

Innovations

In Early Education:
The International
Reggio Emilia Exchange



North American Reggio Emilia Alliance

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In Early Education:
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Introduction

This issue of Innovations is dedicated to Loris Malaguzzi—a man of vision, insight, and determination—the founder of the Reggio Emilia educational project and one of the great pedagogical figures of the 20th Century. In addition to commemorating the 20th anniversary of Malaguzzi's death in 1994, this issue also celebrates the 50th anniversary of the first municipal preschool, the 20th anniversary of Reggio Children, and the 10th anniversary of the Istituzione, Preschools and Infant-Toddler Centers of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia.

On February 17–23, 2014, there were multiple events organized in Reggio Emilia in order to commemorate these four milestones in the history of the experience. There was a national seminar titled “Education is/and Politics” with the participation of over 1,400 Italian educators, on February 21–23. The Reggio Children International Network, which includes 34 countries, had their annual meeting and professional development experience, and the Reggio Children–Loris Malaguzzi Center Foundation advisory board and scientific committee also met. In addition, there was the inauguration of a new version of the exhibit about the history of the Reggio Emilia approach, “One City, Many Children,” and a night of storytelling in the schools and community, “Ritorna la Notte dei Racconti” (“Return of the Night of Stories”). Furthermore, another new atelier cittadini, or urban atelier, also opened to visitors and the community at the Loris Malaguzzi International Center on February 23, the date of Malaguzzi's birthday.

Loris Malaguzzi visited the United States for the first time in 1987, when he traveled to San Francisco, California, the first venue for the first exhibit, “The Hundred Languages of Children.” He visited the exhibit again in Amherst, Massachusetts, in 1988 and in Washington, DC, in 1991. While in Washington, DC, Malaguzzi conceived the idea of the Innovations periodical, in collaboration with Eli Saltz, the director of the Merrill-Palmer Institute, and guided its development, in collaboration with Wayne State University, the publisher of Innovations until NAREA began publishing it in 2012. In 1993, Malaguzzi accepted the Kohl Foundation Prize in Chicago, Illinois, which was awarded to educational institutions under the management of the municipality of Reggio Emilia.

The birth of NAREA in 2002 gave “shape to one of Loris Malaguzzi's many ideas and dreams” (Gambetti, Vercalli, & Riccò, 2012, p. 7), as Malaguzzi had strongly encouraged his colleagues in the United States to form a network of Reggio-inspired educators to support professional development and communication with the educators in Reggio Emilia. NAREA seeks to honor Malaguzzi's aspirations for this organization through its dedication to a new, elevated image of early childhood education, seen as a profession committed to understanding children and education through research and innovation.

This issue of Innovations features “Memories of Malaguzzi” by Lella Gandini, Carolyn Edwards, and George Forman, three of his earliest colleagues in the United States; as well as “The ‘What to Do’ of Teachers,” one of Malaguzzi's final essays, originally published in 1995 in The Fountains: From a Project for the Construction of an Amusement Park for Birds; and a reflection on this book by Atlanta teacher Teresa Cole. Also included in this issue are accounts of the opening of the Robinson Municipal Preschool in Reggio Emilia, the creation and evolution of Reggio Children, and the establishment of the Istituzione, Preschools and Infant-Toddler Centers of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia. The “Voices” column features an article by Mara Bier of Washington, DC, titled “Exploring the Reggio Emilia Approach from a Jewish Perspective,” which includes recollections of a 1993 conference with Malaguzzi and several Reggio educators. This issue concludes with a manifesto released in February 2014 by the Reggio Children International Network, which calls for the activation of an international movement to support the right of education as a common good for all children.

REFERENCE

Gambetti, A., Vercalli, E., & Riccò, P. (2012). Internationality, the Reggio Emilia approach, and NAREA. *Innovations in Early Education: The International Reggio Emilia Exchange* (NAREA 10th anniversary ed.), 6–7.

Memories of Malaguzzi

By Lella Gandini, Carolyn Edwards, and George Forman



The following are recollections of Loris Malaguzzi and his visits to the United States in the late 1980s by Lella Gandini, Carolyn Edwards, and George Forman, co-editors of *The Hundred Languages of Children: The Reggio Emilia Experience in*

Transformation, Third Edition. Lella Gandini is the Reggio Children liaison in the United States for dissemination of the Reggio Emilia approach. Carolyn Edwards is a Willa Cather professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and George Forman is a professor emeritus of education at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst.

Lella Gandini

I remember very clearly the visit by Loris Malaguzzi in Amherst, Massachusetts, to the two beautiful sites of the exhibit, the dinner at Carolyn Edwards's home, and the time spent with great interest by all of us in George Forman's office, looking at the images of "The City and the Rain," while Malaguzzi shared a careful and appreciative description of the children's and teachers' work and conversations, with Tiziana Filippini and I translating.

On the day of the inauguration of the exhibit and the plenary session at the University of Massachusetts, Malaguzzi was very tense—and I was nervous as well—as he spoke to a very large audience (his first occasion speaking to a university audience in the United States and my first time translating for him officially in public). However, he was pleased about the experience. The next day, Malaguzzi was especially delighted by the interest shown in the seminar when he presented, with total ease, the story of "Francesco and the Paper Tube" to about 30 fascinated teachers. I remember how comfortable it seemed then to translate his rich narrative of the intelligent discoveries of this young child as we spoke together in such a favorable physical space to such an intent group of listeners.

Of course, I have many memories of Malaguzzi's three visits to the United States (in Massachusetts, Washington, DC, and Chicago), as I had the great privilege to translate his words. However, the first visit was special because there

was a great deal of expectation due to our frequent correspondence with him beforehand, and when he arrived, he stayed a few days in our home. I remember when he realized that my husband and I knew well David Hawkins, a man whom Malaguzzi often described as one of his sources of inspiration. We promptly got David on the telephone, and Malaguzzi was first incredulous, then very happy to talk with him—as David spoke Italian—and right away, he invited him to visit Reggio Emilia.

Carolyn Edwards

"The Hundred Languages of Children" exhibit opened at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst and Holyoke Community College in December 1988. For the first time in the United States, Loris Malaguzzi, Tiziana Filippini, and other Reggio colleagues lectured at an opening conference surrounding the exhibit, sharing their philosophy and interpretations in person. As Lella has described, Malaguzzi spoke eloquently and fervently to a huge audience on the first night and then to a seminar group the next day. Lella remembers that Malaguzzi was at first nervous—but surely not as nervous as those of us who had organized the events and did not know what we would hear or how our countrymen would receive it. Yet the audience was warm and involved, and the university dean who introduced the meeting understood perfectly the value of progressive education, multidisciplinary thought, and intercultural

He [Malaguzzi] said that the constant way of working in Reggio Emilia was to think and reflect on their own experience, over and over. This was the strategy they had generated in the schools as they sought to find a new approach to education, one that would get beyond the limitations imposed by received wisdom on child development and correct practice.

–Carolyn Edwards

dialogue, and he was clearly exhilarated by the conference.

I remember many things Malaguzzi said. At the time, I was steeped in the philosophy of the American progressive educators who, Malaguzzi said, were close to his heart and who had inspired many of his choices—John Dewey, David Hawkins—but still, many of the ideas surprised me. He said that the constant way of working in Reggio Emilia was to think and reflect on their own experience, over and over. This was the strategy they had generated in the schools as they sought to find a new approach to education, one that would get beyond the limitations imposed by received wisdom on child development and correct practice. He was not saying that theoretical literature should always be distrusted, but he was convinced that new ideas and understandings were emerging that were ahead of the written texts. “The problem is not to close the books that have formed us—pedagogy, sociology, psychology—but to move away from them, to return to them eventually, after having explored other ways,” he said. Thus, I heard a new framework for thinking about the application of expert resources, as something to seek out after systematically observing and reflecting among one’s own team of colleagues.

