



Belmont Cragin Chicago Public school

FOLLOW-UP REPORT FOR 2013

THE HUNDRED LANGUAGES WONDER OF LEARNING EXHIBIT
IN CHICAGO, JUNE – DECEMBER, 2010

Submitted by: Karen Haigh, Kristin Brizzolara, and Jesús Oviedo

QUESTIONS POSED BY NAREA AND REGGIO CHILDREN

In general its difficult to say what or how the Wonder of Learning exhibit in Chicago in 2010 influenced learning or our current experiences in 2014, as there are other factors, variables, or experiences to consider beyond the Wonder of Learning Exhibit.

Questions:

Question 1. How did “The Wonder of Learning – The Hundred Languages of Children exhibit and the NAREA Professional Development Series provoke dialogues around quality in early childhood education in your community?”

Much of what we reported last year about the current notion of quality in our context is still relevant. Overall, the conversation and dialogue on quality have drifted from educational approaches and best practices to *assessments such as* The CLASS, the ECERS, and Teaching Strategies Gold and the new Quality Rating program developed through Race to the Top. Most teachers are focusing on trying to react and comply with all these demands. Additionally all the Head Start programs with the City of Chicago’s Family Support Services are being reviewed by the Federal Government in 2014, so programs have been preoccupied with preparing for this high stakes evaluation. If any classrooms score low, the grantee maybe discontinued. More and more pressure is being placed on Head Start to prove it makes a difference as some would like to see the program eliminated.

The state of Illinois received some Race to the Top funds from the federal government for early childhood education. Most of the funds will be used to evaluate the quality of each program using a rating system from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest). Programs are now being evaluated on this new rating system and will achieve increased funding for higher scores.

We still question the meaning of the term “quality”. One question we have begun to ask is why might principles and practices of the Reggio Approach be beneficial to programs in the Chicago area, especially publicly funded programs for children from low-income communities?

In the Questions and Responses section of the new Crossroads for Learning website there has been discussion on the advantages of Reggio Influenced programs within an American context, which also related to enhancing the quality of learning.

Below are some reflections/responses by Crossroads for Learning Board Members.

Karen Haigh: Reggio Inspired learning supports and provokes children and adults to be better explorers and experimenters, communicators and collaborators, creators and problems solvers which are all needed for 21st century learning. Additionally, key strategies for learning are use of dialogue, documentation, reflection, and revisiting.

Assessment is valued as a tool to inform educators of learning processes rather than assess educators. Qualitative data is equally as important as quantitative data and therefore provides more information about what and how learning occurs.

Academics are tended to but in a more meaningful and imbedded way as knowledge, skills, and/or attitudes are advanced. When Loris Malaguzzi was asked what happens to these children as they go on, he stated, these children “will have an extra pocket” from which to cope, thrive, learn, and relate throughout life.

Juana Reyes: This is a very challenging time for advocates and educators of young children. A time in which the rights of children are violated by an educational agenda that tries to “teach” young children a very limited set of skills and information using approaches that are contrary to sound, developmentally appropriate practice. States are scrambling to implement the core standards and policymakers, administrators, and teachers look to early educators to “prepare” young children for schooling. This agenda is limiting the possibilities for early educators and young children alike. Developmental theory and brain research has informed early education as a discipline that young children learn and build understanding through the use of all five senses, and they do so in the context of relationship. Nonetheless, exploration, movement, curiosity, and invention are replaced by direct instruction, desk time, workbooks, and large group activities in early childhood settings.

We, as early educators and advocates for young children should certainly prepare young children for their future. But how should we proceed? The Reggio Emilia Approach cultivates creativity, communication, collaboration, and critical thinking for not only the young children, but for their teachers as well. It equips children with the possibilities for not only answering finite questions, but also to generate their own theories about the world. Likewise, teachers are invited to become reflective practitioners and co-researchers with children as they explore possibilities and build understanding.

