



North American Reggio Emilia Alliance

# International Network Meeting Report

*By Angela Ferrario, U.S. Liaison for Study Groups to Reggio Emilia and NAREA Board Member*

Along with other networks that are in dialogue with Reggio Children, NAREA received an invitation for two representatives to participate in a meeting at the International Center Loris Malaguzzi on July 6 and 7, 2006. The goals of this first International Network meeting were:

- to create a context for continuing dialogues and collaborations among the various networks and Reggio Children;
- to collect ideas and proposals for future plans and possible directions for the development of the International Center and its identity; and
- to create new strategies and opportunities to promote different kinds of initiatives and events that will support ongoing dialogues.

*In their invitation, Reggio Children stated,* "We have many dreams and goals for this important meeting but, most of all, we would like to try to together find ways, times and thoughts that could help us to continue our process of giving a strong identity to the International Center Loris Malaguzzi. Your precious collaboration along these years has helped us to give more depth to the context of our work and our thinking, in order to build a stronger capability to increase the quality of early childhood education. In fact, it has also been through our dialogues that we have learned how to listen to each other, and how to create professional development

initiatives and many other experiences at international levels. Just at this time when, in Reggio Emilia, we are facing these new possibilities of the International Center as a cultural project and a resource for all of us, we feel that your contributions to our work will provide many other essential and meaningful insights.

We are envisioning the meeting as a context for dialogues, exchanges, reflections, revisiting, sharing, hypothesis, future plans and proposals to take place. Therefore, we are thinking of leaving time and space to each of you to share reflections about your work, the connection with Reggio Emilia, especially in terms of past, present time and future perspectives, also in relation with the idea of the International Center, your desires, ideas and comments. We would like to dedicate to our encounter a great deal of the action of listening, which should help us to analyze our different contexts and what we would like to develop and why."

Beth MacDonald, NAREA Co-Chair, and I represented NAREA at this meeting. Representatives who attended from other groups and countries were:

*Argentina* - SOLARE: Maria Victoria Alfieri and Carlos Tomasini

*Australia* - REAIE (Reggio Emilia Australia Information Exchange): Jan Millikan

*Denmark* - Det Danske Reggio Emilia Netværk: Karin Eskesen

*Iceland* - Kristin Dyrfjörð

*Mexico* - SOLARE: Sausan Burshan

*Netherlands* - Stichting Pedagogiekontwikkeling voor het jonge kind 0-7: Margot Meeuwig and Tiene van der Werf

*New Zealand* - RE Provocations: Sue Stevely-Cole and Chris Cole

*Spain* - Alfredo Hoyuelos

*Sweden* - Reggio Emilia Institutet: Harold Gothson and Birgitta Kennedy

*United Kingdom* - Sightlines Initiative: Robin Duckett and Emma Pace

Carlina Rinaldi and Amelia Gambetti opened the meeting. We were joined by several representatives from the schools and the municipality of Reggio Emilia, who also participated during our two days together, including Sergio Spaggiari and Sandra Piccinini.

I would like to share some excerpts from my notes, which I hope will relay the positive tone and congenial, optimistic yet challenging atmosphere as we began our work together...

### *Carlina Rinaldi, Reggio Emilia*

A new starting point.

A network, but a new kind of network.

If you can share the responsibility of this international center together with us.

A new beautiful starting point.

The center as continuity to our common past but also as a place of innovation and research.

The vision of Loris Malaguzzi was of a harbor with ships coming and going.

What does it mean - international?

- Because there are different nations around the table?
- Simply to be together to put together our differences?
- To dialogue together as we did in the past?

What does it mean to think of ourselves as international?

- To travel from one country to another or to be able to think of ourselves and the presence of others, even if they are not physically with us?

Is our focus on children - girls and boys, or human beings?

Which kind of research and interaction with international politics do we want to develop?

What does it really mean to be a place of education - to be a network of educators?

Which kind of values, responsibilities and ethics do we want to share for our own identity, for our network?

What can we ask of each other?

A lot of energy, desires, problems - countries so close but so different.

A place that Reggio Emilia offers to the world.

Reggio Emilia is a place. The challenge of local and global - reflecting about international and global.

We have in front of us our past and also our future to try to offer to each other.

What does it mean to be a real network?

### *Harold Gothson, Sweden*

A long longing for this meeting.

Talking about your own city in a global world.

Another way of thinking about time and space.

### *Robyn Duckett, UK*

How to move our dynamics.

Moving to a shared energy.

### *Jan Millikan, Australia*

Reggio has provided a mirror.

This network offers another mirror to look at our interpretations; to provide a different sort of dialogue; to join with others, with whom we haven't had the privilege of interacting.

### *Tiziana Filippini, Reggio Emilia*

How important to meet other points of view.

To have you all together - not only the possibility of an exchange but to be put together in a dialogue, in which the dialogue can be shared back and forth.

Between you and us and among ourselves.

### *Sergio Spaggiari, Reggio Emilia*

This network is based on a thought of a man - without Internet - who didn't have a chance to travel around the world - who was not bilingual. Loris Malaguzzi was a person who didn't live in a global world but could be really international even just living

here in Reggio Emilia.

If we behave in this way, we will have a global audience to follow us. The key is to create experiences of high quality and very interesting...shouldn't only be useful to members of the network but we should also be able to catch others who do not know our experience.

During the meeting, each network had 30 minutes to present. We were asked to describe the context, history and experiences of our network as the starting point, from which to elaborate our ideas and proposals for future collaborations with the International Center.

After describing NAREA's history and mission, Beth and I highlighted some of the current ongoing work of NAREA, in order to give the group a sense of where the organization is headed.

