

# FOREWORD

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A well-known positive stereotype exists about Italian culture that is captured in a saying among North American travelers: If you want to have an especially warm reception in Italy, bring along a young child. Italians love children! One cannot help but think of this background when reading about the infant/toddler programs described in *Bambini*. This is a book about a special culture, one that immerses the infant and young child in a network of relationships with shared meaning that overlaps considerably with scientific knowledge about development and with what we generally regard as the best practices for care. It is a special culture that also challenges those of us in North America who would like to emulate much of it. Let me forecast some of the features of the culture as revealed in this book and then point out the connections for American readers.

## VALUES

A culture is built upon values. Three sets of values stand out in the descriptions in this book of programs from four Italian cities—those regarding relationships, children, and teachers and staff.

### Values Regarding Relationships

All programs place a high value on a network of relationships. This includes valuing a structure that has continuity of staff and a connectedness for children who are in a community of relationships that, in turn, are trusting and emotionally supportive. In other words, such relationships involve teachers, other staff, parents, and members of the wider community from which all are drawn. There is a shared meaning across these relationships that produces an atmosphere of attention to multiple points of view, including conflict and experiences in discussing conflict, repairing it, and reaching new points of view. There is an atmosphere of respect in

which everyone is involved in continuous learning and reflection. Relationships are not taken for granted or considered static. Instead, the programs devote time to observation, critical discussion, and reflection about the different relationships that are developing.

#### Values Regarding Children

Another feature of the special culture has to do with an intensive focus on the child. There is simultaneous support, both for the relationship embeddedness of the child (for example, facilitating development of what is mutual and shared), as well as the individuality of the child (facilitating development of what is creative and unique in each child). Each child is valued as a child, not just for what adults want the child to become. As might be expected from the emphasis on building and maintaining relationships, the child is especially valued as sensitive and responsive to others. The child is involved in activities in which meaning is negotiated with others in working on projects and in choosing what is documented for display and discussion. The child learns cooperation and has opportunities to experience interpersonal conflict, as well as its management, negotiation, and possible resolution. The child is valued as active and participatory, as an apprentice, rather than as a target for learning. The children in the Italian programs are involved in repeated experiences of negotiated learning that are relationship-based within a network of relationships with adults and other children. Children learn procedures for interactive learning or a "style" for learning in which they are eager to ask questions and solve problems with others. Everyone expects to learn together.

#### Values Regarding Teachers and Staff

Perhaps most striking of all to the outsider is the set of values regarding teachers and staff. Central to all programs is the valuing of substantial amounts of time for discussion, supervision, and reflection. Teachers and other staff spend a major part of their time each week in collaborating with others in mutual supervision, as well as in critical discussions based on their experiences and observations. Supervision is valued as helpful and important wherein all participants are learning and developing together. This seems in stark contrast to child care settings and programs in the United States wherein all too often there is little time allotted for such activities and where supervision tends to be perceived as a system for accountability and monitoring, rather than being helpful. In *The Hundred Languages of Children* (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998), we have read about this supportive system of pedagogy in the preschools of Reggio Emilia. But in this book it is elaborated in other programs for the ages of 0-3, wherein attention is also given to aspects of emotional development, as well as to cognitive development. Consider these comments from the infant-toddler center in Parma (Chapter 7).

This type of professional development has helped define a new sense of professional identity among teachers. That identity is marked by communication with and listening to children, families, and colleagues. Our model of professional development encourages teachers to practice "reading" attitudes and emotions, paying attention to them, and understanding them. It has made teachers more aware of how delicate it is to intervene in the close relationship between children and parents.

## CONNECTIONS

The chapters in this book offer opportunities for connections with work in North America. I will mention two areas of connections that will engage readers. The first concerns connecting with recent research, and the second with some current programs in the United States.