Jesus Oviedo: The Reggio Emilia approach is not a prescribed curriculum per se but rather a philosophy that fosters a strong “Image of the Child”. According to Loris Malaguzzi, founder of the Reggio Emilia approach, “This theory within you pushes you to behave in certain ways; it orients you as you talk to the child, listen to the child, observe the child. According to Lella Gandini, Liaison for Reggio Children, “All children have preparedness, potential, curiosity; they have interest, in relationship, in constructing their own learning and in negotiating with everything the environment brings to them”.

With today’s programmatic and financial challenges, this approach can go a long way in adding value to education in the world of standards, especially for educators whom are searching for deeper meaning in their work. With so much on their plates, this philosophy can inspire educators to foster creative problem-solving, inquiry, and critical thinking. Among other things, the Reggio Emilia approach fosters social learning. Children can learn from each other as well as from adults. Groups of children can solve problems with each other, employ creativity and imagination, and formulate hypotheses, test-out theories and form consensus, giving children valuable tools throughout life. It is believed that children who attend the preschools of Reggio become great citizens.

Question 2. How did the exhibit and the professional development series strengthen the collaborative participation of educators, families, administrators, community members and/or government leaders in the dialogue about early childhood education in your community?

Inception of Crossroads for Learning

After the Exhibit the city Head Start program wanted to support a follow-up study tour to

Reggio, which occurred in April of 2012. This particular study tour was an extremely collaborative group of people. As a result some of the people from that group are became invested in Crossroads for Learning and became board members.

Crossroads for Learning was officially formed in late 2013 to inspire, support, connect and challenge educators as they seek to understand and apply principles and practices of the Reggio Emilia Approach within their own context in order to advance the quality of programs.

Both the study group and Crossroads for Learning are mostly composed of educational administrators and teachers in private and public early childhood programs. Crossroads for Learning has some museum educators and a person from a park district. The group is working on getting support from local dignitaries and parents.

So far we have created:

- A Board of Directors and an Advisory Board
- A website with the following sections: About us, Events and Resources, Contact us (with questions and responses), Join Our E-mail list along with photos of programs within the Chicago area
- A mailing list
- A Fall, 2013 Launch event with 70 educators participating
- A December 7th Retreat with 60 educators participating
- In collaboration with Loyola Law School we have become incorporated with the state of Illinois and are in process of becoming a non-for profit organization.
- We are in process of finalizing our by-laws and creating a spring seminar on studying the city.

Currently we are working on a plan for professional development activities in response to the strategic plan session.

Invitation for the Launch Event

The graphic is a promotional flyer for the launch event. It features a teal background on the left with white and dark teal text. On the right, there is a map of the intersection of Halsted St and 290, with 'THE PARTHENON' marked at the intersection. Below the map, event details are listed in white text on a dark teal background.

INTRODUCING
CROSSROADS
For Learning
An Intersection of Ideas for Chicago Area Reggio-Inspired Educators

Mission
To inspire, support, connect, and challenge early childhood educators as they seek to understand and apply principles and practices of the Reggio Emilia approach to learning within their own context.

Key Values of the Organization

- Learners are the protagonists of their learning.
- The learning process is valued and respected.
- Participation and collaboration are essential to the learning process.
- Learning is built on relationships and reciprocity.

JOIN US FOR A RECEPTION
The Parthenon
314 S. Halsted St. Chicago
Appetizers & cash bar
Thursday, September 26, 2013
5:00pm - 7:00pm
RSVP by September 1, 2013.
crossroadseventsvp@gmail.com
Include name, affiliation & number of guests.

organization & website
LAUNCH

Five State Study Group

Since the 2008 Study Tour and after the exhibit in 2010, the Five State Study Group has been collaborating in a variety of capacities. The group is composed mostly of Reggio-Inspired educators from California, Colorado, Illinois, Missouri, New Mexico. In 2012, the study group had a retreat at the Ghost Ranch in New Mexico. In February 2014, the Chicago collaborative, Crossroads for Learning posted New Mexico's upcoming Wonder of Learning Professional Development initiatives. Crossroads for Learning is especially encouraging a strong presence of people from Illinois for *Creating Professional Development Practices that Support the Teacher as Researcher*. There will be an Invitation to this Professional Development session for the 5 State Study Tour on October 24-25, 2014.

