



## Reflections from New NAREEA Board Members, Former and New NAREEA Board Co-Chairs

*In 2010, the NAREEA Board welcomed three new members: Jennifer Azzariti, Brenda Fyfe and Carol Anne Wien. In this NAREEA Column, each new board member shares the history and nature of her work in early childhood as well as her goals for NAREEA and plans for contributing to this organization. As of 2010, the NAREEA board also has a new co-chair, Barbara Acton. In this NAREEA Column, Barbara will reflect on what she believes the future opportunities are for NAREEA and what she envisions her work to be on behalf of NAREEA. The outgoing co-chair, Jennifer Strange, will elaborate on the evolution of the organization over the four years she was co-chair.*

### *Jennifer Azzariti*

In 1991, I began my career in early childhood as the studio teacher at The Model Early Learning Center (MELC) at the Capital Children's Museum in Washington, D.C. The MELC was a prominent reference point for hundreds of educators during the years of its existence, 1989-1997, and continues to be viewed as an important part of the history of the Reggio approach in the United States. I carry with me the life-changing experience of the MELC as I work with other schools in dialogue with Reggio. Currently, I am involved in ongoing collaborations with two public schools and two private schools in Washington, D.C. as well as lecturing and consulting nationally with early childhood programs inspired by the Reggio approach.

I believe my training in the visual arts will add an additional perspective to the work of NAREEA. In my collaborations with schools, I find that many educators do not have experience working with materials and media. I would like to see NAREEA help support the development of knowledge and experience with materials. In my own community, there are many

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schools inspired by the Reggio approach that have made serious commitments to study and research. Yet these schools don't communicate or even have a way of knowing about each other. NAREEA can help support collaboration among schools, both public and private, in communities. I would like to see NAREEA move beyond its role as a provider of necessary information about the Reggio approach and become a force in the educational reform movement in the United States.

### **Brenda Fyfe**

I was fortunate to stumble upon the Reggio approach to early learning in the late 1980s when I was teaching for Webster University in Iceland. It's a long story but I learned that educators in many Scandinavian countries had been studying the schools of Reggio Emilia since the early 1980s. When I visited a preschool in Reykjavik that had been inspired by the work in Reggio Emilia, I knew I had to learn more. This started a journey that has involved many visits to Reggio Emilia (starting in 1990); co-hosting "The Hundred Languages of Children" exhibit in St. Louis in 1991 and again in 2001; working extensively with public and private

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schools in St. Louis that have become nationally known for their high quality interpretations of Reggio principles and practices; working side-by-side with Carla Rinaldi at Webster University when she was a Visiting International Professor for the fall semester of 2001; and, most recently, establishing a partnership between Reggio Children, the Municipal Preschools and Infant-Toddler Centers of Reggio Emilia, the University of Modena and Reggio in Italy, Webster University and Maplewood Richmond Heights School District in St. Louis. Through this

partnership, Webster University and the University of Modena and Reggio will offer a joint graduate program designed to prepare educators for the role of *pedagogista*.

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### **Carol Anne Wien**

I am a Professor of Education at York University in Toronto, Canada. I am also the the editor of *Emergent Curriculum in the Primary Classroom: Interpreting the Reggio Emilia Approach in Schools*, and author of *Negotiating Standards in the Primary Classroom and Developmentally Appropriate Practice in "Real Life."* I have authored half a dozen articles on Reggio-inspired practice in NAEYC's journal *Young Children*, and authored with Karyn Callaghan, "Fragile Moments': Artists Co-Constructing Creative Experience with Children, Parents and Early Childhood Educators" in *Innovations in Early Education: The International Reggio Exchange*. I also serve on the *Innovations* editorial board. The article, "Learning to Document in Reggio-Inspired Education" will appear in the spring issue of *Early Childhood Research and Practice*.

