

Joy for a Day Like Today!

Celebrating Ten Years of the Loris Malaguzzi International Center

On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Loris Malaguzzi International Center, a celebration in Reggio Emilia, Italy reflected on both the Reggio Children Company and the International Center in a style most characteristic of Reggio Emilians, with “nostalgia for the future.” On the morning of May 23, 2016, Reggio Children presented to shareholders the fiscal results for the previous year, shared descriptions of the social balance (projects and advancements of the organization), and featured assessment remarks by the President of Reggio Children, Claudia Guidici and Mayor Lucca Vecchi. Later in the evening, a second gathering continued in the auditorium of the International Center as a continuation of the annual meeting of Reggio Children. Citizens, guests, board members, educators, and study group participants convened to hear further remarks from President Claudia Guidici and Mayor Lucca Vecchi, as well as Carla Rinaldi, President of Reggio Children–Loris Malaguzzi Foundation, and Aaron Sherinian, Marketing and Communications Director of the United Nations Foundation.

As Reggio Emilia Institutet and NAREA are two of three founding networks of the Reggio Children–Loris Malaguzzi Foundation, the newest body within the system of the Reggio Emilia, excerpted here are remarks made by its President, Carla Rinaldi:

“Allow me first of all to express my joy for a day like today. Yes, certainly, for the joy of the success of Reggio Children and its balance sheet, but also for its activities and its spirit. Not only will I always feel a part of Reggio Children, but I also believe that our city is becoming increasingly aware and proud of it.

I especially want to express my joy for your presence in this initiative organized for the 10th anniversary of this International Center, as Claudia also said, highlighted by the presence of our esteemed guest, Aaron Sherinian. Ten years is an important anniversary to celebrate. Ten years can be an instant, but at the same time an eternity for those who have lived them day by day; a short-long time, but a time necessary to achieve an undertaking that ten years ago some considered to be impossible. Tonight,

we are here together sitting inside the impossible! And, we are here together to continue the beauty of the almost impossible, which is the courage that we inherited and that we want to transmit to the future. So, we are together in not only the beauty of the possible, but in the beauty and the challenge of the impossible. Impossibility is embedded in part in the dreams, the desires, and the rights that we are talking about today.

This center is our “WE.” It is the place from which the foundation, which I represent here today, takes its meaning. The foundation, which I represent, allowed by my friends and colleagues, is a young foundation, very young, established in 2011. But, it has very deep roots in the history and experience of the city of Reggio Emilia and of the infant-toddler centers and preschools, and of Reggio Children. We have both an important and demanding inheritance, but also a very long history ahead of us – a long history of future.

But why a foundation at a certain point of our experience?

Many different reflections and considerations could be made, but I would like to summarize in this way. We possess a deep desire and responsibility for taking the experience to the borders and peripheries of the world, keeping in mind that each of us is a periphery of the world. Our desire and responsibility is to go where children and youth are not seen because they are invisible and are ignored – ignored first of all as human beings, ignored even by their own cultures and societies. Many images could come to mind; they are offered to us every day. I am speaking of the children that no one asks about or fights for – children that don’t even exist for themselves. They don’t know they exist. They don’t even know that they have rights. Here, then, we draw strength from our roots. This is another value of the Reggio Approach, of this experience, of this city, and also of this foundation. In fact, a key element of the Reggio Approach is the value given and the faith and the listening that is offered to children, and to human beings in general, who acquire dignity because they are listened to, because they are made visible.

And so, with the infant-toddler centers and preschools, and with Reggio Children, we

would like to inhabit those places of periphery, which is not a geographical periphery but a cultural periphery. It is a periphery that does not recognize the rights of children, and thus of human beings, to be— not only to exist, but also to have the dignity of being seen. As I said, there are many things we could add, but it is important to say why, and with what resources in addition to why, this work should be done.

