spirit alive and open-ended»<sup>28</sup> – felt the urgent need to reinterpret the Agazzi educational tradition in light of the educational challenges of the day. Up to that point, researchers of the Agazzi method had primarily focused on its core principles and scientific validity with respect to the historical and cultural context in which it had

predetermined. The State’s recognition of academic freedom is reflected, among other things, in freedom of choice concerning teaching methods»: *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> S.S. Macchietti, *Il metodo Agazzi «oggi»*, in A. Agazzi, S.S. Macchietti, *L’educazione dell’infanzia nella scuola materna e il metodo Agazzi*, Brescia, La Scuola, 1991, pp. 147-171, citation on p. 151. On the Agazzian principles that permeated the *Orientamenti* of 1969, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 151-152.

<sup>26</sup> For more on these figures, see the biographical-bibliographical entries by M. D’Ascenzo and L. Bellatalla, respectively, in Chiosso, Sani (edd.), *DBE. Dizionario Biografico dell’Educazione 1800-2000*, cit. The characteristics of the alternative infant schools – presented as democratic institutions open to local communities, capable of bridging cultural differences, and with an emphasis on experimentation – were described in the inaugural issue of the journal «Infanzia» (which will be discussed later), cf. P. Bertolini, F. Frabboni, *Per una scuola dell’infanzia realmente alternativa*, «Infanzia», n. 1, ottobre 1973, pp. 5-10. Here, the aims of alternative infant schools were listed as meeting children’s needs, guaranteeing equal opportunities for all children, and becoming «a training ground for authentic democracy and broad socialization». As such, these schools sought to establish «a two-way relationship between infant school and the society to which it belongs», and to foster «a model of child who is intellectually curious, socially independent and communicative, ethically spontaneous, emotionally vibrant, and aesthetically eager for diverse creative experiences» (*ibid.*, pp. 6-7, italics in the original).

<sup>27</sup> S.S. Macchietti, *L’oggi del metodo Agazzi*, Brescia, Istituto di Mompiano «Pasquali-Agazzi», [1981], p. 19.

<sup>28</sup> *Statuto-Regolamento dell’Istituto di Mompiano «Pasquali-Agazzi»* [1964] in *Adeguamento alla legislazione vigente della gestione amministrativa e contabile dell’Istituto*, s.d. (Archivio dell’Istituto «Pasquali-Agazzi», Brescia). For a more detailed reconstruction of the history of this institution, see R. Bressanelli, C. Ghizzoni, «Frugando fra le carte». I fondi documentari dell’Istituto «Pasquali Agazzi»: fonte per una storia dell’educazione infantile in Italia fra ’800 e ’900, in A. Ascenzi, C. Covato, J. Meda (edd.), *La pratica educativa. Storia, memoria e patrimonio*, atti del 1° Congresso nazionale della Società Italiana per lo studio del Patrimonio Storico-Educativo (Palma de Mallorca, 20-23 novembre 2018), Macerata, eum, 2020, pp. 29-49.



originated and evolved. Now however, they realized that, if the Agazzi educational tradition was not to be lost altogether, it was essential to show that it still held intrinsic value on the contemporary historical-cultural scene.

Spurred by this newfound awareness, the Mompiano Institute launched a series of conferences during the 1970s. These events, led by distinguished academics in the field of education and primarily aimed at scholars and education practitioners, sought to reaffirm the contemporary value of the Agazzi method by drawing together past and present insights<sup>29</sup>. In January 1981, during a two-day seminar on *L'oggi del metodo Agazzi* [The Agazzi Method Today], organized by the Department of Public Education of Brescia City Council and the «Pasquali-Agazzi» Institute to mark the thirtieth anniversary of Rosa Agazzi's death (Brescia, January 9-10, 1981), education specialist Sira Sirenella Macchietti, a scholar of the Agazzi method and an active collaborator of the Institute, articulated this new research perspective as follows:

Research on the Agazzi method has appeared [...] to be driven by the aim of exploring contemporary issues in light of the «wisdom» and experience of the past. Rather than extracting direct lessons and inspiration from past methods to address today's challenges, the goal has been to delve into their deeper meanings while reflecting on and verifying their current relevance. The idea has been to enhance educational insight, fostering the capacity for critical comparison and, where necessary, pushback against «new educational fads», which often stand in the way of accessing a well-rounded and authentic education. Instead of merely proposing teaching methods to be «imitated», there has been a shift towards drawing on past experiences to foster a process of building awareness, reaching beyond pedagogical «dogmatisms» and partial readings of educational challenges<sup>30</sup>.