### Connecting with Research in Early Development

Happily, early developmental research over the past three decades supports many of the practices described in this book. Researchers have documented the extent to which the human, soon after birth, is biologically prepared by evolution for the activation of a set of "basic motives" or "fundamental developmental processes" (Emde, 1988). The human infant is active and social from the start, predisposed to look at the contours of the human face and listen to the human voice, and primed for social interactions in many other ways. Evolution has also predisposed adult caregivers and older children to interact with babies in special ways in order to fit with their social inclinations. This is indicated by the well-known, high-pitched voice, exaggerated slow speech, and mock surprise expressions that accompany "motherese" and other features of "intuitive parenting," as described by the Papouseks (1979). The human infant is also an emotional being, motivated for monitoring and expressing experience according to what is pleasurable and unpleasurable. The infant's biologically prepared emotional signals are used to communicate states of eagerness, needs, and pleasure. Sometime after 6 months, the infant begins a life-long process of seeking emotional signals from significant others in situations of uncertainty in order to guide behavior—a phenomenon we refer to as "social referencing." Another basic motive also deserves emphasis. The human infant is, from the start, information-seeking—a motive that Jean Piaget (1936) referred to as "cognitive assimilation"—and one I prefer to think of as a basic tendency to seek out the new in order to make it familiar or to "get it right" about the world (see also Nelson, 1986).

Is this surprising? That there is such a degree of cognitive and socio-emotional readiness in infants has indeed been surprising to researchers. But there is a crucial proviso. These basic motives and growing competen-

cies do not thrive without a caregiving environment that consistently helps the infant regulate both behavioral and physiological functioning. The infant requires a primary caregiver who is consistently and emotionally available (Sameroff & Emde, 1989; Sameroff & Fiese, 2000; Sroufe, 1995). What we also know from clinical work and research is that primary caregivers need emotional support from others—a fact that becomes increasingly important as the infant becomes more challenging as a toddler and as mothers as well as fathers become immersed in the demands of work, career, and complex contemporary life.

Readers will discover that the match of the above with the approach of the Italian programs is clear. To quote from the Pistoia group:

We take it as our starting point to base our work on the principle of establishing meaningful relationships in the centers for young children. . . . This careful attention to relationship is consistent with the latest research in child development. We have moved from theories focused narrowly on individual development to ones addressing children in context.

And then there is a connecting with what we know about the roots of moral development. Recent research has also documented how moral development begins much earlier than we have typically thought. Morality senses are built up through repeated interactions with emotionally available caregivers. What we can describe as moral motives emerge from the more basic motives discussed above. Let me provide some examples. The socially motivated infant through repeated face-to-face interactions with mothers during feeding and play, learns turn-taking procedures by 4–5 months of age (Stern, 1985). Thus, turn-taking and the rudiments of reciprocity, or the “Golden Rule,” present in all moral systems in some form, have roots quite early.

So also does the moral sense of standards for the way the world should be. The basic motive of cognitive assimilation, of “getting it right about the world,” when exercised with caregivers and through repeated experiences leads to a mental map of standards about the way the world should be. This is evidenced by a dramatic acquisition in emotional development that occurs toward the end of the child’s second year. The toddler, on occasion, may become distressed when a familiar object is broken, dirty, or seen as not the same—a phenomenon conceptualized as the emergence of distress when internalized standards are violated (Kagan, 1981; Kochanska, Casey, & Fukamoto, 1995). As is true for a sense of turn-taking and reciprocity, all systems of morality also rely on an individual’s internalizing standards or ideals with an emotional response of discomfort giving pause when there is the perception of a violation.

Still another early moral sense has been documented by researchers that also involves an emotional response. The toddler, during the second year, begins to evidence distress when confronted by the expressed pain of a another person, often a caregiver. The toddler also begins to engage in



prosocial behavior such as caring, soothing, helping, or sharing. In other words, the development of empathy has its origins early (Zahn-Waxler, Radke-Yarrow, Wagner, & Chapman, 1992). Although research is ongoing, what evidence we have suggests that the development of empathy and prosocial inclinations also require experiences with emotionally available caregivers who model such inclinations.

Again, readers will discover a match of the above with the experiences provided by the approaches of the Italian programs described in this book. The consistent network of caregiving relationship experiences seems well-suited to provide opportunities for these aspects of early moral development. The same is also true with respect to a final aspect of early moral development that deserves comment.

During the second and third years with the acquisition of speech and of narrative capacities, the young child, by engaging in playful dialogues, develops imaginative capacities in which alternatives for action can be represented and expressed. Envisioning alternatives for action and multiple perspectives is a central part of the Italian experience, and it is considered by most to be an important moral sensibility. (For research bolstering the early roots of morality, see Emde & Easterbrooks, 1985; Emde, Biringen, Clyman, & Oppenheim, 1991; and Emde, Kubicek, & Oppenheim, 1997.)

