Innovations

In Early Education: The International Reggio Emilia Exchange

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Introduction

This issue of Innovations focuses on the value of educational research in early childhood education. In the article “Educational Research and Professional Development: An Existential, Ethical Approach Necessary for Interpreting the Complexity of Life and Educational Experiences,” Deanna Margini, pedagogista for the Preschools and Infant-Toddler Centers, Istituzione of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia, writes that the Reggio educators’ way of thinking about research “is to interpret it in a practical way within our everyday life and experience with the children.” Deanna also describes research as the “epistemological basis of knowledge and the key element in the democracy of merger with Stony Point, a lower and middle school, to the present. From the beginning, they write, “intentions came to be a way of engaging in teacher research at both the individual and school-wide level. Teachers learned to look carefully at the intentions behind children’s actions.” Marty, Anna, and Mauren share that following the merger, “the process of setting intentions created a culture of teacher-research for everyone, and the school-wide intention became a tool for binding the faculties of the two schools together.” They also describe the value of continuity, intersubjectivity, and studio thinking in the evolution of teacher research with children and families at Sabot at Stony Point and trace the development of one of their “umbrella projects,” a two-year experience called “Our Richmond.” In “Identity and Aims of the Infant-Toddler Centres and Preschools,” Indications writes this about the relationship between continuity and research: “The infant-toddler centres and the preschools endeavor to carry out research and experimentation and to expand the opportune forms of connection and continuity between the whole of early childhood services and the primary school, based on exchange, comparison of ideas, and shared professional development and planning…” (Istituzione of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia, 2010, p. 7–8).

We are pleased to publish tributes to an honorary citizen of Reggio Emilia in “Remembering Jerome Bruner,” who passed away in June. Mayor Luca Vecchi of Reggio Emilia; Howard Gardner, Hobbs Professor of Cognition and Education, Harvard Graduate School of Education; Lella Gandini, Reggio Children liaison in the U.S. for dissemination of the Reggio Emilia image on cover courtesy of Sabot at Stony Point.

Research represents one of the essential dimensions of (the) life of children and adults alike, a knowledge-building tension that must be recognized and valued.

—Indications – Preschools and Infant-Toddler Centres of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia

Image Credit

Image on cover courtesy of Sabot at Stony Point.
Embracing Openness and Uncertainty,” including the welcoming remarks by Chief Stacey LaForme of the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation on the first morning of the conference. This column also includes a summary of the peer-review process developed for the annual peer-reviewed issue of Innovations, the first of which will be in September 2017.

In the “Voices: Conversations from North America and Beyond” column, Edna Hussey, principal of the lower school at Mid-Pacific Institute in Honolulu, HI, and Gretchen Reynolds, retired faculty member at Algonquin College in Ottawa, ON, offer their reflections on and inspirations from the Twelfth NAREA Summer Conference. Edna makes connections between the spiral of learning and the experience of the conference and writes that the most challenging pathway on which speakers Moira Nicolosi and Giovanna Cagliari led participants was “viewing learning as research and developing schools as places of pedagogical research.” Gretchen was particularly inspired by Moira’s and Giovanna’s discussion about Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development as a thought-provoking alternative to “the current educational discourse, which is dominated by technical terms such as learning outcomes, developmentally appropriate, objective observations, common core, state standards, skills, abilities, testing, assessment, readiness, accountability, student success, technology skills, etc.”

REFERENCES


Educational Research and Professional Development: An Existential, Ethical Approach Necessary for Interpreting the Complexity of Life and Educational Experiences

By Deanna Margini

Deanna Margini has worked for the Municipality of Reggio Emilia, Italy since 1985. She was an educator at an infant-toddler center from 1985 to 1991. After that experience, Deanna became a pedagogista for the Preschools and Infant-Toddler Centers, Istituzione of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia. She is part of the pedagogical coordinating team and coordinates one municipal infant-toddler center and two municipal preschools. The following article is based on one of Deanna’s presentations during the Seventh NAREA Winter Conference in Miami, FL on March 3–5, 2016.

Educational research and professional development are values that are very dear to our hearts within the Reggio experience. What do we actually mean by research in the context of the daily educational experience of the infant-toddler centers and preschools? Often when people talk about research, it is in an academic or experimental context, but our way of thinking about research is to interpret it in a practical way within our everyday life and experience with the children.