Of course, observing children, predicting, and flexible planning were well-known processes at our university laboratory preschool, but we perhaps did not see these experiences of ours as the primary source of meaning and insight and instead as something to be used within an investigation, ideally framed by theory and hypothesis testing. Malaguzzi’s idea suggested to us a spark of innovation, adventure, and risk-taking—a need for autonomy and optimism here and now. In a parallel way, as we watched videos that Reggio educators shared of young children experiencing clay and other materials, we learned that books should come out, not at the beginning point of experiences

in the classroom, but rather sometime afterward, sought out as resources when children wanted to find out a specific thing, such as how the leg of a certain dinosaur was shaped. I still believe that theory and research literature spark questions for the teacher researcher and provide vital vocabulary for interpretation and analysis, but I appreciate original observations and contrasting perspectives as an equal force in the reflective process. Many other awakenings occurred to me and others during that first grand conference and exhibit in Amherst, Massachusetts. In fact, they led George Forman, Lella Gandini, and me to want to create a different kind of synthesis of the philosophy and pedagogy emerging out of Italy—*The Hundred Languages of Children*, a sourcebook for the slow, cumulative, collaborative process of reflection that teachers everywhere deserve and treasure.

George Forman

A couple of years later, during the fall of 1991, it was agreed that Lella Gandini and I would collaborate with Giovanni Piazza, Amelia Gambetti, Carlina Rinaldi, and Loris Malaguzzi to both plan and document a long-term project, now known as the “Amusement Park for Birds,” completed in May of 1992 with a ribbon-cutting ceremony, with the mayor, parents, and townspeople of Reggio Emilia attending. After creating a documentation of “The Long Jump” some two years earlier from a set of slides, we were eager to capture the work behind the scenes, as well as the teacher’s role in deciding how to support the children’s ideas for this miniature amusement park. During that year in production, Lella and I made several trips to Reggio with a large video camera, and Carla and Amelia came to Massachusetts, with Amelia appointed as visiting faculty at the University of Massachusetts. The collaboration was intense and productive. We learned how teachers in Reggio Emilia are more than observers and a

Malaguzzi was impatient with the American interest in what teachers do, insisting that we should first improve our image of the child.

–George Forman

source of praise. Instead, they teach the children rather directly in the use of professional-quality art materials. They also assure that the project captures strong emotions and reminds children of those connections. They suggest tractable tasks within the children's levels of achievement. They build these tasks toward a clear and exciting culmination. Working on the inside of this project and planning the next steps was truly an honor and an incredible learning experience.

I remember how eager Malaguzzi was to see the completed video, and I feel sorry he saw only an early segment before his untimely death. However, we did an interview with him at the end of our stay in Reggio, asking him to talk about "What makes a good project?" and about the transition from discussing with children to children making graphic representations. In general, here are some memories of shared times (and the pleasure to frankly exchange our different points of view): Malaguzzi was impatient with the American interest in what teachers do, insisting that we should first improve our image of the child. I, on the other hand, was curious about his reluctance to highlight what teachers do. He felt the means would flow organically from clearly stated goals, while I felt I could not truly understand his goals without knowing more about what teachers do. Later, when he revealed his interest in cybernetics and von Foerster, I began to understand the depth of his belief in this movement from goals to means. He was fearful that Americans would simply adopt the means without understanding children on the whole, while I was worried that Loris had an image of the child that was exaggerated.

Over the years, however, my image of the child has broadened as has my knowledge of the rather active role of the teachers in Reggio Emilia. Of course, as Malaguzzi had stated in his Amherst lectures, he did not find useful the idea that children learn concepts in stages. I was rather surprised at this, but he preferred to think of children as competent, and to him, stage theory implied that children must learn a complicated subject by understanding less complicated components before they can understand more complicated components. I think Loris preferred to have teachers document what children can do and move from there, rather than prejudge a child as not capable of an ostensibly more advanced way of thinking. He did influence me to take this view

of careful observation and reflection on what children can do, as opposed to using stage theory to try to preplan what would be too difficult for children to do. (To me, as Howard Gardner has said, Loris Malaguzzi was a bit more of a poet than a social scientist.)

Lella Gandini

The long interview for the book *The Hundred Languages of Children*, which Loris Malaguzzi was pleased to have his friends in the United States publish, took place over the course of three years from 1989 to 1991, except for the last section, which took place in 1992, when we were documenting the "Amusement Park for Birds" project with George Forman.

It was difficult for Malaguzzi to be satisfied when seeing his ideas written on paper. His thoughts were in continuous, lucid progression in search of a deeper respect for the culture of childhood and a wider definition of the role of the teacher as he reflected on the thousands of experiences of his schools for children. Many times during those years, he would call me and tell me to throw out the transcription I had sent him to review because he wanted to start over. I did that each time he asked. But the dialogue with him continued, making it possible for this project to conclude.

In fact, in 1991, as I was awaiting a promised conclusion, I was instead surprised to receive from the hands of Carlina Rinaldi (who had come to the United States to present at an initiative related to the exhibit in Detroit), additional writings from Malaguzzi, accompanied by an outline of how he wanted to integrate them into the interview. I did the final translation, with editing by Lester Little and Carolyn Edwards. (Gandini, 2012, pp. 30-31)

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—Lella Gandini

The “What to Do” of Teachers

By Loris Malaguzzi



The following is excerpted from The Fountains: From a Project for the Construction of an Amusement Park for Birds, published in 1995 and the second book in the “The Unheard Voice of Children” series. This essay was also published in the spring 1996 issue of Innovations.

It is not easy to give a complete outline of the teacher’s tasks. Perhaps it would be better, first of all, to point out that the methods of observation as well as interpretation are inextricably linked to the strategies and aims of the educational project. Thus, the educational theories must be clearly defined and shared, particularly in terms of the roles of children, adults, and contexts in the learning and development processes. This means that there must be strong interaction and a critical coexistence of theory, practice, and the educational project itself.

Another important point is that the adult, as observer-participant, cannot exempt him/herself from being personally involved in some way in the situation being observed. For this reason, apart from the ability to distance ourselves, our level of self-control, and the awareness of our increased responsibility, the interpretive judgments we make on the processes and results of the project must remain open to rethinking and, if necessary, reworking in order to justify their pertinence and importance.

Through this experience of interactionist strategies, the value of observation as research on the forms of learning and development is consolidated, through complex constructions that derive from the contributions of both adults and children and the communicative and relational effectiveness of these contributions. Starting from these general indications, we can expand on the meanings of the “what to do” of teachers.

However, the teacher’s tasks can only be mentioned in a broad sense, as they also involve the sensitivity and experience that the teacher contributes and the resources, which the adult must credit—first and foremost—to the children.

The teacher’s tasks can only be mentioned in a broad sense, as they also involve the sensitivity and experience that the teacher contributes and the resources, which the adult must credit—first and foremost—to the children.

—Loris Malaguzzi

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North American Reggio Emilia

So what to do?

To be convinced that ways of knowing and learning can be identified and that what we are interested in is discovering and understanding through which interactive processes children construct their knowledge and abilities and how these processes can be enhanced or modified.

To trust our self-regulatory resources to differentiate and measure out the nature and quality of our intervention.

To be convinced that children and their cooperative group work are capable of carrying the project through and that its success will also depend on our ability to guide and support them.

To respect children's times of thought and action, as well as those of pause and indecision.

To help children reflect on the possible differences of their opinions from those of others and on their complete freedom, if they so choose, to oppose other opinions.

To help children stay on track as much as possible, to remain faithful to their objectives, the project, and the endeavors of their companions.

To help children present their ideas clearly, without overriding those of their peers, to help them not be afraid of making mistakes, and to assure them that their ideas are legitimate.

To help children recognize the enrichment that comes from the negotiation of ideas and actions, to see the value of sharing and changing points of view and the growth in organizational abilities, knowledge, and linguistic and communicative skills.

To conclude these brief and incomplete notes, the teacher's task is to be a mediator, offering carefully measured and pertinent loans of knowledge and skills, periodically producing summaries of the children's convergent and divergent elements, and the points of arrival of their work; to highlight the emerging meanings; and to solicit the participation of each and every child through increasingly cooperative and productive interaction.

In one essential concept, the teacher's task is to preserve, as far as possible, the naturalness of the children's creative and practical processes, in the conviction that children have the necessary resources for going much further than we might think. We must ensure that children express the best of their resources and the maximum ability to internalize and reorganize the meanings that emerge from their experiences, so that the realization of the project maintains its promises and its objectives for personal development. (Reggio Children, 1995, pp. 18–22)

REFERENCE

Reggio Children. (1995). *The fountains: From a project for the construction of an amusement park for birds* (pp. 18–22). Reggio Emilia, Italy: Reggio Children.

To help children recognize the enrichment that comes from the negotiation of ideas and actions, to see the value of sharing and changing points of view.