Canada is a vast landscape with but 33 million people. We are so small, sitting next to the United States of America with ten times our population. Canadians cross the border constantly and feel strong affinity for Americans. Yet we recognize we are a little different in our values and their expression. I have always loved the creative risk-taking of Americans –

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the sense that if you want to design something or make something happen, you go right ahead and try. I value enormously the invitation to join the NAREA board. I see it as an opportunity to bring a Canadian perspective to the board (alongside Pat Tarr from Calgary), and through my participation, to give access to other Canadian voices to be part of a larger story.

In our Reggio-inspired community, there is a powerful groundswell of commitment to bring children and families into brighter view at policy levels and to consider children important, not merely for their education and future as workers but in themselves and for the joy they bring to life. I have always found the community of people interested in Reggio Emilia and in what we might recreate here in North America, a richly stimulating and creative community. It is a community where feeling as well as thinking, the aesthetic as well as the technical, and imagination as well as the rational are given their place. I feel at home in this fuller version of humanity, for perhaps it is a place where I might have something to contribute. As a woman of letters, a lover of the arts, what might I offer NAREA in an age of technology? I am humbled to admit I have no clear goal yet. My intentions are to listen, to offer Canadian voices to the conversation, to write in ways that support our collaboration together across differences, to engage in the border crossing of imagining possibilities.

#### *Jennifer Strange*

My term as NAREA Board Co-Chair has recently come to an end. During these four years, I have had the privilege of working with many outstanding colleagues as we continued striving to develop an organization of support and advocacy for children,

families and educators. Certainly, I am most appreciative of the collaboration with my two co-chairs during this time, Beth MacDonald and Margie Cooper. These four years have been filled with oftentimes challenging yet always inspiring work. Since the inception of NAREA, many of us have shared the common goal of reaching out to as many of you as possible – from the individual classroom teacher, administrator, university professor and political leader in public and private settings, in rural and urban areas who believe in this exemplary approach to learning and living.

During these four years, NAREA began to coordinate "The Wonder of Learning – The Hundred Languages of Children" exhibition project along with Reggio Children and hosting communities throughout North America, allowing us to offer the highest quality of professional development through related initiatives with the participation of educators from Reggio Emilia, and from the United States and Canada. We are meeting so many of you at the conferences and workshops associated with this exhibition. Indeed, our recent Sixth NAREA Summer Conference was one of the most well-attended yet. In February 2010, NAREA introduced a successful new initiative, the NAREA Winter Conference in Boston, Massachusetts, in collaboration with New England Reggio-inspired educators.

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Our membership has increased despite and perhaps because of these challenging times we face as advocates for young children. Indeed, by sharing in these experiences and participating in this organization, we are all contributing to the rights of children so eloquently spoken of by Loris Malaguzzi: "That the right of truly all children is that dimension which defines and gives value to a more complete sense of humanity." It is with real gratitude that I thank Reggio Children for continuing to support NAREA in our hopes and endeavors. And best wishes to Margie Cooper and the new NAREA Board Co-Chair, Barbara Acton, as they go forward in the leadership of the North American Reggio Emilia Alliance.

**Barbara Acton**

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I am honored to serve as co-chair of the NAREA Board in collaboration with my valued colleagues, Margie Cooper and the other members of the Board. Together we are committed at all times to work in partnership with our colleagues in Reggio Emilia to promote and defend the rights of children, teachers and parents in North America and in all parts of the world. We value our strong relationship with Reggio Children and share a commitment to the development of new resources and new opportunities for dialogue, collaboration and exchange. I believe the members of NAREA represent an important voice for children, childhood and education and serve to guide

our work as a Board. In service to you, we strive to be always visionary, always inclusive and filled with hope. My hope is fueled by the collective commitment to ongoing professional development and the work you are doing in each of your unique contexts.

I have a particular hope to expand NAREA membership to include an increasing number of parents and family members along with educators who share our passion for quality early learning experiences for all children and who will partner with us in our education and advocacy efforts. As always, we will do well to draw strength and encouragement from our colleagues in Reggio who remind us that our collective work requires not only dreams but also action, and that children, parents and teachers are all important protagonists in our work. In the weeks and months ahead, I look forward to working with those of you who endeavor to create a better childhood, filled with "the wonder of learning" for all children, teachers and parents.