In the book In Dialogue with Reggio Emilia: Listening, Researching, and Learning, Carla Rinaldi writes:

The concept of research expresses and describes the cognitive tension that takes shape each time authentic processes of learning and knowledge building occur. We talk about research to describe the individual and common path in the direction of new worlds of possibility.

By cognitive tension, we mean the tendency toward or movement toward knowledge. All human beings have this very strong tendency toward discovering the world around them, right from the moment of birth. Due to this cognitive tension, research belongs to every human being. Each time an authentic process of learning and knowledge building occurs, cognitive tension takes shape. We use the word research to describe the individual and common paths toward new worlds of possibility. Research is the epistemological basis of knowledge and the key element in the democracy of knowledge.

Children do not learn by copying models offered to them by adults, and they do not learn simply because they have been trained. Although it is true that practice and training are part of the learning process, we believe that children learn by means of direct experiences that are qualified through their relationships with others. We believe as well that learning is based on motivation. This is why we often see that children pursue the challenges offered by the teachers or by the environment because they feel motivated and engaged to move toward the learning that these provocations offer.

As a result of research in neuroscience, we now know that knowledge is, above all, the result of a collective, socially constructed process. Therefore, the only effective way of learning is by participating in such a process. This is precisely because knowledge is a common good, and the democracy of knowledge initially takes shape in school. We feel that schools are the places that can guarantee the universality of the right to knowledge, education, and learning. Schools are also places where children and adults can participate in producing culture as an expression of a particular collective group or community that gives identity to that community.
We underscore the value of schools because schools have a widespread presence in the community, and school is an experience of all of its citizens—children and parents. A school that indiscriminately accommodates all children and families is a necessary but perhaps not a sufficient element for creating this democracy of knowledge. The school promotes the democracy of knowledge and research when it becomes a place that is able to interact with the children’s ways of building knowledge, when it is able to produce circularity among the minds of the children and adults, when it activates productive cooperation, when it promotes divergent and pluralistic ways of seeing the world, and when it nurtures the attitude toward listening, relationships, and giving value to the different potentials of each individual. In order for a school to promote the democracy of knowledge and research, it must be able to value and recognize the different ways in which each child approaches the knowledge-building process, giving shape to reality and the different perspectives that enrich human culture.

Von Foerster (2001) believed that we shouldn’t talk about being human but about becoming human. This idea of becoming is part of the change and transformation that belongs to each human being. This invites us not only to understand the differences between the various human bakeings but also to value the various diversities that each person brings. We think that this attitude is fundamental for those who are working in education, because it means avoiding stereotyping or making assumptions about the children, who are becoming in their various ways and times of learning. It means looking at each child in an expectant way and giving value to each individual child in terms of the possible revelations in this process of becoming, which includes moments of stasis and moments of difficulty. We believe that this way of viewing our work gives credit to the children and value to the differences and the potentials in these children who are becoming.

In order for a school to promote the democracy of knowledge and research, it must be able to value and recognize the different ways in which each child approaches the knowledge-building process, giving shape to reality and the different perspectives that enrich human culture.

Deanna Margini

Building knowledge democratically through an exploration of numerical concepts

I have made various affirmations in terms of values, and now I will try to highlight how learning and building knowledge democratically takes place by sharing an experience with 5- and 6-year-old children. This story is representative of the everyday life of the school when teachers are doing their work and the children are divided into groups doing their work. In this particular case, there were children working in the shop, playing with buying and selling. The context of the shop is one that the teachers and children create every morning. The shop is used in various ways by the children, including free play, but it is also a context for exploring numerical concepts in depth.

The children selected which products they wanted to have on sale and chose the prices on the products. The teacher added elements she believed would generate learning. The children used tokens to represent money, and the teacher placed values of 1, 2, and 5 on the tokens. While the children from different groups were working in the classroom and the teacher was observing, she heard something from the group of girls in the shop that motivated her to intervene and propose a challenge. The teacher knew that asking the buyer, Enaria, if she would like to try to buy two things and pay for them together was going to be much more complex than buying one thing and paying for it by itself. The teacher re-launched the situation by offering this new idea, and Catarina, the seller, was amenable. She said, “Okay, you have to pay 3 plus 3 is 6.” Enaria looked in her little bag and seemed to have difficulty finding the
Being engaged in research also concerns the role of the teacher, the role of the adult . . . a teacher who also is able to offer children situations and contexts in which the expressive languages and all of the languages can be situated in the border areas and places of cross-pollination that are so fertile.