This plan to modernize the Agazzi model persisted until the early 2000s<sup>31</sup>, when the dynamism that had marked the early years of the «Pasquali-Agazzi»

<sup>29</sup> For example, the following are some of the seminars held between the mid-1970s and early 1980s: *Direttività e non direttività nell'educazione infantile: il metodo Agazzi e l'odierna problematica* [Directionality and Non-Directionality in Early Childhood Education: The Agazzi Method and the Challenges of Today] (Brescia, 24-25 maggio 1974), *L'educazione religiosa nel metodo Agazzi e nella scuola materna d'oggi* [Religious Education in the Agazzi Method and the Contemporary Infant School] (Brescia, 17-18 ottobre 1975), *Dalla scuola materna alla scuola elementare nella prospettiva agazziana e odierna* [From Infant School to Primary School From an Agazzian and Contemporary Perspective] (Brescia, 18-19 gennaio 1980), *L'oggi del metodo Agazzi* [The Agazzi Method Today] (Brescia, 9-10 gennaio 1981), *Ordine e creatività nella proposta agazziana e nella scuola materna oggi* [Order and creativity in the Agazzi approach and in the contemporary infant school] (Brescia, 13-14 novembre 1981). Until the early 1990s, these conferences were held every one or two years; however, in subsequent years, they became less frequent. The proceedings have been published in the series «Quaderni di Documentazione Pedagogica», which is edited by the Agazzi Institute in Mompiano. Today, this series runs to 39 volumes.

<sup>30</sup> Macchietti, *Il metodo Agazzi «oggi»*, cit., p. 153. The proceedings of the seminar were published in Ead., *L'oggi del metodo Agazzi*, cit.

<sup>31</sup> In 2001, seven volumes were published as part of the book series «Quaderni di Documentazione Pedagogica» under the title *La pedagogia di Rosa Agazzi paradigma educativo per il 2000* (Istituto Pasquali-Agazzi, Centro studi pedagogici, Bergamo, Edizioni Junior, 2001).

Institute began to wane. Recently, however, there has been a renewed push to revitalize the Agazzi educational approach, as well as the research centre itself, in the context of a project launched by Brescia City Council in cooperation with the Catholic University<sup>32</sup>.

### 3. *The television documentary* Il significato attuale del metodo agazziano

Another expression of the effort to reinterpret the Agazzi model of education from a contemporary perspective was the documentary entitled *Il significato attuale del metodo agazziano* [The Contemporary Meaning of the Agazzi Method], broadcast in two parts in the autumn of 1979 by the channel Rete 2, now known as Rai 2<sup>33</sup>. Directed by TV director Sergio Le Donne, with the expert input of Mario Cattaneo<sup>34</sup> and Franco Frabboni<sup>35</sup>, two prominent schol-

<sup>32</sup> On the systematic cooperation between these two bodies, see R. Bressanelli, *La nascita del «Museo Pasquali Agazzi» (Mu.P.A.) a Brescia nel 2021*, «Pedagogia e vita», vol. 80, n. 2, 2022, pp. 22-28.

<sup>33</sup> The two 25-minutes episodes were broadcast in October and November 1979, respectively. Listed in the multimedia catalogue «Teche Rai», the documentary *Il significato attuale del metodo agazziano* (henceforth *Isadma*) is not available online but may be viewed at the Rai Archives. It has also been catalogued in the *Banca dati degli audiovisivi sulla scuola e sugli insegnanti* [Database of audiovisual materials on schools and teachers] (Milan, EDUCatt, 2022, Vol. 2) developed by a research team at the Catholic University of Milan (coordinator: Prof. Paolo Alferi), as part of the national research project *School memories between social perception and collective representation. Italy, 1861-2001* (national coordinator: Prof. Roberto Sani). This database may be consulted at [www.memoriascolastica.it](http://www.memoriascolastica.it) (last access: 30.07.2024).

<sup>34</sup> Mario Cattaneo (1926-2012) was a senior figure at La Scuola publishing house. He was also president of the Brescia Early Childhood Education Centre, an institution founded in 1949 by some of those involved in the leadership of La Scuola with the aims of conducting studies on preschool education and promoting the Agazzi method. This centre played a key role, alongside Brescia City Council, in setting up the «Pasquali-Agazzi» Institute. On behalf of La Scuola, Cattaneo led training courses and conferences for infant school teachers up to the early 1990s. He also headed up several of La Scuola's key publications. When the Italian Federation of Maternal Schools (FISM) was founded in 1974, he became a member of the National Secretariat and took on the role of educational advisor on the professional development of Italian kindergarten teachers. A member of the Christian Democratic Party, Cattaneo served in Brescia as provincial councillor from 1956 to 1960, city councillor from 1960 to 1975, and city councillor with special responsibility for education from 1964 to 1972. For further background, see *Mario Cattaneo. Testimonianze e scritti*, Brescia, Ce.Doc, 2014, as well as his biographical profile in the «Illustrious Citizens» section of the Brescia City Council website: <https://www.comune.brescia.it/aree-tematiche/anagrafe-e-stato-civile/cimiteri/onoranze-al-famedio/cittadini-illustri/mario-cattaneo> (last access: 30-07-2024).

