



North American Reggio Emilia Alliance

THE ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES OF THE REGGIO CHILDREN INTERNATIONAL NETWORK

By Beth MacDonald

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Having attended two Reggio Children International Network meetings - one in Reggio Emilia, Italy and the other in Stockholm, Sweden - I have many reflections from the encounters with representatives from ten countries and our colleagues in Reggio.

There are many layers that represent the significance of these meetings:

- the universal layer - a sense of vision
- the physical layer - a sense of place
- the emotional layer - a sense of communication and connection

Our vision for the future is that educators, families and policy makers who are inspired by the Reggio Emilia philosophy will be united in a mission to enrich and deepen the quality of life for children in all countries.

The physical layer is a meeting place in Reggio Emilia - the International Center Loris Malaguzzi - that encompasses the vision, spirit and personality of the founder of the municipal schools, Loris Malaguzzi. His genius and leadership has directed us to this place and built it "brick by brick." Loris spoke of a

meeting place - a safe harbor, a great forest:

"All of this is a great forest. Inside the forest is the child. The forest is beautiful, fascinating, green and full of hopes; there are no paths. Although it isn't easy, we have to make our own paths, as teachers and children and families, in the forest. Sometimes we find ourselves together within the forest, sometimes we may get lost from each other, sometimes we'll greet each other from far away across the forest; but it's living together in this forest that is important. And this living together is not easy." (Malaguzzi, 1994)

The meeting place is here now for all of us and we can, in collaboration, find each other in the forest. The invitation has been extended to come together from all countries to think, create, project and offer provocations for change. The International Center Loris Malaguzzi can literally be a meeting place for all cultures and contexts and, in addition, a symbol to all educators that change and innovation are possible.

Communicating and connecting with each other is the third layer of the Reggio Children International Network, and the most difficult and rewarding as we take the first steps on our path to the future. The

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meeting in Stockholm was crucial to our development as a network. We explored together how we were going to communicate, and define our roles and our relationship to Reggio Children and the International Center. Of course, the goal of communicating and connecting is similar to Loris Malaguzzi's description of the "forest" - starting out together, being lost and the surprise of finding each other again and again on common ground.

The Reggio Children International Network has very ambitious plans for our meeting in June 2008 at the International Center Loris Malaguzzi in Reggio Emilia:

- development of objectives, goals, intentions, actions, hypotheses and projections for our future work together;
- communication and connections through the International Network's archives at the International Center in Reggio;
- promotion of the International Masters Program in collaboration with the University of Modena and Reggio;
- shared professional development initiatives and study tours;
- website development to include the work of the Reggio Children International Network;
- visits to network countries to experience different contexts and cultures to deepen our work together; and

- support for an effort to create a presence of the various schools, centers and contexts throughout the world that are inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach through a "Tiles Project" at the International Center.

When I reflect on what this International Network can mean for all of us, I think of the quote from Loris Malaguzzi, and his unique sense of communication and connection:

"Our goal is to create an amiable school - that is, a school that is active, inventive, livable, documentable and communicative. Our aim is to make a school that is a place of research, learning, revisiting, reconsideration, and reflection." (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1993)

If we replace the word "school" in this quote and insert the words "International Center," I think we can see the future of the International Center and the endless possibilities of the Reggio Children International Network.

REFERENCES

- Edwards, C., Gandini, L. and Forman, G., Eds. 1993. *The Hundred Languages of Children: The Reggio Emilia Approach to Early Childhood Education*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corp.
- Malaguzzi, L. 1994. *Your image of the child: Where teaching begins*. Child Care Information Exchange, 96.

**The Fourth NAREA Summer Conference
Dialogues for Quality in Education:
The School as a Place of Research**

In collaboration with Reggio Children & Boulder Journey School

*In connection with the opening of "The Wonder of Learning - The Hundred Languages of Children"
A New Exhibit from Reggio Emilia, Italy - North American Version*

June 28-30: The Values of the Reggio Emilia Approach

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- Presentations by North American educators
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- Tour of Boulder Journey School
- Poster sessions representing NAREA members' contexts
- Participant exchange & dialogue

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