#### Connecting with American Programs

Two current programs in North America are noteworthy in terms of our thinking about making connections with the Italian culture and practices described in this book. Early Head Start programs in the United States are new, publicly funded, and designed to serve children living in economic disadvantage. Montessori programs are more long-standing, are largely privately funded, and serve children from families who can pay. Both programs are broadening their horizons and can learn from the experiences of the Italian infant/toddler centers.

Early Head Start began with its first funded programs in 1995. It developed from the recognition that more could be achieved with many disadvantaged children, living in conditions of poverty and stressful environments, if they received help earlier than the Head Start programs available for 3-5-year-olds. Concomitant with this recognition was an increasing appreciation that the Head Start programs in the United States had important goals not only for fostering learning but for fostering socio-emotional competence (Zigler & Muenchow, 1992; Zigler & Styfco, 1993). Both were important for school readiness. The national committee that met to formulate the guidelines for Early Head Start also took into account that the earliest years were different from the preschool years with respect to the centrality of caregiving relationships. The Early Head Start guidelines put a stress on a continuity of positive relationships and the importance of the development of turn-taking, emotional regulation, the emotions of

pride and pleasure in mastery, early imaginative capacities, negotiation, and the sharing of positive emotions (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1994). This conceptual statement about what is important shows strong connection with the philosophy of the Italian programs. Other features of Early Head Start are also consistent with the philosophy and practices described in this book. Early Head Start programs must be community-based and demonstrate plans for family involvement and staff development.

Since Early Head Start programs are new and vary enormously in different communities, a subgroup of programs have been linked as a "national laboratory" in order to assess outcomes with both qualitative and quantitative measures; in other words, research is underway to discover what works under what circumstances and for whom. Clearly, Americans involved in this work can learn a great deal from the Italians. Moreover, it is likely that the Italian programs can learn from research results in the United States, for one sees in this book that concerns with documentation and with investigations of process have, thus far, eschewed consideration of "outcomes" and more quantitative approaches. Thus, there is much room for cross talk among us for which this book contributes greatly.

The same can be said for another large group of programs in North America, the Montessori programs that have important roots in Italian culture, but have developed separately from the experiences described in this book. Originally started by Maria Montessori in Rome at the beginning of the last century on behalf of poor children, Montessori programs have taken forms in America that have similarities to the philosophy and practices of the Italian programs. Like these programs, Montessori programs give prime emphasis to understanding the child's individuality and building on child initiatives. Montessori programs also give emphasis to a structured, consistent environment and curriculum to provide repeated experiences involving mastery and success. Such programs value building strengths for conduct that include respect for others and attending to and completing tasks (Chattin-McNichols, 1992; Loeffler, 1992).

Currently Montessori programs are broadening their views to include involvement in the public sector, communities, and more diverse populations including the disadvantaged ("Montessori," 2000). Like Early Head Start, Montessori is becoming interested in expanding its knowledge base about what works under what circumstances in today's world. Again, this book should stimulate an active dialogue with Montessori educators. In future exchanges, it is hoped that the Italian programs can also learn from Montessori programs in North America, particularly as the latter become more involved in documentation and research.

## BRIDGING TO STYLE

As the editors indicate in the Introduction, this book is intended as a forum for discussion. And as they point out, English-speaking readers will

notice that the Italian authors exhibit a difference in style—a flowing, exuberant, and sometimes indirect manner of narrative and discourse. Among the rewards of this style are fresh and even poetic images. I think especially of the many images that portray the growth of one's autonomy *with* connectedness. Let me end with a beautiful statement from the program in Pistoia (Chapter 8):

From everything that has been said, it can be seen how important it is to help children build their individual identities and, at the same time, to find a sense of belonging. To be and to belong: these become one in defining growth. Thus, it is not by chance that in the repertoire of traditional tales, there are several about children lost in the woods who learn to find their own path back home. Indeed, to grow means to free one's self from the fears of being lost and being alone. We must help children form active relationships with the places of their lives. Then, they can set out on their own adventures and find a path of growth, strengthened by the sense of security that comes from an identity that is recognized by others and in which they recognize themselves.

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