<sup>35</sup> An advocate of educational problematicism and champion of democratic education, Franco Frabboni (1935-2024) was a prominent scholar at Bologna's «Alma Mater Studiorum» University. He was actively involved in promoting a new model of education, including early childhood education, which he labelled «a nuovo indirizzo» [of new orientation] based on his interpretation of Bruno Ciari's work. This model envisaged an open and democratic school system



ars of early childhood education, and in collaboration with the teachers of the three Agazzi infant schools in Brescia – «Cesare Abba», «Girolamo Tonini» and «Sorelle Agazzi»<sup>36</sup> – the documentary was aired during the program «Educazione e regioni – Infanzia e territorio» [Education and the Regions – Children and Communities]<sup>37</sup>. This program was created by Rai's Department of School Education (DSE) with a view to presenting «inquiry into teaching and educational issues» that concerned children<sup>38</sup>. Analysis of «RadiocorriereTV» shows that the program, following its debut with a sequence of episodes entitled *Crescere a Napoli* [Growing up in Naples], initially focused on topics such as the use of dialect, language education, and the lives of children in industrial cities. From late December 1976 through 1977, the program explored various early childhood education experiments then ongoing in Italian cities and sub-urban areas<sup>39</sup>. In 1978, it broadened its scope to address the general situation of Italian infant schools, highlighting both their successes and shortcomings<sup>40</sup>.

that would contribute to the civic advancement of the nation. For a comprehensive overview of Frabboni's biographical and cultural journey, see F. Frabboni, *La mia pedagogia. Lungo le valli incantate dell'Educazione* (Pisa, Ets, 2016). Analysis of «RadiocorriereTV», a weekly radio and television listings magazine, suggests that Frabboni was a consultant to the program «Educazione e regioni – Infanzia e territorio» from its inception.

<sup>36</sup> This information is contained in the opening and closing credits of the two episodes of the documentary.

<sup>37</sup> The program was launched on 6 December 1976, with the subtitle «Infanzia Oggi». Initially curated by Massimiliano Santella, it aired on Mondays and Thursdays from 1:30 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. A few months after its debut, the subtitle was changed to «Infanzia e territorio», and the program, now curated by Mauro Gobbinì, was only broadcast on Mondays.

<sup>38</sup> «RadiocorriereTV», n. 44, 26 ottobre-1 novembre 1980, p. 175.

<sup>39</sup> The episode titles devoted to this theme included: *Cinisello Balsamo. Gli spazi per l'infanzia* [Cinisello Balsamo: Spaces for Children]; *Scuola materna a Venezia* [Maternal School in Venice]; *Scuola materna in Valle d'Aosta* [Maternal School in Valle d'Aosta]; *Puglia: un'assenza storica* [Puglia: A Historic Vacuum]; *Pomezia ore 7.30: dove vanno i bambini?* [Pomezia at 7.30 am: Where Do the Children Go?]; *Cagliari: una realtà conflittuale* [Cagliari: A Conflict Situation]; *Un bambino a Siena* [A Child in Siena]; *Umbria. Scuola statale o scuola comunale* [Umbria: State School or Municipal School]; and *Umbria. Scuola pubblica e infanzia privata*. [Umbria: Public Schools and Private Childhoods]. During this period, various episodes focused on early childhood education in Emilia-Romagna, a region particularly active in promoting innovative educational projects (examples include: *Ravenna. Da figlio a soggetto sociale* [Ravenna: From Son/Daughter to Social Subject]; *Ravenna. Da genitore a cittadino* [Ravenna: From Parent to Citizen]; *Ravenna: una realtà da comprendere* [Ravenna: A Situation to Be Understood]; and *Emilia Romagna: il pluralismo della scuola dell'infanzia* [Emilia-Romagna: Pluralism at Infant School]). The significant number of episodes centred on Emilia-Romagna may be attributed to the involvement of Bolognese scholar Franco Frabboni as a consultant to the program. For further background on the innovative developments in early childhood education in this region during the 1960s and 1970s, see Catarsi, *L'asilo e la scuola dell'infanzia. Storia della scuola "materna" e dei suoi programmi dall'Ottocento ai giorni nostri*, pp. 241-242, 271-299, 313-318.

<sup>40</sup> For example, some of the episodes aired included: *Una scuola all'acqua di rose* [A watered-down school]; *Sul sentiero della... scuola materna* [On the path towards... infant school]; *Il gioco nella scuola materna* [Play at infant school]; *Scuola materna da ente morale sociale*

The following year, designated by the United Nations as the «International Year of the Child», its approximately one hundred episodes predominantly examined the condition of children in Italy's most disadvantaged areas and showcased some of the innovative practices being implemented in Italian kindergartens<sup>41</sup>.

