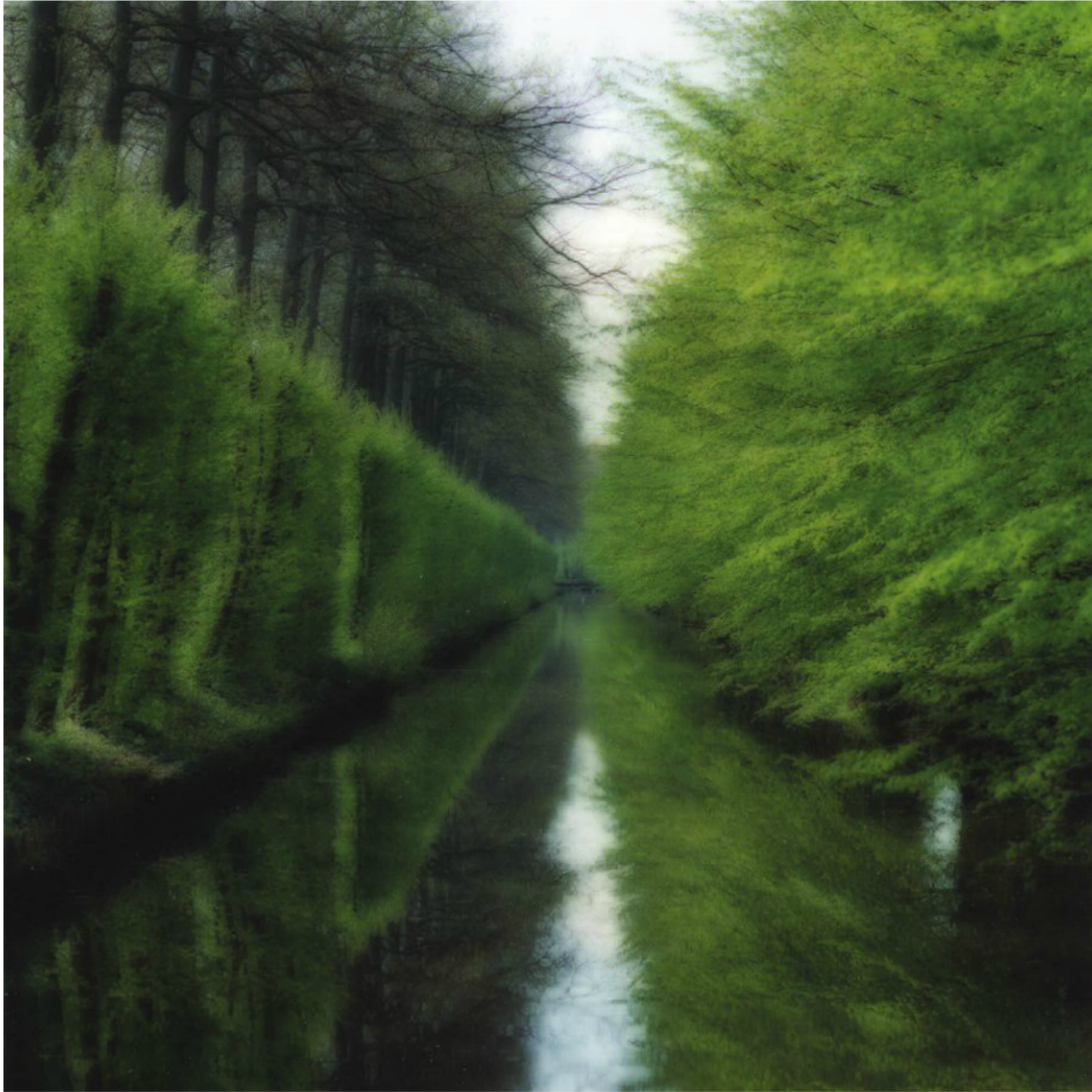


Chicago Life

MAGAZINE



30th Anniversary Issue

Annual Philanthropy Guide

Allen R. Sanderson looks at the Economics of Religion

Pamela Dittmer McKuen writes on What Your Sofa Says About You

Chicago's Non-profit Education Opportunities

Strokes and Rehab

HOLIDAY 2014

Creating an Extraordinary Education

Loris Malaguzzi was born in 1920 in the Reggio Emilia province of northern Italy. He studied pedagogy at the University of Urbino, and psychology at the Italian National Research Center in Rome. After the war, in 1946, while teaching elementary school, Malaguzzi began an intensive educational pursuit, and worked in parallel with eight different village nursery schools. By the 1980s, Malaguzzi's research and work have developed into a unique educational practice, entitled the "Reggio Emilia Approach." Malaguzzi rejected the traditional way of teaching children using slow and unexciting step-by-step methods, and his alternative was to let the children examine and solve complex problems on their own. His studies in psychology led him to the understanding that teaching children included learning from children. Malaguzzi believed that children were capable of extraordinary things. He explained to the German journalist Wolfgang Aichtner, "We must credit the child with enormous potential and the children must feel that trust. The teacher must give up all his preconceived notions and accept the child as a co-creator... (this means) a willingness to question all your own abilities, your knowledge, to become humble. Only then will you be able to listen to the child, to set off on a common search, to educate each other together." (The Independent, April 1, 1994)

Malaguzzi was charismatic, promoting his innovative approach throughout Europe and the United States. He participated in conferences and seminars, and conducted joint research projects with universities and foundations worldwide. Thousands of educators from the U.S. have visited and observed how Reggio Emilia schools encourage children to build knowledge based on personal experience, vision and creativity. Malaguzzi won prestigious prizes and in 1993 he came to Chicago in order to accept the Kohl International Education Award.

In his acceptance speech Malaguzzi expressed, "We think of a school for young children as an integral living organism, as a place of shared lives and relationships among many adults and very many children." (www.dkef.org)