Question 3. What opportunities for teachers, parents, administrators, community members and/or government leaders to meet and discuss the values and goals of education and childhood were generated as a result of the presence of the exhibit and the professional development series initiatives in your community? How did these opportunities contribute to a better understanding of the various perspectives that exist within your community on this subject?

Funders and Government entities seem to be preoccupied with the Head Start Federal Review, the New Rating System and Class and ECHR's Assessments. There seems to be little interest in focusing on the ideals or practices of Reggio such as collaboration, communication, and creativity. Some areas where there may be a spark of interest are in use of materials, documentation, and critical thinking.

The Head Start program review is a high stakes evaluation where if a few classrooms score lower on the Class, the Grantee's (Chicago's Department of Family Support Services) contract will not be renewed and new grantees will be found.

There continues to be major changes in organizational structure this year in both the Chicago Public Schools Head Start, Parent Centers and Preschool for All programs.

Funders seem to be more focused on assessment and more recently on attendance. As a result interest in Reggio Inspired work has decreased. In spite of the lack of interest by key administrators and funders, Crossroads for Learning continues to make plans and promote collaboration and thinking about this work. Much of this has been done through a retreat (with approximately 60 participants) which looked at possibilities for the future. The attached agenda and notes from Crossroads for Learning Retreat shares some ideas that arose.



Agenda for Retreat: December 7, 2013

- 9:00 - 9:30 Crossroads Introduction**
- Power point of Reggio
 - Power point with website
- 9:30 - 10:00 Introductions of the group**
1. Name
 2. Program/position
 3. Involvement exploring Reggio
 4. Principles focused on
 5. Hopes for this retreat
- 10:00 - 10:15 Review Updated Timeline**
- Review Updated Time Line
- 10:15 - 10:30 BREAK
- 10:30 11:15 Small Group Work (have someone record main ideas that are discussed/Write down on large sheets)**
- A. Discuss what you think has been accomplished with exploring Reggio in Chicago Area
 - B. Discuss issues with exploring Reggio within your context and the Chicago Area.
 - C. List threats to pursuing this REA
 - D. List opportunities for pursuit of this REA
 - E. If you had to choose three goals for working together on this approach, what they might be?
 - a. What content areas need to be focused on?
 - b. What learning strategies, activities or experiences best help support our work adapting and adopting the REA.
 - c. What resources would be beneficial for you?
- 10:45 - 11:15 Share Ideas with whole group**
- Note ideas for goals that keep coming up
- 11:15 – 12:00 Choose goals including focus areas and strategies**
- Chose key goals, focus areas for content & strategies or activities to support this work.

Common themes from the notes taken at the retreat were as follows:

- Explaining the approach to parents – power point presentation that could be universally used with key components
- Network of centers – list of centers could be created and included in this could be a description of what principles that center is working on.

- Visiting each other's centers – conferences each year at a different center so you can see different schools. Also encouraging people to see programs outside of Illinois.
 - Documentation – could Book Vine be a resource?
 - Better understanding of studies
 - Getting support from administrators – Lella's presentation in February may help.
 - Focus groups for specific groups like (English language learners, special needs, infant and toddler, elementary, preschool)
 - Share work with larger community – seminar with an exhibit focusing on the city
 - Finding time to meet and talk about/think about the children's work –
 - Validating qualitative data –
 - Articulating value of constructivism, play-based, inquiry-based, collaborative learning –
 - Finding a balance – directive and hands-off . Example of material exploration, dialogue with children etc.
 - Revisit...why are you exploring this approach? One mentioned how it is a state of mind.
 - What does a Reggio inspired environment look like?
- STRATEGY – Choose a few topics that have been more prominent and have them be a focus area for a mini-conference March/April.