-Loris Malaguzzi

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A Reflection on *The Fountains: From a Project for the Construction of an Amusement Park for Birds*

By Tonya Cole



Tonya Cole is an educator at Saint Anne's Day School, a participating school in Project Infinity and member of NAREA, in Atlanta, Georgia. Tonya has participated in two study groups in Reggio Emilia and has attended several NAREA conferences and Inspired Practices in Early Education initiatives. *The Fountains* was published by Reggio Children in 1995 and is the second book in the "The Unheard Voice of Children" series.

When I was invited to write a book review on Reggio Children's publication *The Fountains: From a Project for the Construction of an Amusement Park for the Birds*, I was asked whether I had access to a copy of this book. I responded without much thought, "Yes, our school has several copies!" However, when I glanced up from my computer after agreeing to this proposal, I noticed that right in front of my eyes was a copy of this book in a small stack on my coffee table, along with *Art as Experience* by John Dewey and *A Mind in the Making* by Ellen Galinsky. My reintroduction to this book symbolizes the awakening of my thinking on the importance of documentation and reflection and their significant roles in both our personal and professional lives.

The Fountains serves as a dynamic example of the documentation and reflection process of the ongoing experiences with children at La Villetta preschool in Reggio Emilia. The reader is invited to be an observer of this heartwarming experience of "creating an amusement park for the birds" that is guided by the children with the intuitive support and ingenuity of Loris Malaguzzi, project coordinator; Carlina Rinaldi, *pedagogista*; Amelia Gambetti and Teresa Casarini, teachers; Giovanni Piazza, *atelierista*; and the families of La Villetta. While I have visited Reggio Emilia twice before, I was welcomed to the city all over again through the wealth and depth of children's vibrant conversations, drawings, and interpretations. The book gives strong visual and written inspiration for a self-reflection on our own the-

ories and practices related to the regenerative dialogues pertaining to school as a place of research, relationships, and connections; the processes of documentation, reflection, and transformation; and "The Hundred Languages of Children" exhibit, to name a few, while offering a map (including an abundance of landmarks) of the collective thinking and experiences in Reggio Emilia.

In "The Amusement Park for Birds and the Fountains," George Forman points out that "through a process of rereading, reflection, and revisiting . . . children are able to organize what they have learned from a single experience within a broader system of relations . . . The 'Amusement Park for Birds' project is a wonderful example of school as a place where children are encouraged to reflect on an experience rather than simply have an experience, a context that stimulates children not only to observe but also to reflect on their observations" (Reggio Children, 1995, p. 6). Forman also emphasizes that "reflection on experience is encouraged through verbal dialogue and discussions that result from the shared re-reading of materials that document children's experiences, but also through the use of other expressive materials . . . viewed as tools for designing, expanding, and elaborating ideas and experiences" (Reggio Children, 1995, p. 6). This essay provoked me to think about the relationship of my participation in professional development opportunities focused on documented experiences with children, ongoing conversations and collaboration with colleagues, and reflec-


tions of my personal growth as an educator to my projections about future plans for the actualization and implementation of strategies, experiences, ideas, and values to support potential next steps with children and families.

The descriptive narrative of this book gracefully takes readers on a journey through a project that begins with a game of “what to do” with the children and educators—the organizational phase of the project. The 13 sections of the book organize themselves as a series of planning meetings and serve as “a dictionary of experiences to think about opportunities to think before, during, and after and to document the experience as a vehicle for sharing.” This quote from Carlina Rinaldi from the “Poetics, Aesthetics, and Learning” study tour in 2009 challenges us to contemplate the role of *progetazzi* and invites the educator to think about how to initiate a project with children, develop strategies to decide who does what, and determine documentation strategies.

The conversations with the children during the course of this project give light to the many ways children invite educators into their thinking processes so that their thoughts, desires, and wonderings become known and evident. Moreover, they illustrate how these intelligent proposals made by the children are used to support provocations and continued conversations that are not limited to the classroom, *atelier*, or playground. One aspect of this thinking is the continuous awareness to connect our experiences with the children to the com-

munity and how the community supports and challenges our thinking. This thinking also expands notions and perspectives of the role of environment when the school and community become a unified resource for making meaning of the world that surrounds us. Children’s imaginative and real worlds combined and aroused the sensitivities of a community in the “Amusement Park for Birds” project.

The various sections of this book chronicle the dance between a multitude of ideas related to experience, reflection, perspectives, theories, actions, relationships, and community (this list is certainly not exhaustive) and their complex connection to the role of materials and their communicative abilities. This respect for the children’s theories and ideas connected to fountains comes to life as ongoing experiments for the children and educators to test, confirm, and rework their theories in the section “If We Want to Make Real Fountains.” During the 2009 study tour, Amelia Gambetti said about this project, “It was crucial for the children to figure out how water wheels work. The children used paper, cardboard, and other materials to express their ideas about water wheels. Then, the children had to develop other materials to interact with water. When stuck with their constructions, the decision was made to increase the revisiting between exploration and representation so that the children could reflect upon their water wheel idea.”



The descriptive narrative of this book gracefully takes readers on a journey through a project that begins with a game of “what to do” with the children and educators.

—Tonya Cole

Most refreshing is Loris Malaguzzi’s genuine empathy for the role of the teacher.

-Tonya Cole



The Fountains highlights and celebrates children’s competencies and serves as a powerful voice, not only for the children, but for the educators as well. During the same 2009 study tour, Carlina Rinaldi said, “The ‘Amusement Park for Birds’ project was fundamental and crucial for deepening the understanding of the hundred languages of children.” She also said, “Media are not considered as objects . . . but as part of the brain—they change the brain. The

more you explore materials and techniques, the more children can communicate what they know.” This statement, among others, serves as a strong support and inspiration for my continuous development as an educator.

Most refreshing is Loris Malaguzzi’s genuine empathy for the role of the teacher. His words have given meaning, on so many levels, to my nearly 20 years of experiences as an educator. He begins the section of “The ‘What to Do’ of Teachers” with the words “It is not easy to give a complete outline of the teacher’s tasks” (Malaguzzi, 1995, p. 18). Malaguzzi encourages us to embrace the enormous responsibility of our role through his sage advice: “[B]e convinced that ways of knowing and learning can be identified, and that what we are interested in is discovering and understanding through which interactive processes children construct their knowledge and abilities, and how these processes can be enhanced or modified” (Malaguzzi, 1995, p. 20). Malaguzzi surmises this role by concluding, “[T]he teacher’s task is to preserve, as far as possible, the naturalness of the children’s creative and practical processes, in the conviction that children have the necessary resources for going much further than we might think. We must ensure that children express the best of their resources and the maximum ability to internalize and reorganize the meanings that emerge from their experiences, so that the realization of the project maintains its promises and its objectives

for personal development” (Malaguzzi, 1995, p. 22). These comforting yet challenging and provocative while inspirational words help me realize that through our work with children, we must hold for ourselves the values, hopes, and dreams that we hold for them. We, too, must make meaning of our experiences to remain true to our own personal and professional development. We, too, can go much further than we think.

The Fountains will remain close at hand as a reminder to reflect on the past, to live in the present, and to plan for a future that has limitless boundaries.

-Tonya Cole

During the 2014 hosting period for “The Wonder of Learning - The Hundred Languages of Children” exhibit in Greenville, South Carolina, I will continue to reflect, reread, and revisit the work of the children, families, and educators of Reggio Emilia to further my ideas related to creativity, imagination, expression, and learning. *The Fountains* will remain close at hand as a reminder to reflect on the past, to live in the present, and to plan for a future that has limitless boundaries. I thank the educators of Reggio Emilia, NAREA, and the *Innovations* periodical for sharing the experiences of the daily life of the schools of Reggio Emilia.

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Malaguzzi, L. (1995). *The fountains: From a project for the construction of an amusement park for birds*. Reggio Emilia, Italy: Reggio Children.