–Deanna Margini

The teacher urged Alesia to show her solution in a practical way and saw the moment of understanding in Caterina's eyes. Caterina said, “Because it [the token] has a drawing on it.” She was focusing on the concept of the value of the token and on the fact that not all the tokens were the same. She realized that the values attributed by means of the symbols on the tokens made them different.

Enaria did not move away from the situation and paid a great deal of attention to what was taking place. Being a part of a group through listening is important—the opportunity to have your own silent space of thinking—a space of understanding that may emerge in time. The teacher did not lose sight of Enaria and waited for another time and another opportunity to support Enaria's learning. It was very important that the other girls allowed Enaria to stay close to the situation and observe. This is an attitude that shows welcome, and it is especially important for immigrant children who are learning Italian or children with special rights, who have different times of understanding, to be included. The children often offer this sort of cultural and linguistic mediation to other children, and the teachers regularly encourage them to do so.

With this example, we have further explored the idea of research and the democratic construction of knowledge. Being engaged in research also concerns the role of the teacher, the role of the adult—an adult who fosters circularity among the children's minds that gives and promotes the right to citizenship and to participation in the knowledge-building process—an adult who participates in the children's research by means of attentive listening and giving value to what the children do—a teacher who also is able to offer children situations and contexts in which the expressive languages and all of the languages can be situated in the border areas and places of cross-pollination that are so fertile.
Mosaic of marks, words, material

I would like to reference another experience that has to do with the relationship and the interweaving of the languages of drawing and narrative (Vecchi and Ruozzi, 2015). Because experiences like this open up contexts of observation and documentation for the teacher and for the children, this type of research provides professional development for the teacher. The processes of observation and documentation cannot be separated; they are always interrelated and intertwined. Observations are always reciprocal. The children observe us, and we observe the children. What I observe is in direct relationship or direct proportion to the quality of the context that I, the teacher, was able to construct for the children. In this case, the teachers constructed a context with different types of paper and different drawing instruments.

The first situation included Amina, 2.5 years. While working on documentation, the teacher noticed that words often emerged along with drawing and the movement of the hands of the children. We call this simultaneous emergence of the children’s drawings, their movement and gestures, and their words the *synesthesia of perception*. Amina was experimenting with various writing instruments on semi-transparent paper and found that different tools left different marks. The tone of her voice accompanied the marks that she was intentionally making on the paper. She was drawing a dog, but depending on the instrument she was using, which affected the mark that she was making on the paper, her voice changed. She said “DOG!” when she made a hard mark and “dog” in a soft voice when the mark was lighter. A sort of soundtrack emerged from her tone. The voice and the mark together seemed to give her the ability to create a mental image that resulted in a different kind of dog.

In another situation, the teacher made various kinds of paper available to two children 2.10 and 2.11 years, and the children seemed to understand that this choice offered them many different possibilities. A sheet of corrugated cardboard evoked a memory from the children, and Gaia said, “This paper is catty. It makes a sound like when a cat is scratching her claws.” Federico added, “On this paper, I want to draw a little cat with eyes, ears, nose, and claws.” Gaia said, “I’m going to draw a big cat, too, with a mouth that goes ‘meow’ and with long claws like my dog.” The subject began to take shape with the marks that the children made on the paper. In particular, the details gave identity to the cat, making clear the operation of categorization that is taking place, resulting in a little cat and a big cat.

Gaia took another sheet of paper—a soft sheet used for packing fragile material—and explored it with her whole body. She said, “Ahh, this is a soft piece of paper, not catty like the last one. You could sleep on top of this. It’s like a soft cushion. Now I’m going to do a cat on it.” The children then made different drawings of cats on this particular material. Gaia called her drawing “Cat sleeping on a soft cushion.”
From our observation and documentation, we always see that the material that children draw on is never neutral; it always has a very strong influence on the drawing. A teacher who realizes this and sees it in the documentation that she has made will never again be able to set up a context of this type in the same way. It is also important for the teacher to keep in mind the relationships between the various individuals involved as well as their relationships with the materials.