It was against this backdrop that the documentary *Il significato attuale del metodo agazziano* was broadcast in October-November 1979. The first episode, which aired on Monday October 29, opened with the narrator announcing that he was in Brescia, the city where «in 1895, in a damp old sacristy in Mompiano», the Agazzi's experiment had first been launched. Shots of photographs and documents held at the «Pasquali-Agazzi» Institute helped the viewer to envisage the setting where the Agazzi educational approach first developed. After stating as his initial premise that the Agazzi method had «left a significant legacy to the infant school system», of which it continued to be «one of the pillars», Sergio Le Donne introduced the one theme that could not be overlooked in assessing the contemporary relevance of the Agazzi approach: the infant school's marked social function. According to the presenter, the Agazzi approach could only be fully understood if viewed as «providing a social service», meaning «a service to the child and, through the child, to the family and the community in which the infant school is embedded»<sup>42</sup>. In Le Donne's view, the Agazzi sisters' focus on this aspect – which had become of pressing interest again in the 1960s and 1970s and had been acknowledged as important in the 1969 *Guidelines* – dispelled any question that the Agazzi model might now have become obsolete.

Following this introduction, the episode, divided into three parts, delved into the core principles of the Agazzi method: *The Child and the Environment*, *Practical Life and Manual Work*, and *Expressive Activities*. The footage, filmed by Rai cameramen on location at the three Agazzi-method infant

*a ente pubblico* [Infant school from a social welfare agency to a public institution]; *Orario di lavoro e scuola materna* [Working hours and infant school].

<sup>41</sup> The topics covered by the program in 1979 included: *Crescere nelle serre calabresi* [Growing up in the Greenhouses of Calabria]; *Grassano: a trent'anni dalla inchiesta sulla miseria* [Grassano: Thirty Years After the Poverty Survey]; *Pavia: programmare lo spazio del fanciullo* [Pavia: Planning Children's Spaces]; and *Matera e la sua scuola dell'infanzia* [Matera and Its Infant Schools]. Additionally, numerous episodes that year focused on developments in the Emilia-Romagna region, underscoring the vibrancy of early childhood education initiatives in that area. One notable example is the episode titled *Romagna la sperimentazione privata* [Romagna: Private Experimentation]. For further details on the topics covered in 1979, cf. M. Bernath, *Dipartimento scuola educazione. I servizi per l'infanzia in Italia*, «RadiocorriereTV», n. 16, 13-19 aprile 1980, p. 157.

<sup>42</sup> *Isadma*. Without directly quoting her, the director referenced a statement made by Rosa Agazzi in her address to the National Education Congress in Turin in 1898. On that occasion, she described the kindergarten as «an institution which, by aiming to shape the individual, serves the family, schools, and society»: R. Agazzi, P. Pasquali, *Scritti inediti e rari*, M. Grazzini (ed.), Brescia, La Scuola, 1973, pp. 82-83.

schools in Brescia, placed the spotlight firmly on the children and their teachers, who became the main focus of the program. With ongoing commentary by the presenter/director, these recordings vividly illustrated the foundational ideas of the Agazzi approach.

With regard to the first topic, the episode highlighted the social nature of the Agazzi maternal school, characterizing it as «an open school», «a school of comprehensive education», and «open to the family», with a focus on educating «for life through life». While reaffirming that this educational principle had originated with the Agazzi sisters and acknowledging its continued importance, the presenter pointed out that, despite this meaningful legacy, contemporary infant schools, driven by «a fascination with the new», had «all too often [...] forgotten, [...] and shelved their traditions and educational models, starting with those of the Agazzi sisters».

Next, in the second part of the episode, over footage of children building objects with nails, hammers, and pliers, and setting and clearing tables, the narrator explained the concepts of practical life exercises and manual work. The Agazzi method was described as «the full employment method» because it encouraged children to engage in hands-on activities, which are essential for developing basic self-confidence and fostering independence. In Agazzi kindergartens, practical life exercises were seen as either «corrective» of or «complementary» to the educational experience provided in the home<sup>43</sup>. The presenter noted that the contemporary of these activities was underpinned «by the broader rediscovery of the use of one's hands not only as a tool for creation but also as a medium for thought»<sup>44</sup>.