Scuole dell'Infanzia Robinson: The First Municipal Preschool in Reggio Emilia, Italy

“Our school is called Robinson Crusoe because . . . Robinson was an adventurer; he was very, very courageous and went to sea because his passion was going to sea. A passion is something you have desired for a very long time, and then you do it always.” –Roberto, aged 5.4 years (Reggio Children, 2012, p. 91)

In interviews for the video *Not Just Anyplace: Reggio Emilia - An Educational Experience*, Renzo Bonazzi, the mayor of Reggio Emilia from 1962–1976, set the context for this milestone in the history of the Reggio Emilia municipal educational project:

In the mid-'50s, a new kind of need was beginning to emerge, a need to create suitable conditions for a kind of economic, social, and cultural development that would . . . guarantee an improvement in the quality of life. I think we can say that the crisis . . . was also a sign of existing pressure affirming the level of dissatisfaction and the repercussions and growth we witnessed through the whole of the '60s.

The Reggio Emilia municipality approved plans in 1962 for urban development in new neighborhoods that included the creation of five municipal preschools. In 1963, the municipality . . . organized a conference on the relationship between psychiatry, psychology, and pedagogy. Loris Malaguzzi was one of the promoters of the initiative. (Fasano, 2012)



Renzo Bonazzi also elaborated on the contribution of participation to their efforts at this time in their history:

In order to make the schools a reality, we needed to have a very active level of support to sustain our efforts. An essential component

of our policy during that period was to work toward bringing about the conscious participation of the community . . . When we opened the first municipal preschool in 1963 . . . we promoted the formation of a committee of parents and community members who would be responsible for the management of the school's activities, together with the teachers and staff, in the sense that they were given the power to decide how to utilize the resources that were being allocated to the school.

Loris Malaguzzi had his own direct experience in the field of education and he, too . . . had been hired by the municipal administration to be the head of the psycho-pedagogical center. In our opinion, he was the most suitable person to work with the educational aspect of the preschools. (Fasano, 2002)

Franco Boiardi, the commissioner for public education in Reggio Emilia from 1960–1969, describes the challenge of gaining approval for municipal preschools:

The problem was to finally create a new and truly modern service, one that would not only take in children, who were often left behind at home under the care of grandparents, but would produce culture, generate debate, and involve families and parents as well. The provincial administration council turned down our plans time and again . . . So I decided to try and beat them at their own game by asking an important company in Milan to design four prefabricated school buildings. I took the four plans to the municipal council and said to the commissioners, “Tell me where I can put them. It's time to put a stop to this question of where to place the buildings. You just tell me where they should be put.” And this caused the old negative prejudices to collapse. Then the prefecture approved one preschool, not four. But that was the first one we were able to build, which was the Robinson preschool. (Fasano, 2002)

An essential component of our policy during that period was to work toward bringing about the conscious participation of the community. . .

–Renzo Bonazzi

The problem was to finally create a new and truly modern service, one that would . . . produce culture, generate debate, and involve families and parents as well.

-Franco Boiardi



In an interview with Lella Gandini in *The Hundred Languages of Children: The Reggio Emilia Approach in Transformation*, Loris Malaguzzi offers his reflections on the Reggio Emilia educational project in the early 1960s and the opening of Robinson preschool:

It was a school with two classrooms, large enough for 60 children, and we gave it the name of Robinson, to recall the adventures of Defoe's hero. You will have heard how the birth of the first school in 1963 established an important landmark. It affirmed, for the first time in Italy, the people claiming a right to found a secular school for young children—a rightful and necessary break in the monopoly the Catholic Church had hitherto exercised over children's early education. It was a necessary change in a society that was renewing itself and changing deeply and in which citizens and families were increasingly asking for social services and schools for their children. They wanted schools of a new kind: of better quality, free from charitable tendencies, not merely custodial and not discriminatory in any way.

It was a decisive achievement, although the school was housed in a wooden building assigned us by the authorities. Indeed, it was difficult to find enough children to participate because of the novelty of a city-run school. Three years later, it burned down one

evening. We all ran there, even the mayor, and there we stood watching until only ashes remained. Yet one year later, the school was rebuilt with brick and concrete. We were now involved in a serious endeavor. From these early roots of civic determination and passion, widening to become part of the public consciousness, are the happenings and stories that now I am narrating to you.

From the parent-run schools, we had received the first expert group of teachers. Responsibilities were clear in our minds; many eyes, not all friendly, were watching us. We had to make as few errors as possible; we had to find our cultural identity quickly, make ourselves known, and win trust and respect. I remember that, after a few months, the need to make ourselves known became so strong that we planned a most successful activity. Once a week, we would transport the school to town. Literally, we would pack ourselves, the children, and our tools into a truck, and we would teach school and show exhibits in the open air, in the square, in public parks, or under the colonnade of the municipal theater. The children were happy. The people saw; they were surprised, and they asked questions.

We knew that the situation required continuity but also many breaks with the past. The experiences of the past we sought to preserve were the human warmth and reciprocal help,



We had to make as few errors as possible; we had to find our cultural identity quickly, make ourselves known, and win trust and respect.

—Loris Malaguzzi

with the sense of doing a job that revealed —through children and their families— unknown motivation and resources, and an awareness of the values of each project and each choice, for use in putting together entirely different activities. We wanted to recognize the right of each child to be a protagonist and the need to sustain each child's spontaneous curiosity at a high level. We had to preserve our decision to learn from children, from events, and from families, to the full extent of our professional limits, and to maintain a readiness to change points of view, so as never to have too many certainties.

It was a feverish time, a time of adaptation, of continuous adjustment of ideas, of selection of projects, and attempts. Those projects and attempts were expected to produce a great deal and to do well; they were supposed to respond to the combined expectations of children and families and to reflect on our competencies, which were still in the making. I remember that we really got involved in a project based on Robinson Crusoe. The plan was for all of us together, including the children, to reconstruct the story, the character, and the adventures of our hero. We worked on reading and retelling the story; we used our memory as well as our skills at drawing, painting, clay, and woodworking. We rebuilt

the ship, the sea, the island, the cave, and the tools. It was a long and spectacular reconstruction. (Gandini, 2012, pp. 90–91)

Celebrations and Observances

On November 4–5, 2013, the municipality of Reggio Emilia, the *Istituzione* of the Infant-Toddler Centers and Preschools, Reggio Children, and the Reggio Children–Loris Malaguzzi International Center Foundation celebrated the opening of the Robinson preschool on November 5, 1963, and 50 years of municipal preschools. The invitation to the observances included Renzo Bonazzi's recollection of the time in which the first municipal preschools were established:

In the early 1960s, following the reconstruction, we felt it was necessary to accompany the recovery of economic activity and the profound change in the productive structure of the area with services that would guarantee a better quality of life . . . Within this context, the preschool project developed. It was a service to the families, in particular to working women, and a qualified instrument for the formation and development of the children's personality that supplemented the role of the parents.



The two-day program included readings and testimonials through the voices of the protagonists; an anniversary breakfast for Robinson preschool children, parents, and staff; a concert given by a class of middle school children, dedicated to the children of Robinson preschool; a meeting with the protagonists of the history of Robinson preschool, dedicated to Renzo Bonazzi; and a celebration in the city with words, dance, light, and digital music.

The invitation to the events also included this reflection: “Still today, the Robinson school bears witness to the adventure of a city that has continued—not without hard work and trials—to invest in the future through education, starting from the youngest children.”

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I remember that we really got involved in a project based on Robinson Crusoe. The plan was for all of us together, including the children, to reconstruct the story, the character, and the adventures of our hero. We worked on reading and retelling the story; we used our memory as well as our skills at drawing, painting, clay, and woodworking. We rebuilt the ship, the sea, the island, the cave, and the tools. It was a long and spectacular reconstruction.

–Loris Malaguzzi



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Image on cover – From the experimental work based on the reading of *The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* – Robinson Municipal Preschool, 1969 – © Preschools and Infant-Toddler Centers – Istituzione of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia – from the catalog of the exhibition *One City, Many Children: Reggio Emilia, A History of the Present*, Reggio Children, 2012

Drawings in article – From “*Tracce d’Identità*” and created by 5 year-old children at *Scuola Comunale dell’Infanzia Robinson* during 2008-2009 school year

Image and quote on back cover – From the catalog of the exhibition *The Hundred Languages of Children* – © 1996 Preschools and Infant-Toddler Centers – Istituzione of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia

Reggio Children – International Center for the Defense and Promotion of the Rights and Potential of All Children

This letter from Carlina Rinaldi, announcing the formation of Reggio Children, was published on the cover of the spring 1994 edition of *Innovations in Early Education: The International Reggio Emilia Exchange*:

Dear Friends of Reggio Emilia,

On March 11, 1994, “Reggio Children – International Center for the Defense and Promotion of the Rights and Potential of All Children” was incorporated as a limited company. The organization is supported by a majority holding of the municipality of Reggio Emilia, a number of corporate shareholders, and by private shareholders including parents, teachers, and other citizens, and the company will be governed by a board of directors. My role will be that of executive consultant.