In another situation, the children chose bubble wrap for their drawings, and they drew according to the pattern that the material suggested. Emanuela, 4.6 years, interpreted a possibility for this material when she decided that she could make a gesture that turned the material into something else. She said, “If I close it, it turns into a book.” Meriem, 4.9 years, said, “If I turn it around, it’s a different story.” The girls made two different interpretations of different stories, depending on the orientation of the drawings on the bubble wrap.

An immediate, extraordinary understanding was established between Emanuela, Meriem, and two other girls as each one contributed to their shared stories. All of their narrative abilities were nurtured and reinforced by the stories that they created together.

Here is the girls’ first story:
“Once upon a time, there were some colored balls that went out in the street.” Eva, 4.3 years
“They had to roll on the sidewalk, so they wouldn’t get squashed.” Meriem
“And the steam made them turn black . . . one of them stays far way.” Eva

This is their other story:
“Once upon a time there were two sad balls.” Meriem
“They got lost in the woods.” Denise, 4.3 years
“The wind blew them into the woods.” Meriem
“They want to find the way home.” Denise
“But they don’t remember the way.” Meriem
“Because they had the map turned upside down.” Eva

Once again, the interweaving of the different languages and the loans of knowledge circulating among the children created a new concept as well as a democracy of knowledge and the freedom to explore what is new and unknown.

Marisa, 3.6 years, chose black paper and a black marker. She said, “I drew my favorite park! It’s the Victory Park where I go on Sundays with my Mom.” She seemed to be aware of the fact
that she’d chosen materials that made the border between the drawing and the paper very unclear. She said, “I’m finished. Can you see it?” The teacher got in on the game and said, “I don’t see anything.” Marisa said, “Because I just played a trick on you! I took the black paper and the black marker, and now you can’t see my drawing anymore!” Marisa proposed a sort of a camouflage or a conception of a drawing. She gave a different identity to a very familiar context.

What happens when mistakes are made during the knowledge-building process? We believe that mistakes have to exist. We interpret mistakes as steps in the process and as an unexpected event that generates new possibilities, a sort of creative accident. A creative accident is the foundation of the story of a witch who lost her legs. Giorgia, 3.3 years, chose a sheet of transparent paper to draw her witch on, because she was going to be putting it on the overhead projector to project on the wall to scare her friends. Giorgia said, “I’m making a witch . . . the fingers . . . the tummy. My witch is scary.” After Giorgia drew the witch, she moved the transparent paper and realized that the legs were still on the table covering. What do we do with this witch who lost her legs?

The teacher asked two 5-year-old children to take a look and see if they could help Giorgia solve her problem, which Giorgia explained to them. The question “what happened?” always accompanies the children’s research and all research in general. It is a question that we can find all through “The Wonder of Learning” exhibit. In answer to the question of “what happened?” Giorgia offered her own interpretation, and then the other children offered theirs.

“The legs stayed here, on the tablecloth, because when I did like this with the marker, they stayed here.” Giorgia

“The legs stayed here, the tablecloth, because when I did like this with the marker, they stayed here.” Giorgia

“Maybe you made the body too long.” Gianluca, 5.6 years

“When I drew with the marker, this thing here happened . . .” Giorgia

In Reggio Emilia, we put a lot of emphasis on the learning of children and adults in groups. We consider the following to be necessary conditions for real research: the importance of having a group of adults with different backgrounds who share responsibility for the children; time (that is not optional) for collegial relationships; documentation that makes visible and creates awareness of the dynamics and the processes that take place; and documentation that makes it possible for each person to participate in the interpretation of the experience, including the parents and the community.

REFERENCES


The Umbrella Project: One School’s Ongoing Research on Continuity and Intersubjectivity

By Marty Gravett, Anna Golden, and Mauren Campbell

Our story is in its third decade of Reggio inspiration, unfolding as we at Sabot at Stony Point have translated Reggio-inspiration in the lower and middle schools and have moved year by year toward greater understanding. Along the way, our “umbrella projects” have become keys to continuity and sparks for intersubjectivity among all of the protagonists, all of the researchers, in Sabot’s learning community. Yearly, umbrella work brings everyone—children, teachers, parents, and the larger community—into conversation around a provocative idea. We were inspired by the declaration of intent that we heard pedagogista Tiziana Filippini describe so passionately when we sent our first team of teachers to visit the schools of Reggio Emilia. We also eagerly watched as the concept of meta-projects was developed in Reggio with Reggio Tutta and Reggionarra. These concepts have informed our thinking within the Sabot context.