The foundation's funds are derived from economic investments made by local businesses and foundations, international investments, and also by individual citizens who want to ensure that objectives like the one's mentioned can be reached. We have some examples that we can share. At the national level, for example, the collaboration with the non-profit association ENEL Cuore for the "Fare Scuola" (Doing School) project, aims to reignite for schools, beginning with the schools of the peripheral areas of Italy, the idea that it is possible to change. Beginning with school architectures, the project seeks to modify or update also the "architectures" of doing school. Or, the project at the international level, thanks to AMREF, and in collaboration with the colleagues mentioned previously, called "Orti di Strada" ("Street Gardens"). Or, through exchanges with the colleagues who are here with us in the study groups, the possibility to continue the "Learning Teachers" project. In this project, educators who come from some of these global peripheries can have the study tour experience thanks to economic support from their colleagues. As they return to their countries of origin, accompanied by an experience of being with us, that spark becomes truly a tree with deep roots.

So, the ultimate objective of the foundation is the one common to all – to give meaning to this Center, to improve the lives of children and youth and their families, and of entire societies, but also to seek collaboration with states, governments, foundations, communities, and humanitarian organizations like UNICEF, Save the Children, the United Nations, and other organizations of this type, to rediscover value and quality so that we can rediscover the value and the quality of childhood.

Because whereas we talk about the rights of children, not much is said about the rights of the society to have childhood, because a society without childhood is a society, as Claudia said, that does not have a future.

What strategies will we use and have we already begun to use to do all this, in the projects mentioned and others that I will not list here? It starts with a form of solidarity, which we have interpreted as research. Our foundation aims to be one that creates solidarity through research. What research? That which, like we learned with the infant-toddler centers and preschools, and have practiced, the real research, which involves doubts and questions, the kind that requires the partners to share equality and dialogue. Not solidarity only as benevolence, not just providing prefabricated kits – “I’ll teach you how to do it” – that are the same for all, but research viewed as reciprocity, that recognizes the knowledge of the others, whoever and wherever they may be, that recognizes equal dignity.

This is the value that we would like to offer, along with our natural partners and our city, to all the organizations – national and international – that want to do something, I repeat, “not just anything,” but a school, a place of childhood, an experience, that not only recognizes the rights of childhood, but – I repeat – rights require the responsibility of each society to have childhood. Childhood is not just the sum of the children. It’s something more. It is, as we have seen in the history of this experience and in the first teachings of Loris Malaguzzi, a political and cultural choice that each city, each community, each country, has and must have the sense of duty and the courage to make, each assuming their own responsibility. This is why today, being here together is for all of us, for the foundation that I represent, a true joy, because in this joy lies the indispensable hope for the future that we all share.

Reggio Emilia Institutets founding partnership in the Reggio Children–Loris Malaguzzi Foundation with NAREA in USA and Red Solare in Argentina is a way of giving realization to our own mission and vision, which seeks to craft “a world where all children are honored and respected for their potential, capabilities, and humanity.” By not just holding a vision, but acting on it through collaboration, participation, and fiscal investing, that makes possible the type of projects highlighted in President Rinaldi’s remarks.

Since the first municipal preschool, Robinson, opened in 1963, the education project of Reggio Emilia has never stopped transforming itself. The full political investment of six decades has left innumerable traces not only in Reggio Emilia, but also throughout the

global community. From the Foundation's eventual establishment in September 2011 to the present, important initiatives, projects, and investments have been made in the peripheral communities of President Rinaldi's remarks. Certainly the distinct histories of Italy, Sweden and the United States make political comparisons difficult, but few would argue that political will for the wellbeing and citizental rights of very young children and youth remains one of the most significant features of Reggio Emilia's legacy. Reggio Emilia Institutet has learned, and continues to learn, through participation and exchange with Reggio Emilia and colleagues around the world that the opportunities and responsibilities of our time are wisely carried out when there is commitment to a common good. In this way, the collective voice of all those who share a renewed global democratic mission for children, families, and educator is amplified.

Reggio Emilia Institutet as well as Argentina RedSolare can be voices for change, and a mutual and shared voice for what is possible when "going beyond" replaces "staying within." Advocacy for the democratic rights of all children can be the mutual purpose that propels us forward. We welcome the participation of all.

Carla Rinaldi, President, Fondazione Reggio Children–Centro Loris Malaguzzi

Harold Gothson, Director Emeritus, Reggio Emilia Institutet

Margie Cooper, Standing Chair, North American Reggio Emilia Alliance