The goal of Reggio Children is to support and disseminate the wealth of knowledge in theory and practice that results from 30 years of experience in the education of children from three months to six years of age. Reggio Children will also respond to the increasingly numerous requests for information and cooperative exchanges that arrive from all over the world.

In terms of this interest, the objectives and tasks of Reggio Children are as follows:

- to host study groups and organize professional development seminars for educators and to set up a professional development center;
- to document the work of children and teachers and the organizational system of the Reggio Emilia municipal schools through publications and various media;
- to publish and sell books, journals, documents, videotapes, and other communication tools;
- to design projects for school buildings and prototypes for furnishings and educational materials;
- to establish an interactive museum in Reggio Emilia that could permanently house the exhibit “The Hundred Languages of Children”;
- to promote research and study to deepen the understanding of the theory of the Reggio Emilia approach through seminars and an annual symposium to be held in Reggio Emilia;
- to establish cooperative relationships with organizations in Italy and in other countries to promote joint cultural initiatives and professional development . . .

Reggio Children will serve as liaison between the administration of the municipal schools of Reggio Emilia and individuals or groups in terms of requests for information, visits, and so on.

As guiding principles of Reggio Children, we are dedicated to:

- propagating a strong concept of childhood and children, of their rights, potential, and resources;
- promoting study, research, and experimentation on educational themes, with preference given to the concept of children’s learning as an active, constructive, and creative process;
- setting a higher standard of professionalism and professional development for teachers and instilling a greater understanding of the values inherent to collegial work and of the significant relationships with children and their families;
- emphasizing the concepts of research, observation, documentation, and interpretation of the children’s processes of thought and action.

Reggio Children hopes to carry on the vision of Loris Malaguzzi that began more than 30 years ago, a vision that promotes the rights, potential, and resources of children everywhere.

–Carlina Rinaldi

By so doing, Reggio Children hopes to carry on the vision of Loris Malaguzzi that began more than 30 years ago, a vision that promotes the rights, potential, and resources of children everywhere.

Warmest regards,

Carlina Rinaldi

(Rinaldi, 1994, p. 1)

Evolution of Friends of Reggio Children

The international association Friends of Reggio Children was founded on May 24, 1994 as a non-profit organization supported by the volunteer work of its members. Its three main objectives were:

- to develop and disseminate the thought and work of Loris Malaguzzi, in particular through the constitution of an international foundation that will bear his name;
- to support and promote the experience and cultural development of the municipal infant-toddler centers and preschools of Reggio Emilia, also in relation with other educational and cultural experiences, to promote the rights of children; and
- to develop relationships with the school advisory councils, whose role is fundamental, and support their activities.

The association managed the Remida Creative Recycling Center from 1996 until 2012 when the association was transformed into the newly established Reggio Children-Loris Malaguzzi Center Foundation. The Foundation continues the management of Remida.

Evolution of Reggio Children

Reggio Children began publishing the *Rechild* newsletter in 1996. In the first issue, Reggio Children's role in the global community is elaborated: "The Reggio Children project represents a new and more far-reaching alliance and a forum for discussing the rights of all people and the themes of civil, cultural, and human growth" (Reggio Children, 1996, p. 11).

An evolving list of services and activities are offered by Reggio Children in the areas of professional development, consultancy, exhibits, information, and publications.

The June 1997 issue of *Rechild* featured an article titled "Professional Development and Research: The Cultural Challenge of Reggio Children," which describes the promise and challenge of the work of Reggio Children:

In the international dialogue on the educational experience of Reggio Emilia, an experience that began in the 1960s, we now have before us a map that is both geographical and cultural: an entire world of education and culture . . . This world has shown appreciation for the quality of the work accomplished here in Reggio, the educational values, and the pedagogical and didactic approach . . .

The essential elements of this [approach to] quality are continuing **research and professional development**, two elements that are interconnected and inseparable, and which are also the shared cultural objectives of Reggio Children and the municipal infant-toddler centers and preschools. But what meanings can we give to the concept of professional development today? . . .

Over the last few years, we have tried to create opportunities that enable us to interact effectively with the different cultures and experiences of our interlocutors. This means identifying strategies that are appropriate to the complexity of our experience, which is characterized by this inseparable relationship between professional development and research, viewed as an ongoing means for creating a new culture of education. (Reggio Children, 1997, pp. 1-2)

The essential elements of this [approach to] quality are continuing **research and professional development**, two elements that are interconnected and inseparable, and which are also the shared cultural objectives of Reggio Children and the municipal infant-toddler centers and preschools.

-Reggio Children

The project has unfolded through national and international exchanges and, above all, through interdisciplinary exchanges around the issues of human life and human identity.

—Carlina Rinaldi

In 2000, Giordana Rabitti was elected as the new president of Reggio Children. She succeeded Eletta Bertani, who had been president since the founding of Reggio Children in 1994. In an interview in the April 2001 issue of *Rechild News*, Giordana discussed the developments that would strongly characterize the future work of the organization:

One new thing, something I didn't expect, has been the sudden and significant increase in requests from different worlds, from worlds that are far from ours geographically, economically, and culturally . . . not just because this is part of Reggio Children's mission but because the idea of . . . social justice is rapidly gathering strength in all the economically advanced countries . . . [which are] increasingly orienting themselves towards assisting disadvantaged countries. (Reggio Children, 2001, p. 3)

In fact, in an article titled "Cooperation and Solidarity" in the May 2003 issue of *Rechild News*, there is a summary of the international projects in underdeveloped countries, including early childhood centers in Albania, Bosnia, Kosovo, Cuba, and Senegal; the qualification of school environments and the professional development of teachers in Egypt and Palestine; and the professional qualification of special needs in refugee camps in Algeria.

On the occasion of the 10th anniversary of Reggio Children in 2004, Carlina Rinaldi, executive pedagogical consultant, wrote about Reggio Children as a "cultural place" and its new relationship with the *Istituzione* and the Loris Malaguzzi International Center in the December 2004 edition of *Rechild*:

The original conceptualization of the Reggio Children project . . . implied a sense of expansion: the central focus is not solely on the infant-toddler centers and preschools; rather, starting from the culture developed in these services (pedagogical, administrative, and political culture), the idea was to go beyond, to see other "places" for deepening, enriching, and organizing this knowledge. The project has unfolded through national and international exchanges and, above all, through interdisciplinary exchanges around the issues of human life and human identity . . .

I think of Reggio Children, then, as a promoter of research, with international characteristics as well. A single topic—for example, how children play today—could be studied in multiple sites, which in turn are asked to produce

and submit documentation for the comments and interpretations of the other participants. As it stands today, this complexity could be accentuated or dissolved in relation to two new situations: the *Istituzione*, which manages the services, and the Loris Malaguzzi International Center.

Many open questions thus emerge for all of us . . . My hope is that a "Reggio Children system" will be conceptualized—a system made up of interactions that will respect the autonomy of the various components while guaranteeing a dialogue among them that is capable of producing research, change, and innovation.