Northeast American Reggio Emilia Alliance

Marty Gravett is the director of early childhood and outreach at Sabot at Stony Point. Hearing Loris Malaguzzi speak during a conference regarding the Reggio Emilia approach in 1993 inspired Marty to visit the municipal preschools of Reggio Emilia two years later and to share his vision with her daughters’ preschool, Sabot. That same year, she joined her friend and mentor, Irene Carney, on the Sabot faculty, and they began a project, now entering its third decade, to bring the Reggio Emilia approach to Richmond, VA. The Sabot faculty is now extending the Reggio educational project’s powerful image of the capable child beyond preschool into lower and middle school.

Anna Golden has been a teacher-researcher at Sabot at Stony Point since 1996. In 1995, she was given a copy of The Hundred Languages of Children. Anna found Sabot after searching for a school where educators were studying the Reggio Emilia approach. She has a BFA in photography and a Master’s in Art Education. Anna speaks and writes about teaching, children, and art and leads professional development workshops for schools and daycare centers. Most recently, you can find her thinking in the books Our Inquiry, Our Practice; Nature Education with Young Children: Integrating Inquiry and Practice; and Nature Preschools and Forest Kindergartens. Anna’s blog, “Atelierista: Stories from the Studio,” is read by people around the world.

Mauren Campbell is entering her fifth year as an elementary educator and has taught in Sabot at Stony Point’s kindergarten, first, and third grades. Years before becoming a teacher herself, Mauren attended the Sabot preschool, then in the beginning stages of gaining inspiration from the schools in Reggio Emilia, Italy. As part of the Sabot family, Mauren watched the school transform and later, after graduating from the University of Virginia, became the first Sabot preschool alumna to join the school’s faculty. Her four years of reflective teaching inform her thinking and writing about place-based curriculum—a topic she plans to pursue in her graduate work at Antioch University New England in the fall of 2016. She reflects on the work in her classroom on her blog, “Learnings Unearthed.”

The Sabot faculty has contributed in countless visible and invisible ways to the creation of this article. The significant contributions of ideas and editing from Susan Barstow, Irene Carney, and Sara Ferguson are too great not to mention.
In the early years of our Reggio-inspired work at Sabot preschool, intentions came to be a way of engaging in teacher research at both the individual and school-wide level. Teachers learned to look carefully at the intentions behind children’s actions. Sabot teacher Marty Gravett and Sabot parent (and St. Catherine’s School teacher-researcher) Pam Oken-Wright, who had traveled to Reggio Emilia together, wrote at that time about this powerful paradigm: “The search for progettazione leads us to realize that our work with children can be far more collaborative and that it can require far more of us as teachers than ‘following children’s lead.’ We have come to believe that the teachers’ reading of children’s intent is central to our effort to engage in the kind of responsive, fluid, and inclusive curriculum which could be one of Reggio’s greatest legacies” (Oken-Wright & Gravett, 2002, p. 197). In an interview with Lella Gandini, Loris Malaguzzi said, “Teachers must leave behind an isolated, silent

A Brief History of Sabot at Stony Point

The strongest thread weaving together the myriad elements of Sabot at Stony Point—both human and chronological—is the image of the child. From the founding parents who in 1972 repaired an old farmstead to house the tiny preschool they were creating for their children, to the present-day 28-acre campus hosting more than 180 children age 2 to 14, how we think about children is what connects us. In 1993, Marty Gravett, a parent who would later become the preschool pedagogista, heard Loris Malaguzzi speak and initiated conversations with the then-interim director, Irene Carney, about the visionary preschools of Reggio Emilia, Italy. As a result, the vision of how to guide the school’s journey into the present emerged. Through the Reggio lens, we at Sabot began to articulate and refine our beliefs that children deserve not only adults’ listening attention but also to encounter challenges in resource-rich spaces of beauty and authenticity.

From the very first discussions of the Reggio Emilia approach, Sabot teachers recognized many parallels to their own image of the child in the words of Malaguzzi and in the actions of Reggio children and teachers. After Marty visited the schools in Reggio Emilia and joined Irene and the faculty, Sabot committed wholeheartedly to the inspiration of the Reggio Emilia approach. Teachers were drawn to the intellectual challenge of the role of teacher-researcher and the reflective process. They began to discover many ways in which documentation and representation enriched the school experience for the children, teachers, and parents.