- 1 We explained that as a new organization, NAREA must remain focused on constructing an identity that builds internal organizational strength. Our committees are now functioning well but the workload is increasing to a level, beyond which our group of volunteer board members cannot sustain long-term. With our membership growing, we will soon need to take the step to become our own non-profit organization with additional paid staff beyond our current part-time administrative coordinator.
- 2 We talked about the importance of developing regional visibility by recruiting additional membership coordinators and mentoring those in this role.
- 3 We mentioned that another component of our work is to find ways to better reach and support isolated educational settings, economically-challenged systems and public systems where there is interest in learning about Reggio-inspired practices within these contexts.
- 4 We shared that we are also committed to trying to find a way to keep "The Hundred Languages of Children" exhibit in North America and that an ad-hoc committee of NAREA board members is currently exploring the possibility to seek funding for this purpose, in order to help ease the financial impact on sponsoring educational programs and groups.

We then shared the ideas, suggestions and proposals for collaboration with the International Center that we

had gathered from NAREA board members.

- 1 The continuation of study groups that have a particular focus. We expressed our interest in working with the International Center to further develop formats for study groups that involve clear expectations regarding prior preparation, participation during the study group, and subsequent reflection and action. This included possible groups for administrators, *atelieristi*, students and professors, architects and designers of space, and regional groups that have a history of working together.
- 2 Initiatives, which are connected to ongoing professional development for educators and those in other disciplines, in order to move forward in making better childhoods possible for all children. The development of many different kinds of opportunities for educator development - more hands-on, varying in length and maybe offered in the style of their own internal professional development system.
- 3 Collaboration between the International Center and each of the networks to develop exhibits from each of their countries that show how public and private schools have applied Reggio-inspired concepts. If a common framework for these exhibits were developed, it could help various national groups to learn from each other and to recognize unique aspects of different cultures and communities that result in differences...and, if these exhibits were available as virtual documents and/or as real exhibits at the Center itself, they could be studied in different ways and by many more people than just those who visit Reggio Emilia.
- 4 Interest in expanding the influence of Reggio-inspired concepts from 0-18 years.
- 5 A particular topic of interest is to learn more about *formazione*, the process of teacher professional development that takes place in the Reggio Emilia schools.

We closed our presentation by posing the following questions for the group to consider:

- How will the further development of the International Center as a professional development vehicle impact the work of NAREA?
- How do we construct an identity for NAREA that balances partnerships and, at the same time, builds internal strength?
- How is it possible to develop more collaborative planning and scheduling with Reggio and,

perhaps, other networks that offer more predictability and advance notice?

- In addition to using a focus group style, how about creating an international planning committee to continuously develop plans for the International Center?

Following the 11 presentations, the group from the Reggio schools and municipality met to analyze what they had heard and the representatives from the 11 countries/networks met to do the same. In her report from the Reggio group, Amelia Gambetti stated that "we were extremely positively impressed by your presentations, which showed a lot of generosity and competency and commitment of your work, which definitely came through." She emphasized the need for more time to "read between the lines" of the presentations to understand the expectations.

At the close of the meeting, Amelia announced plans for the near future.

**Study Groups:** to analyze the history and programs of past study groups, in order to better understand the quality of what is offered and to respond to the variety of requests; to create new formats and offer study groups with specific topics connected to different areas.

**International Internship Program:** to increase the number of participants that will be selected yearly for internships in the Reggio schools.

**Masters Course:** announcement of the first International Masters Course, in collaboration with the local University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, to be held in 2007.

**Exhibitions:** a plan for the organization of different traveling exhibits and the birth of new exhibits to increase the visibility of the work.

**Reggio Children Re-Capitalization:** Reggio Children will formally begin to manage the International Center Loris Malaguzzi; re-capitalization is the process that Reggio Children is going through, in order to raise the company capital necessary to run the Center; initially, current shareholders can buy new

shares; then, beginning in December, if there is still capital left for new shareholders, Reggio Children will open up to new members, also at the international level.

After the meeting, a declaration of intent was sent to the mayor and politicians of Reggio Emilia on behalf of the entire group, which stated:

*"The representatives of the Network "Reggio Children in the World," gathered together during the seminar "In DIALOGUE," organized by Reggio Children, the Istituzione Scuole e Nidi d'infanzia - Municipality of Reggio Emilia and the International Association "Friends of Reggio Children," in order to present the cultural identity of the International Centre Loris Malaguzzi and define the quality of the activities and initiatives in an international perspective,*

**INTEND**

*To propose to the attention of the administrators, politicians, teachers, parents and citizens the central role that the quality of the experience of the Reggio Emilia municipal infant-toddler centres and preschools has inside the international educational, cultural and political discussion;*

**GIVE**

*A great value and meaning to the realization of the International Centre Loris Malaguzzi and they confirm their availability to sustain it in its initiatives, in the planning and in the costs, acknowledging the place as an essential tool, in order to support, develop and qualify the researches and the educational policies at world level. In particular, the Centre appears as an extraordinary opportunity offered not only to the town of Reggio Emilia, but also to many cities and nations of the world, in order to maintain and develop an international dialogue around values that today, much as yesterday, are common to the participants in the Network and to their organizations.*

It was also agreed that a meeting of the International Network would be held each year in a different country and, eventually, in connection with a professional development initiative.

**COMING THIS FALL TO MEMBERS AREA OF NAREA WEBSITE!!**

***Spanish translations of selected articles from Innovations in Early Education:  
The International Reggio Exchange and new experience from Cyert Center for Early  
Education in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania!***