Above all, however, we want to ensure that the thoughts and passions of the many who have enabled the birth and development of Reggio Children will always guide and accompany the future of the project for childhood in Reggio Emilia and in the world. (Rinaldi, 2004, p. 5)

During a presentation at the "Crossing Boundaries" international conference in February 2004, Sergio Spaggiari, director of the Preschools and Infant-Toddler Centers, *Istituzione* of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia, shared the vision for the conference, which marked the ten-year anniversary of Malaguzzi's death:

The aim of the Crossing Boundaries conference is to enable an ideal "crossing" of the city of Reggio Emilia, which, though not physically a border town, has intentionally situated itself in a transit zone of ideas and people, where diversities can be the essential resource for cultural exchange. (Spaggiari, 2004, p. 12)

In honor of the 10th anniversary of Friends of Reggio Children, a former and a current president offered these remarks:

Piero Nasuelli, president from 1999–2003

The Association was also conceived as an instrument for giving opportunities to all those who consider the basic principles of a society, such as equal rights, justice, freedom of expression, peaceful coexistence among people based on mutual respect of the history and culture as an element to guarantee peace, to be the fundamental premises for disseminating a culture in which children are placed at the center of a process that enables the cultural growth of the entire society. (Reggio Children, 2004, p. 15)

Gianna Fontanesi, president since 2003

Responsibility is the principle on which the work of the Association has been constructed in these first ten years; shared responsibility based on the value of participation . . . This is the nature of the volunteers: they are capable of contributing enormous energy and enormous commitment, giving of their time and offering themselves without reserve, with generosity and enthusiasm. This would not be possible without the awareness of being a part of a system that is based on values rather than simply organization, the system to which the infant-toddler [centers] and preschools belong and thus, too, the *Istituzione* and Reggio Children. (Reggio Children, 2004, p. 15)

The Loris Malaguzzi International Center, the Reggio Children International Network, and the Reggio Children–Loris Malaguzzi International Center Foundation

The December 2005 edition of *Rechild*, one of many issues focused on the Loris Malaguzzi International Center, includes this statement of the values and vision of the center:

The International Center was created to give value to one of Reggio Emilia's strongest and most defining features: the ability to listen and give visibility and support to the rights and requests of children, young people, parents, and teachers and also to develop the city's potential and "vocation" as a pole of attraction for all those involved in the processes of education. (Reggio Children, 2005, p. 3)

In 2006, Reggio Children began to manage and coordinate programs and projects at the Loris Malaguzzi International Center together with *Istituzione*, Preschools and Infant-Toddler Centers, Municipality of Reggio Emilia, and Friends of Reggio Children. In 2007, Carlina Rinaldi became president of Reggio Children.

Juna Sassi, city officer for schools, university, and youth, wrote about the beginnings of the Reggio Children International Network and its relationship with the Loris Malaguzzi International Center in the April 2007 edition of *Rechild*:

It is a project of the city that has within it an international culture. A first meeting held by Reggio Children networks around the world sought to explore what it means today in an increasingly international world to be an

international center. We are not attempting to standardize education and culture but to safeguard their differences through dialogue. (Sassi, 2007, p. 2)

In this same issue, Carlina Rinaldi describes the Malaguzzi Center as "a metaproject":

The Center is a tool for helping us to think better and to think **other**. It is a tool for helping changes in our teaching, for thinking what we need to do as a city, as world citizens, a tool for creating conditions of paradigmatic change in our way of conceptualizing, of creating relations. In my view, therefore, and not only mine, the Center is a large metaphor for what we are, for what we have been and for what we want or would like to be. It is a way of thinking, of thinking of ourselves differently. It is a "metaproject." (Rinaldi, 2007, p. 6)

The February 2009 edition of *Rechild* heralded the opening of the preschool in the International Center:

This is the 21st municipal preschool to open in the local area. A new adventure, a joyous and challenging journey putting down roots in a particularly significant neighborhood for the city—Santa Croce—only minutes from the Reggio city center where, more than other places, varied cultures and traditions live side by side. (Reggio Children, 2009, p. 12)

In this same issue, the Reggio Children International Network, which had its first meeting in 2006, is described as "a formal network built up together with representatives in the countries Reggio Children has been interacting with longest in a sustained way" (Reggio Children, 2009, p. 15). In 2010, the Reggio Children International Network was further extended. The network, which collaborates continuously with Reggio Children, was joined by several new countries: Austria, Chile, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Uruguay, Scotland, and Venezuela.

In their article in the 10th anniversary edition of *Innovations*, "Internationality, the Reggio Emilia Approach, and NAREA," Amelia Gambetti, Emanuela Vercalli, and Paola Riccò write about the value of difference within the Reggio Children International Network and the creation of the Reggio Children–Loris Malaguzzi International Center Foundation:

Since then [2006], we have had the privilege and the responsibility to coordinate it [Reggio Children International Network]

in collaboration with our Reggio Children colleagues and with the educators of the Infant-Toddler Centers and Preschools – *Istituzione* of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia . . . On September 29, 2011, the Reggio Children–Loris Malaguzzi International Center Foundation was established in Reggio Emilia, Italy. Along with the Reggio Emilia *Institutet* in Sweden and RedSOLARE Argentina, NAREA became one of the founding members.” (Gambetti, Vercalli, & Riccò, 2012, p. 6)

President of the Foundation, Carlina Rinaldi, states that “the concept of research will be the keystone of the work of the Foundation,” that has as its guiding orientation, “improving the lives of children and communities through the promotion of quality education in Reggio Emilia and around the world.” Established through the transformation of the Friends Association, the Foundation maintains the responsibility for Remida, as well as the participation of many through volunteering efforts. Its aims are to address the potentials and the rights of people from birth, to preserve and increase the

heritage of the quality and experience of the preschools and infant-toddler centers of Reggio Emilia by promoting education as a fundamental investment for the growth of a community, and to contribute to the development of the Loris Malaguzzi International Center as a research, innovation, and experimentation center.

Current Research Projects:

A school as a learning community

City *ateliers*

Children in need—Nairobi’s Street Academy

Educating city

Laboratory of new rights

The Foundation, like the municipal infant-toddler centers and preschools, like Reggio Children, and like the traveling exhibition “The Wonder of Learning – The Hundred Languages of Children,” represents in the words of Loris Malaguzzi, “the possible for mankind and for children . . . a place of liberty, of encounter and passion, a place of resistance, and also aspiring to be a chapter of the future, narrating and courting dream and desire” (Rinaldi, 2010, p. 1).

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Istituzione, Preschools and Infant-Toddler Centers of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia

In an article in the December 2004 edition of *Rechild*, titled “In Reggio Emilia, A Place for Everyone,” Sandra Piccinini, president of *Istituzione*, Preschools and Infant-Toddler Centers, describes a new management initiative for early childhood services in the municipality of Reggio Emilia:

In October 2003, the municipality decided to manage the overall network of early childhood services through a single specific management instrument called *Istituzione*. According to Italian law, the *Istituzione* guarantees public governance of the services, without entrepreneurial aims; it has organizational and cultural autonomy and has its own budget and board of directors. One of the aims of this choice was to improve the quality of and expand the early childhood services in our city, in collaboration with the various management bodies that, over the last several years, have created new enterprises and new services.

Over the last ten years, on the impetus of the city’s strong population growth and the increase in the birth rate, to guarantee citizen’s rights to all and to provide an immediate response to the families, the municipality has opened one new infant-toddler center per year, thanks in particular to an interesting collaborative relationship between the public administration and the private cooperatives who manage the services.

Today, the city of Reggio Emilia has 22 municipal preschools, 2 of which are managed by cooperatives, and 23 infant-toddler centers, 10 of which are managed by cooperatives. Added to these are 10 state preschools and 10 private preschools with a religious base.

The broad network of educational services now makes it possible to **offer a place to all children in the 0–6 age range whose families make a request for enrollment**. Within this context, the creation of the International Center becomes, for the entire system of infant-toddler centers and preschools and for Reggio Children, a new challenge for the future and a commitment toward the pedagogical founder of this extraordinary experience, Loris Malaguzzi. (Reggio Children, 2004, p. 13)

Sergio Spaggiari, former director of the municipal preschools and infant-toddler centers, served as the director of the *Istituzione* from

2003–2010. In 2010, Mayor Graziano Delrio named Claudia Giudici, psychologist and *pedagogista*, president of the *Istituzione*. Paola Cagliari, *pedagogista*, became director of the *Istituzione* in 2010.

Currently, there are 12 municipal infant-toddler centers and 22 preschools in Reggio Emilia. In addition, the *Istituzione* works with affiliated municipal preschools and infant-toddler centers with a special agreement (managed by cooperatives), state preschools, private (Catholic) preschools, and other affiliated services for childhood.