These explanations, alongside the footage, provided the viewers with a clear understanding of the child's role in the Agazzi style kindergarten. In this setting, the children are active participants in their own learning, gaining knowledge and personal autonomy through direct, concrete, everyday experience and cooperation with their peers rather than via prepackaged information conveyed by their teacher. Of particular note, during the footage of children performing household chores, it was emphasized that there were no «distinctions between boys and girls» in the assignment of these tasks. On the contrary, the presenter commented that engaging boys in activities tradition-

<sup>43</sup> The presenter added: «In general, and especially today, children receive little encouragement to be active in the home and many tasks are done for them. It is commonly believed that gratifying children requires shielding them from the effort and encounter with reality that practical life exercises both offer and impose. As a result, children often start school unable to manage even simple tasks and resistant to new challenges. In contrast, when children are trained to handle practical, concrete tasks on their own, they grow in independence and become more engaged with reality»: *Isadma*.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* Suffice it to recall here that the 1969 *Guidelines* emphasized the close link between «Constructive and Practical Life Activities» and «Intellectual Education», cf. Lombardi, *I programmi della scuola per l'infanzia in Italia dal 1914 al 1969*, cit., pp. 266 ss.

ally viewed in the home as «typically female» could help to break down deeply ingrained «mindset barriers». According to Sergio Le Donne, illustrating that «certain models are not inherent in nature but rather are rooted in culture and tradition», represented a valuable «contribution to sexual education»<sup>45</sup>.

This comment was clearly intended to affirm the contemporary relevance of the Agazzi educational approach, and specifically in relation to the theme of sex education, which was a major focus in the political and cultural debates of the time, fuelled by the feminist movements of the 1970s. During this period, sexual education was a prominent topic of discussion in education and school-related circles. For instance, the 1969 *Guidelines* emphasized the need to introduce «a basic form of sexual education» starting from infant school, and «to implement it in non-repressive ways»<sup>46</sup>.

The third part of the documentary – entitled *Expressive Activities* – emphasized the Agazzis' belief in play as the primary means through which children learn and express themselves. This segment showcased footage of children who were busy drawing, scribbling, painting, or moving coloured pencils to the rhythm of music, either standing at easels or lying on the floor. The presenter explained that, in the Agazzi approach, play activities were viewed as «true languages» which children use to learn about their surroundings. Play also fulfilled a «liberatory» function, by allowing children to express their emotions. It was noted that the importance the Agazzi method placed on expressive activities had sometimes been leveraged to discredit the approach<sup>47</sup>. However, such criticisms were unfounded, as confirmed by the 1969 *Guidelines*, which emphasized that play, described as «a key manifestation of childhood», should be a central feature of all activities offered to children<sup>48</sup>.

Building on the final theme of the first episode, the second episode, aired on Monday, 05 November 1979, focused on symbolic languages. Although the presenter acknowledged that the Agazzi method did not provide a «complete answer» in this regard, he believed that it nevertheless offered «valuable pointers and clues». Specifically, the Agazzi method took an «extremely interesting» approach to the use of symbolic languages by valuing «spoken language» and recognizing «the absolute need to move beyond the child's spontaneous, immediate, concrete, everyday language». The footage illustrated activities designed to translate the Agazzis' insights into practice. The sisters' approach was based on the belief that «by starting with the children's 'spoken' language and the

<sup>45</sup> *Isadma*.

<sup>46</sup> Lombardi, *I programmi della scuola per l'infanzia in Italia dal 1914 al 1969*, cit., p. 262.

<sup>47</sup> Sergio Le Donne explained that some scholars believed laying too much emphasis on expressive activities was «a deadly trap at the educational level» because, in elementary schools, these activities were often undervalued and somewhat marginalized. Reflecting on these practices, the presenter also touched on singing, an activity that was highly valued by the Agazzis but also controversial at the time the documentary was produced, cf. *Isadma*.

<sup>48</sup> Lombardi, *I programmi della scuola per l'infanzia in Italia dal 1914 al 1969*, cit., p. 263.

‘spoken’ language of the neighbourhood as a basis for playing with words and sentences, it was possible to devise a playful exercise book» that would serve as a highly effective language teaching tool<sup>49</sup>. This episode also touched on the use of «contrassegni» [labels]<sup>50</sup>, the well-known device invented by the Agazzi sisters to promote the development of symbolic language, which was also recommended by the 1969 *Guidelines*<sup>51</sup>. Interestingly, when reflecting on the Agazzi method’s emphasis on language learning, Sergio Le Donne compared it to the pedagogical model of Don Lorenzo Milani. He quoted Milani’s famous statement that «a child who knows “a thousand” words is linguistically (and not only linguistically) stronger than a child who knows “a hundred” words»<sup>52</sup>.

