

# Foreword

*Carlina Rinaldi*

These ministories, part of the history and experiences lived by children and teachers in Reggio Emilia and shared with parents and many educators who have visited us throughout the years, are now offered to eager students of our approach in the United States. They are the result of the process of listening and documenting.

By moving from one field of experience to another—if children have the opportunity to do that in a group context and they have a chance to listen and are listened to—they can express or modify the theories they construct and represent them through expressive languages. While the children express new concepts, they also develop them. Often a concept translated from one language into another becomes clearer and better defined. The experience of constructing a concept in a different language not only gives another version of that concept, but enriches it.

The task of those who educate is not only to make it possible for differences to be expressed, but to be nurtured through exchanges. In this way, not only the individual child learns how to learn, but the group becomes aware of constituting a teaching place where ideas are renewed.

In addition to offering support and mediation to the children, the teacher who knows how to listen, observe, document, and interpret these processes will realize her potential as a learner. Documentation can be seen as visible listening. This ensures that the group of children and each child can observe one another while learning, and that the teachers can learn how to teach by observing the learning processes of the children.

These ministories, brief visual narratives, are the result of a broad range of documentation: videos, tape recordings, written notes and, of course, photographs. They make visible, in partial and subjective ways, the learning processes and strategies used by each child and by children together. They enable reading, revisiting, and assessment—all actions that are integral parts of a knowledge-building process. They are essential for understanding cognitive processes as well as relationships among children and adults.

# Introduction to the English Translation

*Amelia Gambetti and Lella Gandini*

These brief stories are emblematic of a positive and interactive image of childhood that has nourished the high quality of the educational work of teachers in Reggio Emilia through many years, and has inspired educators in the United States, and more recently, in several other countries of the world.

Many of these stories evoke surprise and wonder, but it is not that these children are exceptionally gifted; they are competent, as are all children who feel listened to and respected. *Children are not merely to be instructed and protected.*

These are everyday stories that show sequences of action and help us perceive the complexity of a context rich in attentiveness and relationships. The latter renders possible, on a daily basis, the extraordinary *evolution* of the children's thinking.

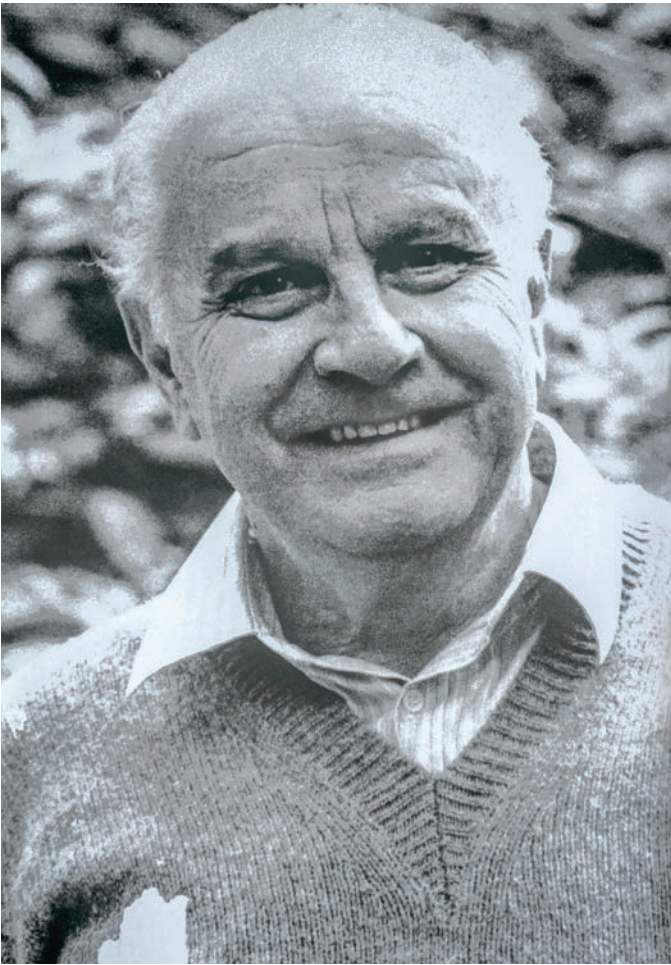
The stories show the reader how teachers observe children through the lens of a camera, a tool that trains one to capture meaningful moments. It is moments such as these that help give meaning to the life of the school and to the shared goals of educating and learning to learn.