The article “Utopia and Concreteness” in the November 2012 edition of *Rechild News* offered these reflections on 2012 and hope for the future from the *Istituzione* of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia, Reggio Children, and the Reggio Children-Loris Malaguzzi International Center Foundation:

The year 2012 will be coming to a close in a few days time, a difficult year for many, a particularly difficult year for those—like us—who work in the world of education; to continue to guarantee quality public schools, we have acted on choices of culture, organization, and management that have not been simple. We have perseveringly continued to plan, work, and move forward with our commitment to children, teachers, and parents, to a society in which policies and interventions of quality are necessary—our **utopian concreteness** . . . Even though the future appears uncertain, and guaranteeing the rights of the weakest and freedom of thinking seem to be an objective to pursue and difficult to achieve, the invitation, promise and wish we make for ourselves and for all **women and men of good will** is not to give up working and hoping, so that the future might truly be “a lovely day” for very many people in the world. (Reggio Children, 2012, p. 1)

RESOURCES

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Voices: Conversations from North America

Exploring the Reggio Emilia Approach from a Jewish Perspective

by Mara Bier



On November 18, 2013, the Washington, DC Jewish community was honored to host an evening of learning presented by Amelia Gambetti and Lella Gandini, with remarks by Margie Cooper. The evening's presentation, titled "Places, Dialogues, Identities," was held at Temple Emanuel Early Childhood Center in Kensington, Maryland, and attended by Jewish early childhood educators from the Greater Washington, DC area and across the nation. Also in attendance were members of DCREA (Washington DC Reggio Emilia Alliance). The evening began with a tour of the school, and then opening remarks were made by Rabbi Warren Stone, Temple Emanuel; Madeline Lowitz-Gold, director, Temple Emanuel Early Childhood Center; Naama Zoran, Reggio Children International Network representative from Israel; Steve Rakitt, CEO, The Jewish Federation of Greater Washington; and Mara Bier, director of early childhood, Department of Jewish Life and Learning, The Jewish Federation of Greater Washington. Below are Mara's comments.

It was 1993. I went to my mailbox at the Board of Jewish Education of Greater Washington and saw that I had received an invitation. There was to be a three-day conference in DC, titled "A Reggio Emilia Symposium: Shared Goals, Different Directions," featuring Loris Malaguzzi, Sergio Spaggiari, Carla Rinaldi, Tiziana Filippini, and Amelia Gambetti and organized in collaboration with the National Learning Center and the Capitol Children's Museum.

Interesting . . . I was curious. We received four tickets, and I invited three colleagues. We sat in the audience, and the days unfolded. Loris Malaguzzi stepped up to the podium. I was mesmerized by his words, his philosophy, his passion, and his view of children. The wisdom was remarkable, the story determined, the understanding of children beyond what I had ever heard before. Or so I thought that was what I understood. I learned quickly that, like our Torah, one quick "read" is hardly enough to bring understanding of this deep and complex philosophy. You have to turn it and turn it and turn it again.

And so we did. The Jewish early childhood community here in Greater Washington began

to learn and collaborate. It took a while, but in 2000, the first group of four of us traveled to Reggio Emilia. We thought we understood the Reggio Emilia approach then, but we learned it was deeper than that—we kept turning. Our group of interested educators grew. We read, studied, and attended sessions at NAEYC conferences. We went to NAREA conferences; we visited "The Hundred Languages of Children" exhibit. Whenever we encountered Reggio learning, we always encountered our colleagues from Jewish preschools around the country and in Israel.

We wanted to bring this way of thinking about children, learning, and schools to our community. We already had many excellent schools, but we wanted to grow our practice and deepen our understandings. We visited local schools that were working this way in DC. The interest grew and spread. Here we are blessed with a strong, connected community of directors, and a core group accepted the challenge.

Shortly after we began our studies, we met Naama Zoran at a NAEYC conference, and she has guided our community of learners in strengthening our understandings. She pushed and she pulled, and she challenged us

and continues to do so. She has been a determined force in the growth of our community's learning and understanding. She will not let us settle for anything but excellence. She has helped us frame our vision of highest quality for young children.

The core value system we heard about from the educators of Reggio Emilia was a perfect fit for our Jewish values. All of what we hold dear, as educators of Jewish children, and what we strive for as a Jewish people were there. In order to focus on this aspect, we worked together with the educators of Reggio Emilia to organize a two-year study group initiative called "Exploring Reggio Through a Jewish Perspective."

A dream came true for us when in 2008, Naama and I led our first Jewish study group to Reggio Emilia along with our colleagues from California. In 2012, we brought a second Jewish study group to Reggio. Each group included over 70 educators from DC, Baltimore, California, and Israel, learning together in Italy. Many of those participants are here tonight. We look forward to our next opportunity.

Members of our community of educators have attended many NAREA conferences and NAEYC sessions and have had the opportunity to learn from Amelia, Lella, and other educators from Reggio Emilia. We have visited the exhibit as it toured the country. When we return home from all of these learning opportunities, we meet, study, reflect, and question, question, question. We have also joined with other DC educators in the newly formed DCREA group where monthly we learn with Jennifer Azzariti and other wonderful DC educators. Our *pedagogista* group is made up of *pedagogisti*, *atelieristi*, and curriculum specialists from many Jewish schools in our community. We meet monthly to talk, reflect, question, challenge, and learn from each other.

Tonight, we have the opportunity to gather together educators from Jewish schools and leading Jewish early childhood national organizations to learn, study, reflect, and question. We have traveled to Italy, California, Oklahoma, Oregon, Florida, and Colorado to learn together with you and from you. Tonight, the Washington Jewish community welcomes you and all of our guests into **our** tent. We are honored that all of us are here together. Thank you, Lella, Amelia, Emanuela, and Margie for coming to teach us tonight. I extend the warmest welcome to you from our Washington, DC community and our colleagues across the country.

Each time we open the Torah, we read the same words but hear them differently because each time, we come as a different learner, ready to hear and understand at a deeper level. And so it is with our learning tonight. You will help us stay committed to our values and to the potential of all children to think, to learn, and to construct knowledge. To that end, we will continue to build our community, brick by brick.

The core value system we heard about from the educators of Reggio Emilia was a perfect fit for our Jewish values. All of what we hold dear, as educators of Jewish children, and what we strive for as a Jewish people were there.

—Mara Bier

Manifesto – Reggio Children International Network, February 2014 (Work in Progress)

This manifesto was issued in February 2014, on the occasion of the ninth annual meeting of the Reggio Children International Network.

“Children’s earliest experiences form the basis for all subsequent learning. If solid foundations are laid in the early years, later learning is more effective and is more likely to continue lifelong, lessening the risk of leaving school early, increasing the equity of educational outcomes, and reducing the costs for society in terms of lost talent and public spending on social, health, and even, justice systems.” (From a communication from the European Commission “Early Childhood Education and Care: Providing All Our Children with the Best Start for the World of Tomorrow”)

“Study after study shows that the sooner a child begins learning, the better he or she does down the road. But today, fewer than 3 in 10 four year-olds are enrolled in a high-quality preschool program. Most middle-class parents can’t afford a few hundred bucks a week for private preschool. And for poor children who need help the most, this lack of access to preschool education can shadow them for the rest of their lives. Tonight, I propose working with states to make high-quality preschool available to every child in America. Every dollar we invest in high-quality early education can save more than seven dollars later on—by boosting graduation rates, reducing teen pregnancy, even reducing violent crime. In states that make it a priority to educate our youngest children, like Georgia or Oklahoma, studies show students grow up more likely to read and do math at grade level, graduate high school, hold a job, and form more stable families of their own. So let’s do what works and make sure none of our children start the race of life already behind. Let’s give our kids that chance.” (President Barack Obama, “State of the Union” speech, February 12, 2013)

“Education has shaped my life and the history of my country. I grew up in a society ravaged by war and mired in poverty. Schools had been destroyed. My classes were held in the open under a tree. We had no desks, chairs, or other basic necessities. The Republic of Korea was on its knees, but education enabled the country to stand tall again. The United Nations

Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and other international partners provided books and school supplies to help pave the road to recovery. I will never forget the hope that these basic tools gave us. Even in the worst circumstances, education helps to give children confidence to face the future. As Secretary-General of the United Nations, I want every child, without exception, to have the same opportunity that I had. The power of education to transform lives is universal. When you ask parents what they want for their children—even in war zones and disaster areas—they seek the same thing first: education. Parents want their children in school.” (Ban Ki-moon, United Nations Secretary-General, New York, September 2012)

The idea of a manifesto, an international manifesto that states that education, in a broader sense, is a common good, was born from the conviction that education is the primary element of the promotion of a global democratic citizenship and a right of all human beings.

“Those of us who work in the field of education have learned ‘on the job’ that many things can be affected by one’s cultural heritage, by theories and experience, by literature, art, and economics, by scientific research and technology. But many things are also born of intuition, taste, ethics, the choice of values, of reasons, and opportunities that, in part, we can control and, in part, we cannot control and that are suggested only to a certain extent by the job of living itself.

