

Memories between the Past and the Present

By Amelia Gambetti

This issue of *Innovations*, volume 2, number 1, was dedicated to the memory of Loris Malaguzzi, the founder of the Reggio Emilia approach, following his death in February 1994. Reading through its pages brought back so many memories of my life as an educator. Malaguzzi hired me on behalf of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia in 1967, and I was a teacher for 25 years in Reggio Emilia under his guidance. Malaguzzi became my mentor and followed the development of my work and the evolution of my attitude as a teacher, encouraging my thinking, my doing, and my learning, always with that “why?” in my mind, supporting my motivation and awareness. He helped me to look at the image of the child, of the school, of the parents, and of my colleagues from the point of view of rights instead of needs and from the point of view of strength, potentialities, and richness instead of weakness.

Loris Malaguzzi’s deep commitment to quality in education and the importance of “starting strong” from very young children was visible and tangible through his approach to assessing what we, as teachers, were doing. He said, “We, as educators, have major responsibilities. We should always be aware of this so that our capability to analyze situations supports our ability to be critical about our work and never satisfied, because children deserve the best in order to be creative in their thinking, capable of building many relationships, and ready to encounter the complexity of life.”

In 1992, I received an offer to become a visiting lecturer at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst Laboratory School from George Forman, a collaborator and friend of Malaguzzi. When I decided to accept, Malaguzzi was proud of my choice and told me that my experience in the States could become a sort of “other eye” for him—an additional point of view related to another part of the world that interested him. After I finalized my retirement from the Municipality one morning, I went back to my school, and Malaguzzi was waiting for me. He said, “We have worked together for 25 years, and you can never retire from our collaboration. You always have to feel responsible for it, because you cannot betray the principles of our approach. If you do, you will betray me.” I felt the weight of that responsibility then and ever since—as a consultant for 25 years with Reggio Children and in North America and in my work establishing networks and dialogues among different experiences inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach throughout the world. This is the reason why, for me, Loris Malaguzzi has

never died, and he never will until his beliefs, his vision, and his mission for education is respected.

When I was working in Amherst, I was asked by *Innovations* to write about my experience there. Loris Malaguzzi encouraged me to do this periodically as a meaningful strategy for sharing what I was doing and why. When I was asked to share the most important things that Malaguzzi taught me, I responded, "Do not give up. Respect life and all human beings. Find dignity in yourself and in your work. Be curious about life and interested in all of the experiences that life and its complexity will offer to you. Learning does not end. Do not be satisfied about things—search continuously. Use creativity as an aspect of your intelligence. Be rigorous, professional, and ethical about what you do. Be aware of what you do without taking anything for granted. Be flexible and responsible. Learn how to listen—how to speak up and collaborate. Find joy and pleasure in all of the aspects of your work. Welcome different emotions and feelings. Look at every situation as a whole, not in pieces. Always learn how to build relationships. Make a commitment and act on your beliefs. Be spontaneous, follow your intuitions, and be positive and optimistic about life. Know how to wonder and how to be amazed. Accept who you are, be yourself, and have the courage to express what you think even if it is different from what others think. Difference is a value."

Malaguzzi had a very strong personality and had strong visions about education and its deep meaning. He always fought with all his strength against mediocrity, because children deserve the best without any question. It was a precious and unforgettable lesson for my personal and professional life. All my gratitude, love, and appreciation to Loris Malaguzzi.