

## THE LEARNER



“ we believe that the child is very intelligent, that the child is strong and beautiful and has very ambitious desires and requests. This is the image of the child that we need to hold.”

(MALAGUZZI, P5. 1994B).

Our actions reflect our values. How we express our value of the child is at the heart of all we do in school:

- The way we design our schools, schedules, classrooms and playgrounds.
- The decisions we make for the children and the decisions we ask them to make.
- The way we talk to and about children, how we listen to children and even how we observe children reflects our values and thoughts towards them.

### Reasoning and Research

One way to express these values is the concept of the image of the child. This concept was born out of the philosophy of the Reggio Emilia schools in Northern Italy. Their founder Loris Malaguzzi had a vision to create schools that honoured the child, childhood and their place in society. Malaguzzi described the child as “rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent, and most of all connected to adults and other children” (Malaguzzi, p10, 1994a). At ISU we hold a similar perspective to Malaguzzi and design our school based on these values. However, as Malaguzzi (1994a) points out, our view of the child is incomplete without the perspective of families. The partnerships within the relationships between the child, the teachers and families is crucial to a child’s success in school. Developing a shared image of the child is something that we continue to build and create as an entire learning community, composed of the child, their family, their teachers and all the adults that work in the school. Part of the process of developing that image is to be intentionally reflective regarding our actions and decisions and ensuring that beliefs about the child are mirrored by our actions.

Malaguzzi points out that it is our internal image of the child that determines how we act with the child and it is very difficult to act contrary to this image. For example:

- How do we view a child's mark making on a piece of paper, do we inquire into their creation and frame their discovery on the wall or do we make a superficial remark about its beauty?
- How do we view their explorations, passions and discoveries, do we support and build on their inquiries or regard them as naive and insignificant?
- What value do we place on their curiosities and questions, do we write them down and help them explore them or dismiss them as childish or even amusing?
- When we observe or listen to a child, do we pay them our full attention or are we distracted and disengaged?
- Do we "save" our children from their responsibilities by calling the school about their lost assignment or do we show that we have confidence in our children to take responsibility and meet with their teacher about their assignment?
- When our children have a choice of activities, electives or college courses to choose from, do we trust and support their decisions or guide them towards our preferences?

Our actions, words and the value we place on the child's learning and products of learning tells the child how we value and view them. It is our intention that we develop a shared image of the learner, that we can act on together in partnership with families.

### Partnership

We want to partner with families and we value your input and feedback. If you have ideas or questions we would love to talk with you in person to discuss this. You may find it helpful to consider the following reflective questions:

- What is my image of my child?
- How do my actions express how I view my child?
- How might I want to change my image of the child?

