

50 years of Project Zero

First of all let me thank from the behalf of Reggio Children system that is here represented by some colleagues of mine and myself and I would like to thank you not only for this invitation and this opportunity but for these past thirty-five years together.

If there is a key word or some key words for my speech one of these is together for rights in fact in the course of the last years we researched and fought together, even if at a distance, for the rights of children, young people, teachers to have and live a school, and more in general educational places, where the quality is granted by respecting and welcoming differences that is another key word for our relationship, different intelligences, the plurality of languages, cultures, art, and beauty, like an essential part of the curriculum and an essential part of life.

Two realities, Project Zero and Reggio Children, that strongly believed and acted being convinced that teachers' professional development is a long-life learning process and that no qualification of the school and of the school culture is possible without the teachers' driving role.

But why 35 years? Some people here are good testimonies (?). When did we meet? Why? There is a sort of serendipity in life that sometimes drives the most important choices.

It was in 1982 when Howard Gardner and Ellen Winner came to Reggio Emilia for the first time, it was Lella Gandini who created this connection, I don't know if Lella is here, but she knew about us she knew about Gardner's researches and she thought it could be important to let them meet and like in life, not only we were able to meet but something special happened. And this was the very beginning of a relation which found its more advanced and mature expression in the research Making Learning Visible.

The milestone in the research path, which always characterized the reality of Reggio Emilia (the pedagogical research) but also I think many realities all over the world and I think a good paradigm for reflecting about the many meanings of the concept and the term research.

An unforgettable moment of my personal and professional path, in my cognitive map.

Thanks to this path, the starting of this research, I understood the deep meaning of the concept "international, intercultural".

The transition from one language to the other, from one culture to the other, among different meanings assigned to the same word, the feeling of disorientation, of losing every communication but, at the same time, the certainty, which become more and more fragile by opening and welcoming novelties and differences that the colleagues proposed us, the joy of discovering made together: all this is an indelible professional and human heritage. There is nothing that can link you with another experience, another person, than be surprised together, to be wonder to be alive in the moment for example when children can drive us in a new world and this happened to us.

And it's thanks to this experience - the research we developed together - that I understood, deep in its roots, the cultural and political role of the title that we gave the research itself Making Learning Visible: making visible, making things exist, valorizing the most physical and difficult existing act: learning and making learners visible - the child and the teachers. Learning as an unique process, maybe a unique piece of heart. It was a big emotion when the group of us that started this research found the title Making Learning visible, but there was a step not easy to go to professor Gardner and say: "May you accept it?". He did.

And the great adventure started or maybe it was started before since the moment that we met

I deepened the concept of multiple points of view, the concept of PLURIVERSE, that is to say the MANY POSSIBLE UNIVERSES we had to learn and to negotiate: it's difficult to negotiate from different prospective and different points of view. We learned also the difference between to negotiate to dialogue, and we learned also the different approach to the concept of time: Italian time and anglo-saxon time are different. So when we were organizing an appointment we had to define if it was the Italian time or anglo-saxon: it's a joke but it had been quite serious.

What I described is only a part of what I learned, a small part of the COGNITIVE MAP this experience donated to me, but along with this map, embedded in this map, there is another map, an EMOTIONAL MAP that come evident in this moment having you in front of me: a map of MEMORIES, of intense, exciting moments, which left an unforgettable sign in my life.

I was speaking about the first time, that is to say when Howard and Ellen came for the first time to Reggio Emilia. It's difficult to use words to express the surprise and the joy that struck us when we learned this new. You have to think about Italy at this time (1982) and about a small town that was consolidating an awareness on the quality of its educational centres.

Loris Malaguzzi was, perhaps, the most astonished among us. You have to think about Italy at that time and about a provincial town that was consolidating.

But above all you have to think about a gentleman - a researcher, pedagoga and a philosopher, that is to say Loris Malaguzzi, very well known at that time in Italy, who developed a theory, the theory of The hundred languages of children, an innovative and for some aspects revolutionary theory about learning and the role of art in the educational processes. At that time we had fax not emails and in a fax there was the new that professor Gardner, one of the most important stakeholders of Project Zero, a student of Nelson Goodman, but - above all - the author of a new theory, the theory of the seven intelligences, different but similar to the theory of the The hundred languages of children was coming; another brave, courageous theory, challenging if

front of us. When we saw them coming to visit Reggio the encounter was unforgettable.

We had then conferences, meetings, visits to the schools, everyone wanted to know each other better, to do something together: the excitement was very high.

But, as you know, just to give you the vibration of that moment, I want to remind the moment in which the cultural became more driver of the situation. My culture as you know the best agreements, the deepest intimacy are established during a meal when people share desires, truths, and secrets. And during a meal - on the hills of Reggio I remember that Loris Malaguzzi wanted to convince Ellen and Howard how good the food of the area was: parmigian cheese, salami and "erbazzone" just as a way to give them the real taste not only of the food but of that culture of that encounter and how important it was for us.

So a deep relationship started, as I said, and in my memory there are many beautiful discussions, discussions that generated tensions, but also a lot of laughter and women's complicity. Mara was pregnant of Daria at that time and all of us were behaving like aunts or uncles of Daria: we were waiting for a baby. Then a young researcher came, Ben Mardell. I remember his astonishment, his unforgettable curious eyes and ... his bow tie. Unusual and eccentric, it made him even "friendlier".

And we were waiting also for the director professor Steve Seidel, he came and we were all a little worried...but he revealed unbelievable human talents and an uncommon ability to be a very high level cultural mediator because there were many mediations and negotiations to produce and this was the beauty of our being together. Then more and more a long list of people from Reggio: Vea, Tiziana, Amelia, Mara, Giovanni, Marina, Laura, Claudia, David, Melissa, Mara, Steve, Ben... A group of learners learning about learning. It has been fantastic to learn together about learning and to share the excitement. I will never forget the moment in which watching the beautiful video and slides from the children of the schools we were including Howard Gardner when he came astonished not by the beauty of the children but by the beauty of human learning where there are the contexts that can support it. Then we continue since the publication the idea to choose the fingerprint in the cover to underline the uniqueness contemporary the need to respect it and to create dialogue based on it. Then many other opportunities, conferences in the world, in Reggio, in Europe, in China, in England together and these are, as I said, not only professional but also personal memories in fact it's how a research was started but also a research that is nowadays extremely contemporary: this was the beginning of the research that still continue, of a friendship that still continue which has crossed time and bounds but it's friendship itself the best research. That is why I want from the behalf of my colleagues and my personal to thank again this experience and to think that we have to be together again and again not only for our friendship but because we are both places of resilience, we are both places of future. And in a moment like this to have people, to have organization able to show to the world the beauty of childhood without bounds is what humanity needs.