

Celebrating Camillo Grazzini and Fifty Years of the AMI Advanced Course in Bergamo

This course year (2010-2011), the Fondazione Centro Internazionale Studi Montessoriani (FICSM), Bergamo, Italy is training its fiftieth class of elementary students. So many years of “initiating” students into the rich world of the elementary child is a wonderful accomplishment, and in those fifty years students have come from over forty different countries.



Founded by Mario M. Montessori in 1961, “Bergamo” was the first AMI centre to hold a course specifically to train Montessori teachers to work with elementary school children. During the early years, Mario Montessori lectured extensively for the Bergamo Course and the knowledge and experience developed over the years constituted a basis for all advanced training courses. Camillo Grazzini helped build the centre to take the place it occupies in today’s Montessori landscape. Mrs Eleonara Honegger, who was to be the

first Director of Training of Bergamo, upon accepting that responsibility made it an explicit condition that Camillo join her to lead the centre. Working side by side with Mrs Honegger for 24 years, and taking his inspiration from Mario Montessori, his great teacher and mentor, Camillo became a leading Montessori authority. This commemorative issue, therefore, is dedicated to Camillo as the constant factor of Bergamo. His work truly connects the centre’s past to the present, his inspiration and influence still so very present in what sums up the vibrancy of Bergamo. It is therefore appropriate that



when the Montessori community celebrates Bergamo’s golden jubilee, it does so in paying tribute to Camillo.

Renilde Montessori, with great fondness, described Camillo as ‘without a doubt Mario Montessori’s prime pedagogical legatee.’ The selection of articles in this issue all bear witness to Camillo’s pedagogical brilliance, his vast knowledge, his meticulousness, his careful and thoroughly researched writing.

And for those who know Camillo's work, this issue revisits his special fields such as Cosmic Education, the Adolescent and Mathematics. Some of the articles were co-authored with Baiba Krumins Grazzini, and we're happy to include two later articles written by Baiba that serve either as an extension of an article previously done by Camillo, or to elucidate one of the "great stories" as it is told at FCISM.

This issue also includes an interview, the result of two long discussions between David Kahn and Camillo Grazzini in 2003 and 2004, published in the *NAMTA Journal* 2004 winter issue. We are grateful to David for his permission to reproduce the interview here. You may wish to either read it as an introduction to Camillo's work or leave it as a "treat" which will help you see how and where the building blocks of his Montessori life fit.

To continue from Renilde Montessori's recollections of the relationship between her father and Camillo, she recalled their unique bond which sprang 'from mutual respect, profound affection, and fruitful intellectual dialogue. One of the most appealing aspects of their companionship was its mischievous complicity, reminiscent of two young lads in the second stage of development, deadpanning the sometimes aggravated adults around them. Camillo filled to a great extent the immeasurable void that the death of Maria Montessori left in the life of her son, by becoming in turn a son to him. They worked together with analogous understanding, inspiring each other's thoughts in the mode familiar to Mario Montessori since the time he joined his mother in her magnificent endeavours.

Camillo most certainly contributed in great measure to the development of elementary materials, which Mario Montessori and he designed together.



Mario Montessori



Camillo Grazzini

Incidentally, most of these have not yet been manufactured, and it is a great pity.

Camillo carried forth the work of Mario Montessori, in his own inimitable fashion. His dedication verged on the obsessive. He was unstinting in his giving of wisdom and knowledge and asked remarkably little, if anything, in return—as a good Montessorian should. He was totally unassuming

about the mindbogglingly vast fund of knowledge he had amassed over the years—also a trait of the utopian Montessorian. [...] One thing is certain. The integrity of his understanding of Montessori principles and practice, their scope and their promise, was of a calibre only possible for a direct descendent of those who formulated them.'

Renilde Montessori's sentiments resonate in the stories of former students whose lives were deeply affected by their time in Italy, at FCISM. Some precious memories were shared recently in the October AMI/EAA Newsletter—a read we can wholeheartedly recommend. We thank AMI/EAA and the authors for their permission to quote from some contributions reliving that special time.

Larry and Pat Schaefer, 1970 "students," remember that 'the two trainers—Eleonora Honneger and Camillo Grazzini—were talented, skilled, gifted and very experienced Montessorians. Camillo Grazzini was dynamic, fiercely Italian, protective of the centre and proud of the place where the Renaissance began. [Camillo's lectures] reflected his deep interest in research and scholarship. [His] respect and love for our children touched us deeply and today we consider this part of him exceptional.'

Deborah Thompson recalls that when she started her course in 1971, she was 'not prepared for the opening lecture. It was early evening and Italian frescoes graced the lecture room in Città Alta. Mr Grazzini gave a vision of our whole course of Montessori studies. That evening we were inspired with our first thoughts of Cosmic Education, The Four Planes of Development, Causality and Finality, and Human Tendencies. [...] That first evening I was captured by a vision which continues to guide me today. For many of us the seeds of our Montessori work were planted under Mr Grazzini's nurturing, but more often challenging, guidance.

Maureen Peifer (1974-1975) can still visualize Camillo's care and precision with each movement as he slid the constructive triangles around the table, imbuing the students with a reverence for geometry and the legacy of the Mesopotamians, Greeks, and Dr Montessori. She remembers 'tension levels rising in the practice room as finals approached' and beautiful Bergamo, to which she said goodbye by singing the students' own version of "Maria" from *West Side Story* in the piazza after the ceremony, 'Maria, I just took a course on Maria, and suddenly that name will never be the same to meeeeeeee.'

To sum up: 'What a year. What a gift in my life. What a legacy to share and pass on.'

Donna Bryant Goertz (1981-1982) found her course to be a transformational experience in the way she thought about Montessori, humanity and the earth. 'The "Kodak" moment of Mr Grazzini illustrating the preposition "into" for us by stepping up onto a chair, making like a bird, and then stepping down "into" the nest became a favourite snapshot for many of us who often wished we'd had a hidden camera to record it. When Grazzini designed a new presentation for the theorem of Pythagoras, what a thrill it was for us to provide him with a captivated audience! We loved his brilliance.'

And Kathryn Sleeper, a more recent graduate of Bergamo who studied with Baiba Kruminas Grazzini, recalls 'I had the good fortune to meet Mr Camillo Grazzini in 2000 when I visited a friend who was taking the course. What impressed me most about him was his interaction with my son, then twelve. It was immediately apparent how much he respected, and cared about, children. And, of course, his contributions to the course, materials, and Montessori movement are legendary'.

Camillo left a treasure—please savour his words with delight and inspiration.