Having explored the educational principles underpinning the Agazzi sisters’ teachings, the broadcast then focused on a theme that was key to addressing doubts about the validity and contemporary relevance of their insights. According to Le Donne, one of the main reasons the Agazzi method continued to receive considerable support and remained the focus of ongoing study and experimentation over 80 years after its founding, was the fact that it was an «anti-method». He explained that the term «method» describes «a rigid educational system that purports to be exhaustive, in the sense of solving all the challenges of education» and that remains unaffected by the «ravages of time», thus claiming «to be perpetually valid», a definition that did not fit the Agazzi model. The greatest merit of the Agazzi approach was its grounding in the «maximum transparency to time, that is, maximum permeability to time itself, to history». To further illustrate this characteristic of the method and defend it from accusations of obsolescence and old-fashionedness, Sergio Le Donne added:

The Agazzi model or structure is a set of ideas, of broad educational ideas, based on which it is possible to construct different educational trajectories, which are clearly left and entrusted to the school. And which the school can negotiate, adapt, and recycle according to the specific challenges and needs of the local community setting. So, it is an anti-

<sup>49</sup> *Isadma*. In one scene, for example, a child explains to a classmate what he is drawing as he continues to work. In another, during a puppet show on the theme of toothache, the teachers encourage the children to interact with the puppets by asking questions and sharing their own experiences of going to the dentist.

<sup>50</sup> As footage of the «old labels» held at the «Pasquali-Agazzi» Institute is shown, the narrator comments that as components «of the children’s identity and of the organization of their personal and community lives», these labels help to «strike a balance between the individuality and the socialization of the child»: *Isadma*.

<sup>51</sup> Lombardi, *I programmi della scuola per l’infanzia in Italia dal 1914 al 1969*, cit., p. 275.

<sup>52</sup> *Isadma*. As is well known, the prior of Barbiana identified proficiency in both written and spoken language as key to both personal development and social emancipation, especially among the poorest classes. There is an extensive literature on Don Milani’s pedagogy of the word. For further background, see R. Sani, D. Simeone (edd.), *Don Lorenzo Milani e la scuola della parola. Analisi storica e prospettive pedagogiche*, Macerata, eum, 2011.

method. This is its key strength: it acts as a sort of necklace of educational ideas that each school can wear on itself and refine based on its unique geographical location and historical context<sup>53</sup>.

The second episode closed with some remarks on the training of Agazzi maternal school teachers. As the camera showed a teacher sitting on the floor, playing and talking with the children – projecting an image of a creative, industrious, and non-authoritarian educator who listens patiently and fosters dialogue and cooperation – the presenter emphasized the need to have «extremely robust professional competence» to implement this kind of teaching-learning model. He explained that the Agazzi approach, which was rooted in everyday life and the realities of the moment, demanded an educator who was «even more competent» than others. Recognizing the importance of this aspect, he expressed the hope that «those responsible for infant schools – whether state, municipal, or private – [would] increasingly commit to systematic and rigorous professional development for their staff»<sup>54</sup>.

#### 4. Rai and the Agazzi maternal school model

While up until the 1970s, as outlined above, studies on the Agazzi approach were largely the preserve of a small professional circle – academics, scholars of preschool education, and infant school teachers – and reported in the specialized literature and at sector-specific conferences, the documentary *Il significato attuale del metodo agazziano* marked a sea change in this regard. The TV program, which closely aligned itself with the lines of inquiry pursued by the «Pasquali-Agazzi» Institute from the mid-1970s, sought to reinterpret the Agazzi tradition in light of contemporary educational challenges. From a communications perspective, however, it was addressed to a broader public than before. Leveraging the reach of the mass media, the documentary – directed by a non-expert, but informed by sound advice from education specialists – was aimed at engaging a far larger and more diverse audience than previously targeted by the specialist literature<sup>55</sup>.

Analysis of the journal «Infanzia»<sup>56</sup> reveals that Frabboni himself – who,

<sup>53</sup> *Isadma*.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> It should be noted that, about a year after the documentary *Il significato attuale del metodo agazziano* was broadcast on Rai, it was also screened during the earlier-mentioned seminar *L'oggi del metodo Agazzi*, see Rosa Agazzi: *un metodo, una vita*: «La Voce del Popolo», 16 gennaio 1981.

<sup>56</sup> Founded in October 1973 by the educationalist Piero Bertolini (1931-2006) and initially printed by La Nuova Italia in Florence with the subtitle *Orientamenti esperienze indagini sui problemi pedagogico-didattici e sulla gestione della scuola materna e asili nido* [Guidelines,



as earlier mentioned along with Cattaneo, had advised presenter and director Sergio Le Donne – emphasized how uniquely the Agazzi method was portrayed in the documentary. In the same weeks that the program was airing on national television, the Bologna-based scholar transcribed and commented on the documentary's script in an article entitled *Quando il commento TV ha il sapore del linguaggio pedagogico. Zoomata televisiva sul metodo Agazzi* [When TV Commentary Has the Flavour of Pedagogical Language: A Television Zoom-In on the Agazzi Method]<sup>57</sup>. In the introductory notes to this article, Frabboni praised the documentary, noting that its primary strength lay in the fact that it had not been produced by an insider. This, he argued, enabled a meaningful dialogue between science and experience, moving beyond an era when these disciplines, functioning as «separate entities», «*blossomed and withered within individual, well-guarded, fenced-off gardens*, which could only be accessed by their respective experts», thus perpetuating the «fragmentation and division of knowledge».

