

In Memory of Professor Filippo Spagnolo, A Mentor for Many Young Scholars

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I never wanted to be the one to bring this sad news, but our dear friend, Dr. Filippo Spagnolo, Associate Professor of Mathematics Education at the University of Palermo, Italy, passed away suddenly on March 2, 2011, after a short hospitalization.

It is really hard for me to condense my memories of him and his works into just a few words. I lost a great mentor, a “playfellow” for my research in Mathematics Education, and a faithful friend.

Professor Filippo Spagnolo was a very warm and friendly person with a cheerful personality, a curious researcher and a tireless worker.

I met him, for the first time, ten years ago when I started my doctorate. I learned so much from his joy of life and his interest in research! He was not only my PhD thesis supervisor, but, until his death, an important human guide for my life.

In the following, I shall try to summarize (with the help of the document written by Bartolini Bussi for ICMI, 2011) some main points of his long and fruitful career as researcher in the Didactic of Mathematics. The list of his papers and books can be downloaded from his homepage <http://dipmat.math.unipa.it/~grim/homefil.htm>.

He received his doctorate in 1995 with Guy Brousseau, defending a thesis on “*Les Obstacles épistemologiques: Le Postulat d'Eudoxe-Archimede*.” He entered the research field in 1976 with Brousseau, drawing on Bachelard’s theoretical construct and testing a new research hypothesis on how the classical notion of infinity could be an obstacle for the development of non-standard analysis.

In the following years he worked with Régis Gras and other important researchers in the statistical implicative analysis. The book “*Statistical Implicative Analysis: theory and applications*,” a significant piece published by Springer in 2008, which he wrote together with R. Gras, E. Suzuki and F. Guillet, is the outcome of this fruitful collaboration. This book and the methodology discussed on it represents for the community of Mathematics Educators an interestingly powerful point of convergence between mathematicians, statisticians, psychologists, specialists in pedagogy and in data mining.

Another book edited by Professor Filippo Spagnolo and myself was the “*European and Chinese Cognitive Styles and Their Impact on Teaching Mathematics*,” published by Springer in 2010 with a preface by Professor Shuhua An, from California State University at Long Beach.

His studies on Chinese mathematics education started in 1986 and continued for more than twenty years. This book was the last project published by Professor Filippo Spagnolo and myself.

The web page http://math.unipa.it/~grim/East_West.htm details some of his papers written on this subject and some of the international projects in which we was involved. One of the last and most significant projects to which he dedicated his attention was the ambitious international project

“*Classroom Teaching for All Students Research Working Group*,” conducted in collaboration with researchers from China (Beijing Normal University, Tianjing Normal University, Nanjing Normal University, East China Normal University, Hang Zhou Normal University), from the United States (California State University at Long Beach, National University in California, Louisiana University, Grand Valley State University, Montclair University, Indiana University), from Korea (Seoul National University), and from Malaysia (University of Malaysia).

According to Bartolini Bussi (2011), beside these main publications, Professor Filippo Spagnolo, published more than 150 papers in a variety of refereed research journals. Most of these are frequently quoted by many international researchers.

Since 1990, he also was Editor in Chief of the Journal “*Quaderni di Ricerca in Didattica*”, QRDM and QRDS of G.R.I.M. (http://math.unipa.it/~grim/menu_quaderni.htm) and a member of Editorial Boards of different research reviews such as the “*Journal of Mathematics Education*,” from the United States, the “*Mediterranean Journal for Research in Mathematics Education*,” from Cyprus Mathematical Society, the “*Canadian Journal of Science Mathematics and Technology Education*,” from the University of Toronto, and the “*Acta Didactica Universitatis Comenianae Mathematica*,” from the University of Slovakia.

He was also the vice-president of the C.I.E.A.E.M., “*Commission Internazionale pour l’Etude et l’Amélioration de l’Enseignement des Mathématiques*”, a commission affiliated with the organization of ICMI.

He also was the coordinator of the PhD course on “*History and Didactics of Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry*” with an international consortium including Universities from Italy (Palermo, Bologna, Catania, Pavia and Napoli), from Spain (Alicante), from Cyprus, and from Slovakia (Nitra).

Professor Filippo Spagnolo was a wonderful person, open-hearted, generous and full of energy and humor. He always helped and encouraged me and many other students at the University of Palermo. He really was a mentor for many young scholars in Mathematics Education.

Many other thoughts could be shared about him, more about the refined readings that he always discussed with many colleagues, students and friends, and more about his interests, not only scientific but also literary, musical, artistic, philosophic, and political, interests that were signs of an open mind, a curious person, free of preconceptions and foreordained patterns – thoughts and ideas that all of the people that had the fortune to work with him, unfortunately, have now lost forever.



All of those who knew him will be saddened to hear about his death; he will truly leave an empty place in our hearts and minds that no one else can fill.

But...to all of us, and especially to the young scholars in Mathematics Education...an invitation to continue in the same life and on the same road traced by him!