In the spirit of Malaguzzi and progressive education, Chicago educator Kate Cicchelli and visionary Cameron Smith co-founded the Bennett Day School, an independent, Reggio Emilia inspired, pre-pre-K-8th grade school located on Fulton Street just east of Halsted. The new school opened in late August and the bright space turned busy with the love of learning and an abundance of drive. Colin Reynolds, the lead Senior Kindergarten (SK) teacher and TinkerLab Curator expressed how his class had been building a community from the first day of school. After outdoor play, the SK and JK (Junior Kindergarten) classes have been gathering together for a read aloud story. "This is a great chance to build literacy skills like comprehension, vocabulary development, and making connections," said Reynolds.

In early October, Reynolds and his SK class focused on a pond project. After reading, watching videos, singing songs, and building a paper pond out of materials at hand, the class took their

knowledge into the real world and embarked on a day trip to the ponds at Lincoln Park. "It was a thrilling experience for the children to make connections between what they had learned in the classroom and what they experienced," said Reynolds. In preparation for the trip, the class previewed their travel route using "Google Maps" and imagined they were traveling the streets in "Google's Street View." Reynolds added, "We also used the satellite option



to view the shapes of the pond and plot out a walking plan for our day. This exercise helped the children visualize our trip but provoked them to develop an understanding of cardinal directions (N, S, E, W) and anticipate various aspects, like seeing the island in South pond or walking on the docks at both ponds." On the day of the trip the children observed the ponds, took notes, pictures, and videos, and in the days that followed they continued to reflect on their experiences and used their documentation and memories to move ahead with the next phase of their project, building a living pond in the classroom.

Co-founder Cicchelli who is also the Principal of the school expresses, "...Our school, our community, our city—these are the bedrock of who we are, how we learn and what we teach. I was born and raised in Chicago; as a product of and career professional in progressive, independent education I look forward to building that community together."

Cameron Smith, Co-Founder and CEO of the Bennett Day School, who is also a father of a JK student, has been witnessing the transformation and growth of the students and teachers while his dream of starting a school is becoming a success. As the children explore new ideas and places at the school's TinkerLab and outdoor green space, and in the city as a classroom with family and friends, Smith believes that "in pursuing their natural love of learning, Bennett Day School students will change the world. That is what education is meant to accomplish." □