Beginning ideas for an action plan based on ideas from the retreat:

(1) Have an annual mini-conference with site changing each year so educators can tour different programs; place donates space for a day. This idea is also included in number 4. relating to a professional development plan.

(2) Columbia College offers a seminar on the Study of the City with eight sessions over a 15 week period. We hope to then plan for an exhibit of the work to be presented in spring or winter of 2015 (It will take time to look at documentation from diverse settings; about eight sites will be involved in the seminar on Thursday nights). This would be a traveling exhibit that would be hosted in various places throughout Chicago such as a bank building, Pilsen neighborhood, Hyde Park Arts Center, downtown, etc. We anticipate about 1/3 the space of the Wonder of Learning (which was 5,000 sq. ft. minimum); ours would be about 1,000 sq. ft., which is approximately the size of two classrooms. We need do a cost projection. How can we assure this Crossroad exhibit will contain Reggio ideals and what we are doing? Through connecting with and representing experiences from the Seminar on the City, we hope to exhibit work that remains within the ideals of Reggio as experienced within our context.

(3) Create a PowerPoint to introduce Reggio ideals, principles and practices within our context to parents.

(4) Create a formal plan for professional development. After looking at the timeline for professional development activities, it was decided March or April would be the best time for our mini-conference.

(5) Have additional specialized meetings-sessions within the year. (i.e. Focus on special rights, elementary education, the role of administrators, etc.)

A future event happening in Collaboration with Columbia College's Education Department a presentation with Lella Gandini and Educators from the Chicago Public School's Velma Thomas Center. See Flyer below.

Columbia College Chicago's Education Department & Crossroads for Learning present an evening with Dr. Lella Gandini.

THE REGGIO EMILIA APPROACH TO LEARNING AND IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. CONTEXTS

Thursday, February 27, 2014

4:30pm to 6:30pm

Columbia College Chicago, Music Hall
1014 S. Michigan Ave., First Floor

R.S.V.P. by Friday, February 21, 2014

Listen to Lella Gandini and Velma Thomas Early Childhood Center educators share experiences with children and learning. Light refreshments available.



Lella Gandini, Ed.D, is a consultant in early childhood education and the Reggio Children United States Liaison for the Dissemination of the Reggio Emilia Approach. She is a Visiting Scholar at Lesley University and taught previously at Smith College and at the University of Massachusetts. She is an author of many articles and book chapters about the Reggio Emilia approach and is co-editor and co-author of The Hundred Languages of Children: The Reggio Emilia Approach to Early Childhood Education; Beautiful Stuff: Learning with Found Materials; Bambini: The Italian Approach to Infant/ Toddler Care; In the Spirit of the Studio: Learning from the Atelier of Reggio Emilia; and Insights and Inspiration from Reggio Emilia: Stories of Teachers and Children from North America.

Columbia
COLLEGE CHICAGO

Education

CROSSROADS
For Learning

Question 4. How did the exhibit and professional development series impact the visibility of the learning and relationships of children, teachers and parents within your early childhood education community?

We have taken it upon ourselves to try and making learning (especially the learning process) more visible even though many funders and administrators seem less interested. In collaboration with Columbia College we have planned a mini-action research project to involve several of the private and public Reggio-Inspired early education programs collaborating through Crossroads for Learning. As mentioned previously, we hope to later develop a traveling exhibit, which would make children's learning more visible.

THE CITY OF CHICAGO PROJECT: EXPLORING, UNDERSTANDING, AND EXPRESSIONS OF CHICAGO AND CITIZENSHIP

A Mini-Action Research Project with Reggio Inspired Early Childhood Education Programs in the Chicago Metro Area

DAYS, DATES, AND TIMES: INSTRUCTOR:
Thursdays, 5:30 – 8:30 Karen Haigh, Ph.D.
Feb. 6 & 20, Mar. 6 & 20, Apr. 10 & 24, May 8 & 22

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

Influenced by Reggio Emilia's work studying The City and Ben Mardell's work with teachers and young children on How Things Work, this project will look at how young children create, think critically, understand, and communicate ideas about Chicago. There will be a later follow-up phase to this project where documentation will be organized, portrayed, and presented within the Chicago area.