Frabboni acknowledged that early childhood education institutions, compared to schools at the other levels of education, displayed particularly «*strong receptivity and openness to interdisciplinary contributions*». However, he cautioned that this openness should not encourage the misconception that pre-schools were a «no man's land, a pedagogical city 'open' to all 'external' intrusions and influences». To prevent this, he stressed that infant schools should continue to «*resolutely, tooth and nail, defend both their historical heritage (the educational models that had constituted their original launch pad, such as those of Froebel, Owen, the Agazzis, and Montessori) and their experimental heritage*», which they had been «*patiently designing and implementing*» since the mid-1960s. Frabboni concluded his introduction by commending the documentary for using a television language «*imbued with a distinctly pedagogical essence*» to sketch a «*clearly presented*», «*conceptually rigorous*» and «*critically precise*» 1980s «*portrait*» of the Agazzi method, proving that even a «*non-expert [could] do Pedagogy*»<sup>58</sup>. Frabboni thus focused on the film's

*projects, and research into educational issues and the management of infant schools and day-care centres*], the journal initially drew on the collaboration of the research centre «Centro Studi Bruno Ciari». Frabboni was co-editor of the journal for almost fifty years, namely, from 1976 up to his death earlier in 2024. As Bertolini wrote in the inaugural issue of «*Infanzia*», the periodical was founded with view to leading a «battle» in the field of preschool education, to becoming «the voice of all the forces interested in an alternative educational discourse, a hub for catalysing, propelling, and connecting all those who [...], mostly in isolation from one another» were working in this direction, cf. P. Bertolini, *Presentazione*, «*Infanzia*», n. 1, ottobre 1973, pp. 3-4, citation on p. 4.

<sup>57</sup> Effe effe [F. Frabboni], *Quando il commento TV ha il sapore del linguaggio pedagogico. Zoomata televisiva sul metodo Agazzi*, *ibid.*, n. 37, [ottobre-novembre] 1979, pp. 11-15. Although some passages were edited, Frabboni did not make any major changes to the director's commentary.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11 (italics in the original).

communicative power, noting that it did not present the Agazzi approach for celebratory or eulogistic purposes, but rather to underscore the method's contemporary relevance and vibrancy.

Like other audiovisual sources, this film influenced viewers' «knowledge of the past», but also their «understanding of the present»<sup>59</sup>, effectively bridging the gap in time and reorganizing the audience's memories<sup>60</sup>. When examined «not merely as a direct testimony to the past of schooling but also as a media-driven and, therefore, social reconstruction of it»<sup>61</sup>, the documentary on the Agazzi method offers valuable insights into school memory<sup>62</sup> defined as the «collective [...] practice of remembrance of a common school past»<sup>63</sup>.

The two episodes of the program «Educazione e regioni – Infanzia e territorio» devoted to the Agazzi method allow us to infer «the representation of the school and the teaching offered by [...] the word of information and communication»<sup>64</sup>: in this case, the specific image of how «schooling was done» in Agazzi-inspired kindergartens. An image that had been revisited vis-à-vis the past and was now being transferred into, and reinforced within, the collective memories of Italians. The director's narrative commentary and the

<sup>59</sup> P. Sorlin, *L'immagine e l'evento. L'uso storico delle fonti audiovisive*, Torino, Paravia, 1999, p. 27.

<sup>60</sup> On the heuristic potential of television documentaries in the context of school history studies, see P. Warmington, A. Van Gorp, I. Grosvenor, *Education in motion: use of documentary film in educational research*, «Paedagogica historica», vol. 4, 2011, pp. 457-472. For a broader discussion on developments in studies concerning the relationship between television and history, see P. Ortoleva, *Testimone infallibile, macchina dei sogni: il film e il programma televisivo come fonte storica*, in G. Miro Gori (ed.), *La storia al cinema. Ricostruzione del passato/interpretazione del presente*, Roma, Bulzoni, 1994, pp. 299-331 and S. Carini, *Media e storia: cronologia di un dibattito*, in A. Grasso (ed.), *Fare storia con la televisione. L'immagine come fonte, evento, memoria*, Milano, Vita & Pensiero, 2006, pp. 47-90.

<sup>61</sup> P. Alfieri *Introduzione*, in Id. (ed.), *Immagini dei nostri maestri. Memorie di scuola nel cinema e nella televisione dell'Italia repubblicana*, Roma, Armando, 2019, p. 13.

<sup>62</sup> On this interpretive category, see – among others – A. Vinao Frago, *La memoria escolar: restos y huellas, recuerdos y olvidos*, «Annali di storia dell'educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche», n. 12, 2005, pp. 19-33; Id., *Memoria, patrimonio y educación*, «Educatio Siglo XXI», n. 2, 2010, pp. 17-42; C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, 2017.