Yet even in this constellation hovering between theories and practice that are both stable and unstable, necessary, possible, and even accidental and between the variations, imbalances, and even adversities of social policies, there is plenty of margin and freedom for us to use our intelligence, passion, and creativity. So despite everything, it is permissible to think that creativity, or rather knowledge and the wonder of knowledge (our most important right, which



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Education is a fundamental right for all human beings with no distinction of race, color, gender, language, religion, political opinion, and it is a permanent condition for life.

so often goes unrecognized) can serve as the strong point of our work. It is thus our continuing hope that creativity will become a normal traveling companion in our children's growth and development." (Loris Malaguzzi, from the catalogue of the exhibit *The Hundred Languages of Children*)

"Our experience also confirms that children need a great deal of freedom: the freedom to investigate and to try, to make mistakes and to correct mistakes, to choose where and with whom to invest their curiosity, intelligence, and emotions. Children need the freedom to appreciate the infinite resources of their hands, their eyes, and their ears, the resources of forms, materials, sounds, and colors. They need the freedom to realize how reason, thought, and imagination can create continuous interweavings of things and can move and shake the world. Children must have the freedom to do all this without anyone arbitrarily setting the timing, rhythms, and measures for them. Yet this valuable apprenticeship, which cannot be left to chance, can only be accomplished when children are assured of the broad and active co-participation of adults." (Loris Malaguzzi, from the catalogue of the exhibit *The Hundred Languages of Children*)

Education is essential to the life of each human being and the community. Education is a fundamental right for all human beings with no distinction of race, color, gender, language, religion, political opinion, and it is a permanent condition for life. It is collective, without limits, and universal. As water, nobody must be obliged to buy education for his or her own necessity; everybody has the right to have access to good quality education.

As it is a common good, education sets as its roots the sharing, the social bond, the collective initiative and proposes the themes of being the same, of democracy, of each person being an owner of rights. Through education, each person is able to be part of the civil collectivity and community since birth to receive and contribute to civil society in a relation of active reciprocity, respecting each other's subjectivity and the different cultures. The diminished economical resources, but especially the cultural and social issues in regard to individual freedom versus social solidarity and protection, risk to legitimate choices that are going against the idea of education as a common good. Education cannot be guided by economic and market issues. The town of Reggio Emilia, the *Istituzione* - Infant-Toddler Centers and Preschools, Reggio Children, and the Foundation "Reggio Children-Loris Malaguzzi Center," together with the Reggio Children International Network, ask for support in wording the value of education as a common good.

This manifesto is seeking to activate an international movement that could raise its voice on the right to quality education for all the children, our children, all over the world. With this manifesto, we are trying to reach all the subjects—teachers, children with their families—with the aim to also reach governments that through their power and action can influence education, support us, and give a strong basis for our work. It is a project that sees the responsibility lying in the hands of national and international governments and national and local organizations.

North American Reggio Emilia Alliance

Resources

Message from Reggio Children

The office of Reggio Children is pleased that there is so much interest in North America about our infant centers, preprimary schools, and educational philosophy. We note with pride the resources published and professional development initiatives organized about the Reggio Emilia approach to education. We caution interested educators that some resources and initiatives related to the Reggio Emilia approach have not accurately reflected our experiences and philosophy. In order to ensure accurate representation of ideas concerning Reggio, we urge publishers and producers of resources as well as organizers of initiatives concerning the Reggio Emilia approach to coordinate their plans with Reggio Children, s.r.l., via Bligny 1/a, 42100 Reggio Emilia, Italy, reggiochildren@reggiochildren.it, www.reggiochildren.it

Bibliography

Visit the NAREA website for a comprehensive listing of resources related to the Reggio Emilia educational philosophy.

Reggio Children Publications

Resources published by Reggio Children are available from Learning Materials Workshop.
800-693-7164
mail@learningmaterialswork.com
www.learningmaterialswork.com

North American Study Groups in Reggio Emilia, Italy

May 24-31, 2014
North American Study Group

Contact: Angela Ferrario
aferrario@comcast.net

International Professional Development Initiatives in Reggio Emilia, Italy

April 6-11, 2014
International Study Group

Contact: Reggio Children
www.reggiochildren.it

NAREA Jobs Site

Searching for Reggio-inspired employment? Searching for Reggio-inspired candidates? See the NAREA Jobs Site section of our website to post or apply for positions. Reggio-inspired educators are in demand, and NAREA strives to connect employers with employees through this service. Please help us spread the word in your community.

Contacts for Reggio Children

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“The Wonder of Learning – The Hundred Languages of Children” Exhibit

January 24–May 14, 2014

Greenville, SC
Hosted by First Baptist Church Kindergarten and Infant-Toddler Program, the exhibit will be located at McAlister Square Mall. A series of initiatives have been organized in connection with the presence of the exhibit.
Contact: Kristy Way, kristykway@gmail.com
greenville.wonderoflearning.org

June 19–December 7, 2014

Albuquerque, NM
Hosted by New Mexico Wonder of Learning Collaborative, the exhibit will be located at New Mexico Museum of Natural History & Science. A series of initiatives will be organized in connection with the presence of the exhibit.
Contact: Gigi Schroeder Yu
gigi.wonderoflearning@gmail.com
newmexicowol.squarespace.com

Visit www.thewonderoflearning.com and www.reggioalliance.org for more information about the exhibit.

Conference Calendar

Discount for NAREA members at all initiatives listed

“The Wonder of Learning – The Hundred Languages of Children” Initiative

Greenville, SC

May 1–2, 2014

Encounters with Literacy: Stories from the Daily Lives of Young Children

Speakers:

Amelia Gambetti, Lella Gandini, and Project Infinity educators

Contact:

Kristy Way, kristykway@gmail.com
greenville.wonderoflearning.org

The Tenth NAREA Summer Conference – Promoting the Rights of Children: Community Participation and Dialogue

Albuquerque, NM

June 19–21, 2014

Speakers:

Carla Rinaldi, Amelia Gambetti, Lella Gandini, Carolyn Edwards, and George Forman

Encounters with “The Wonder of Learning – The Hundred Languages of Children” Exhibit

NAREA Lifetime Achievement Award ceremony honoring George Forman

Participatory *ateliers*

Virtual visits to Reggio-inspired schools

Contact:

NAREA, www.reggioalliance.org

“The Wonder of Learning – The Hundred Languages of Children” Initiatives

Albuquerque, NM

September 12–13, 2014

Children as Citizens: Early Learning Environments in Nature, Culture, and Community

Speakers:

Karen Callaghan, Jason Avery, and Jesùs Oviedo

October 24–25, 2014

Reflective Practice: Creating Professional Development Practices That Support the Teacher as Researcher

Contact:

Gigi Schroeder Yu
gigi.wonderoflearning@gmail.com
newmexicowol.squarespace.com

Call for Cover Photographs

If you have photographs from your educational community that represent the values inherent in the Reggio Emilia philosophy and you would like to see one of them published on the cover of *Innovations*, please submit jpg or tiff files of high-resolution photographs (300 dpi @ 8" x 10") to Judith Allen Kaminsky, judithallenkaminsky@gmail.com

Call for Articles

The editors of *Innovations* are always interested in experiences from the field related to Reggio-inspired work. If you would like to submit an article for publication in *Innovations*, contact Judith Allen Kaminsky, judithallenkaminsky@gmail.com

NAREA Mission Statement

The North American Reggio Emilia Alliance (NAREA) is a network of educators, parents, and advocates seeking to elevate both the quality of life and the quality of schools and centers for young children.

We envision a world where all children are honored and respected for their potential, capabilities, and humanity.

Our mission is to build a diverse community of advocates and teachers to promote and defend the rights of children, families, and teachers of all cultures through a collaboration of colleagues inspired by the Reggio Emilia philosophy.

Visit www.reggioalliance.org for regularly updated conferences and initiatives calendar



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Our experience also confirms that children need a great deal of freedom: the freedom to investigate and to try, to make mistakes and to correct mistakes, to choose where and with whom to invest their curiosity, intelligence, and emotions. Children need the freedom to appreciate the infinite resources of their hands, their eyes, and their ears, the resources of forms, materials, sounds, and colors. They need the freedom to realize how reason, thought, and imagination can create continuous interweavings of things, and can move and shake the world.

- *Loris Malaguzzi*