OVERARCHING GOAL:

ECE educators collaboratively research and study children's understanding and expressions while provoking deeper understanding and advocating for a better understanding of the image of the young child and their learning processes.

Question 5. How have the early childhood educators in your community learned to extend the visibility of classroom experiences of learning and relationships to include connections with the values and goals of parents and administrators, as a result of the professional development opportunities created by exhibit and professional development series? In which way did the educators connect children's experiences to government/district mandated curriculum standards and outcomes?

As mentioned in last year's report, it seems that the notion assessing or noting quality programming and children's learning is only viewed as valid if it is in a test like or quantitative format. Additionally teachers and assistant teachers are all being evaluated using CLASS. It seems that programs are being scrutinized more intensely now.

Question 6. How did the exhibit and the professional development series encourage educators to document the role of the environment in their classrooms? What did educators and parents learn about the role of the environment within the school community through the documentation of the learning and relationships that typically develop within that context?

Since our last report, there still has not been that much of a focus on the role of the environment. We may be able to revive the looking at environments through Crossroads Professional Development plan.

Question 7. Were the educators in your community able to organize an exhibit of documents of the learning and relationships of children, teachers and parents to be shared with community members in a public context during your hosting period? If so, where was the exhibit and how did your community respond? If not, what plans do you have for such an annual exhibit?

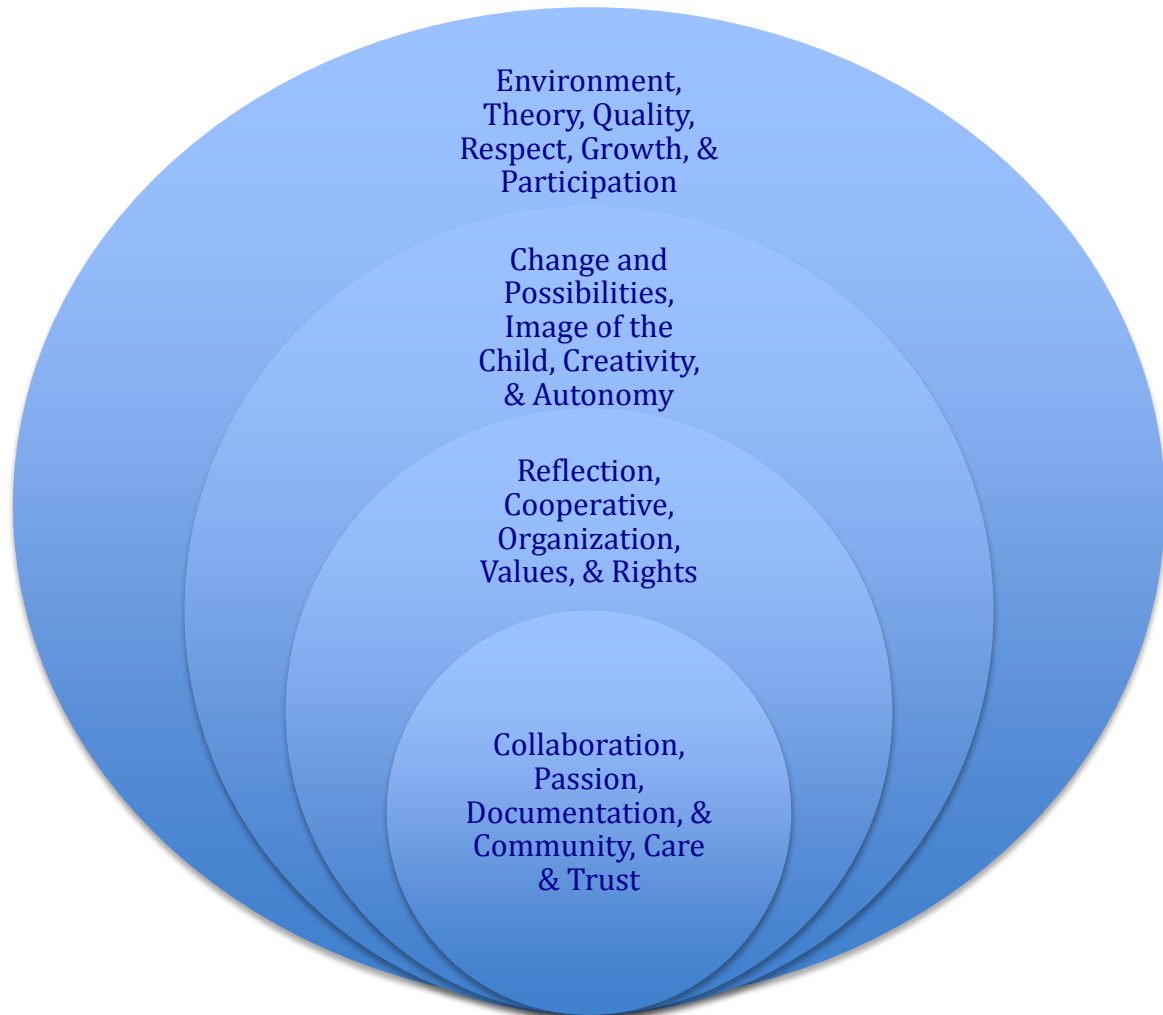
The organization has brainstormed some long-term plans to develop an exhibit related to the City of Chicago Project. The content of the exhibit as well as the documents and artifacts to be displayed will develop from various classroom and children's experiences as related to the project. As board members with previous gallery and exhibit experience, Kristin Brizzolara and Jesús Oviedo have been working on a projected cost analysis for the proposed exhibit.