<sup>63</sup> J. Meda, A. Viñao, *School memory. Historiographical balance and heuristic perspectives*, *ibid.*, p. 2. This essay outlines the three perspectives from which school memories may be investigated, namely «as an individual, collective and/or public practice» of recalling a common school past, *ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3. Juri Meda specifies that «collective memory genetically descends from the collective imaginary, whose symbolic materials can either derive from the cultural heritage of a given community or be integrated and redefined by the culture or information industry»: J. Meda, *Memoria Magistra. La memoria della scuola tra rappresentazione collettiva e uso pubblico del passato*, in G. Zago, S. Polenghi, L. Agostinetto (edd.), *Memoria ed Educazione. Identità, Narrazione, Diversità. Atti del Convegno nazionale Siped, Padova 30 giugno-1° luglio 2020*, Lecce-Brescia, Pensa Multimedia, 2020, p. 29. On the collective school memories nurtured by Italian television, see Alfieri (ed.), *Immagini dei nostri maestri. Memorie di scuola nel cinema e nella televisione dell'Italia repubblicana*, cit.

footage captured by Rai cameras at the «Cesare Abba», «Girolamo Tonini», and «Sorelle Agazzi» infant schools combined to reveal a novel educational approach that was rich in pedagogical and social meaning. The portrayed approach offered a dynamic yet peaceful learning environment that balanced order with freedom, fostering democratic collaboration between preschool institutions, families, and the community. This school system was presented as acknowledging children's complex nature, emphasizing cooperation and mutual assistance, interpreting play as a source of creative and active energy and viewing the environment as the first early learning resource. The documentary showed that while the Agazzi approach did not disregard symbolic communication, it prioritized tangible experiences over theoretical ideas, preferring «spontaneous, immediate, concrete, everyday language» to «logical languages, [...] logical-formal, mathematical languages»<sup>65</sup>.

The television documentary *Il significato attuale del metodo agazziano* was created to stimulate reflection on the pedagogical, social, and ethical implications of the Agazzis' peculiar educational model. Its aim was to convince viewers that this approach to early childhood education remained salient to the educational needs of late 1970s society. Without viewership data for the program, it is impossible to determine the actual impact on the collective memory of Italians of this first and only attempt at revisiting this segment of shared educational history for presentation to a television audience<sup>66</sup>. Considering that it was broadcast on weekdays in the early afternoon, it is reasonable to assume that the documentary did not lead to a large-scale reconstruction of memory.

In subsequent years, neither public nor private Italian television channels produced any further programs devoted to this specific chapter of history. Although the Agazzi sisters and Pasquali left an indelible mark on the history of early childhood education in Italy and beyond, their approach fared differently compared to that of Maria Montessori, for example. Indeed, in 2007, the private Italian television network Mediaset broadcast a primetime TV movie on

<sup>65</sup> *Isadma*.

<sup>66</sup> Consultation of the Rai Archives and «RadiocorriereTV» reveals that no other television programs exclusively devoted to the Agazzi method were aired before or after 1979. However, examination of the TV listings magazine shows that in January 1979 – about ten months before Sergio Le Donne's documentary aired – a brief feature on the Agazzi method was shown on «Tressei. Genitori ma come», a program produced by DSE, curated by Sandro Lai, Franco Matteucci, and Massimiliano Santella, and broadcast on Rai 2 on Thursdays from 1:30 to 2:00 p.m. More specifically, on 4 January 1979, Graziano Cavallini, a professor at the University of Sassari, who had been tasked with illustrating «the pedagogy of the past» (*Per scoprire i bambini*, «RadiocorriereTV», n. 10, 4-10 marzo 1979, p. 111) presented a five-minute *Scheda pedagogica* [Educational Profile] of the Agazzi method. Cavallini's feature, entitled *Scheda pedagogica: Rosa e Carolina Agazzi*, offered a quick outline of the educational objectives of the Agazzi approach. Although the feature is listed in the multimedia catalogue «Rai Teche», it is not available for viewing online but may be consulted at the Rai Archives.

Montessori's work, *Maria Montessori. Una vita per i bambini* [*Maria Montessori. A life devoted to children*], which proved extremely popular with the public<sup>67</sup>.

<sup>67</sup> The TV movie about Montessori, broadcast in two parts (on 28 and 30 May) on Canale 5, garnered one of the highest audience ratings of 2007. For an in-depth account of this docufilm and to explore the memory held of Montessori internationally, cf. S. Polenghi, «*Maria Montessori. Una vita per i bambini*»: a biopic that blends memory, interpretation and reality, in J. Meda, L. Paciaroni, R. Sani (edd.), *The school and its many pasts*, Macerata, eum, 2024, pp. 721-731.