What is more, these stories reveal the role of the adult who reflects upon and invests in the intelligence of children, offering them situations and materials that have the potential to be transformed. The teachers expect positive results, but because these encounters are rich in unanticipated twists and turns, the teachers' expectations are often surpassed by the great creative capacity of the children. One can be surprised by the intensity of the relationships and interactions and also, given the transformations, by the creation of metaphors that are the result of the transformations produced by the children's imagination.

The teachers together create an amiable and favorable environment—rich with a variety of materials—that becomes favorable because they observe and listen to the children and their specific interests. It is this intense awareness that suggests to them their strategies, choices, and provocations. In the actual process, the teachers document what happens and then interpret and give meaning to it, evaluating the situation together with the children. Teachers, in fact, weave into their own work the exploration and discovery of the children.

Among the languages that children and adults explore explicitly, one can notice aspects of learning that are interwoven. Examples might include: forms of symbolic communication that support the development of language and writing, awareness of quantity and use of numbers, and representation of space and living in a space by having a sense of belonging to it. One notices, for example, that materials are transferred by children from one area to another, creating new interactions, dialogues, and possibilities. One finds observations of aspects of nature, with attempts to explain scientific development, and very often, a clear engagement in the solution of problems.

Each story where the actions follow one another or overlap—once documented—offers possibilities for analysis and interpretative hypotheses; these are essential for developing the competencies of teachers and children in making choices either to continue that particular experience or find new strategies.



Loris Malaguzzi  
c. 1990

Time has high value. In these stories, one sees that in such an environment there is no sense of being rushed; one can explore, construct, solve a problem, or simply enjoy shared moments. Teachers leave time and take time. They have the responsibility and the right to have time to reflect and question what is happening, and also to explore with the children what shared steps ought to be taken. All this is part of an attitude of research in order to connect and construct processes of reciprocal awareness and assess the learning taking place in an authentic and respectful way.

Rendering visible through documentation the pleasure of learning and the complexity of children's actions and inventions is a way to include parents and help them to understand the power of children. This is essential not only in regard to the parents' own children, but for encouraging them to be supportive of the educational experiences of all the children in the school.

These stories told with color photographs first appeared in the Italian edition of *The Hundred Languages of Children* in 1995, one year after the death of Loris Malaguzzi. He had participated actively in the preparation of the first English edition of the book, which came out in 1993, but his wish that the book include such stories and color images was not realized. The present publication, consisting entirely of illustrated stories, thus fulfills a long-standing wish shared by many.

Loris Malaguzzi knew well several of these stories; in fact, he had chosen some of them to introduce the philosophy and practice of Reggio Emilia in the first exhibit, which was entitled *The Hundred Languages of Children: Narrative of the Possible*. One notable example is the story of Francesco and the paper tube, a favorite of Malaguzzi's. He presented it at the University of Massachusetts when the exhibit was shown there in 1988, with Lella Gandini as his interpreter.

He narrated and analyzed, image by image, this apparently simple but extraordinary story about a ten-month-old child and his research, thereby creating intense interest and attention for the thirty spellbound teachers present.

We could ask ourselves at this point: "But are these stories dated? Is there a difference between then and now in Reggio Emilia and in our educational world in the United States?" Perhaps. However, the messages they offer are timeless and fundamental for a positive culture of childhood, for understanding a strong image of an active child, and for an education that prepares children to become active participants in their learning in the twenty-first century. These stories, with their beautifully designed and intelligent message, also allow us to see and observe children and perceive an image of teachers being attentive and competent in constructing meaningful experiences. Not only this, but they also offer material to study and convey the image of a context purposely organized for observation and for research about children and with children as inquirers.