Question 8. How did the presence of the exhibit and professional development series contribute to educators', parents' and community members' abilities to advocate for the rights of children in the community? In what ways did their abilities develop? Did educators and parents develop a better understanding of current policies regarding early childhood education and issues being addressed by school and government officials, the disposition to communicate with school and government officials through e-mail and phone and/or attendance at meetings and rallies}

One of the many goals for creation of an traveling exhibit throughout Chicago is to facilitate the general public and key decision makers in being able to be able to see children's capabilities and therefore adjust curriculum requirements to be more engaging and developmentally appropriate while promoting deeper thinking and stronger social skills.

I think its important for us all revisit the key words that arose from the Chicago group that went to Reggio in 2012. Following is a framework sharing key words that came up repeatedly. It may do some good to share this Framework at our first mini-conference in 2014 in the late spring.

Framework of key word for Chicago Study Tour of Reggio Emilia, 2012



Key Questions or Reflections that we need to continually asked and share are:

- We could also ask what value do the infant/toddler centers and preschool programs have on our city?
- What is our DNA?
- What we could realize from gathering and viewing documentation of the history of our education. (i.e. Public Schools, Social Service organizations, etc.)

- What is in a name, what's the story behind the name of your school, agency, center? [Maybe each in gathering a landscape of programs we can ask questions about the program.](#)
- Should we consider creating a Chicago Exhibit? How can we make the culture of childhood visible? How can we make the processes for learning visible? [We are working on this now.](#)
- How can we help others to see the value in “how to learn” and not so much the “what to learn”? [Through the our own exhibit, sharing at our mini-conference and going to other conferences such as Narea's summer conference and New Mexico's Professional Development session in October, 2014.](#)
- What does it mean to learn how to learn? What is complex learning?
- What is our notion of quality?
- It is important to pay attention to the details in the drawings. Why? [This will be pursued in the seminar and at our mini-conference.](#)
- Each of us needs to be listened to, welcomed, and respected. What does that mean?
- How can those interested in these ideals and practices work together more and connect? [More possibilities for connection can and have occurred through our Crossroads events.](#)