The study of the Reggio Emilia approach has not been without its struggles, setbacks, and disequilibrium. Still, from the first small project through many experiments, arguments, and knotty problems, the Sabot community has remained committed to sustained dialogue and engagement with Reggio Emilia. In 2005, a group of dedicated parents collaborated with the faculty to create a Reggio-inspired kindergarten. The next year, having outgrown our space, Sabot merged with the 40-year-old Stony Point School, acquired a large house and 28 acres of land contiguous with a 100-acre city park, and continued the development into primary and middle school education.

In 2015, searching for ways to strengthen the continuity of thinking throughout the school, the faculty adopted what we have come to call the 5 R’s, which relate to higher order thinking: relationship, research, reflection, representation, and reach. Reach is conceived of as the combination of risk and rigor that we see as evocative of researchers’ desires to do their best work based on the “the centrality of motivation and the pleasure of learning” found in democratic classrooms where knowledge is co-constructed, not consumed (Preschools and Infant-Toddler Centres, Istituzione of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia, 2010, p. 11).
mode of working that leaves no traces. Instead, they must discover ways to communicate and document the children’s evolving experiences at school... [Children] become even more curious, interested, and confident as they contemplate the meaning of what they have achieved” (Edwards, Gandini, and Forman, 2012, p. 46).

Furthermore, Ivana Soncini, pedagogista responsible for inclusion of children with special rights in the municipal infant-toddlers and preschools in Reggio Emilia, wrote “... in Reggio, we have learned that each child has a different way of achieving intersubjectivity” (Edwards, Gandini, and Forman, 2012, p. 206).

In addition to following the children’s intentions, teachers began to develop collective intentions, such as creating protocols for documentation or looking at movement as a language. One year, in an effort to expand the school environment and use our immediate geography to provoke children’s research, we made a collective agreement to explore the school’s little one-acre piece of forest. As we tried out different provocations to inspire children’s interest in the forest, we found ourselves learning to support projects, learning to document, pursuing children’s thinking, and learning the value of intersubjectivity. Anna Golden, our atelierista, wrote about our developing confidence with this approach and described how it allows the intentions of the teachers to merge with the intentions of the children: “Over time, as the children revisit further experience through documentation and discussion, and the teacher reflects on each succeeding interaction, a path for inquiry will emerge” (Golden, 2013, p. 130).

After almost two decades of Reggio-inspired early childhood education, Sabot merged with Stony Point School (an independent lower and middle school) and grew into a school community for families of children aged 2 to 14. Once the two schools merged, the process of setting intentions created a culture of teacher-research for everyone, and the school-wide intention became a tool for binding the faculties of the two schools together. Over the years, we have come to call these whole-school explorations our umbrella projects because like an umbrella, they stretch to encompass us all and to gather us in collaboration as we explore a big idea in many varied and nuanced ways. We intentionally choose broad whole-school topics. They are sometimes conceptual (i.e., place, time, relationship) and sometimes, media-focused (i.e., tinkering, music and sound) but they are always a way for us to move forward together, to develop some shared understanding—intersubjectivity among the protagonists—and continuity across the school.

For the last two years, our umbrella project has been an exploration called “Our Richmond.” Like so many of our colleagues, we continually seek ways to make an impact on the community outside of our campus. With the schools of Reggio Emilia as an example and with a nod toward Ben Mardell and his studies of Boston and Washington, D.C., Sabot has explored the way children see the city and how children and youth are “seen” by the city. Within a context of collaborative support, the teachers and pedagogical team use the umbrella project as a tool to refine our capacity for building intersubjectivity and as a way to create continuity. We see the patterns that connect, rather than relying on assumptions that make us blind to possibilities.

**Continuity**

There is great potential for continuity in the school every day. Paola Cagliari tells us the concept of continuity in the context of education is complex (Cagliari, 2013). At Sabot at Stony Point, the concept of continuity contributes to our efforts to connect the values and approach of the program for very young children with the programs for children of primary and middle school age. The continuity between age groups and grade levels and also between the different constituencies of children, parents, and teachers is the research that has engaged Sabot for the past decade. In growing our school as one school united by a common philosophy, continuity has become especially important to our work.
What we are striving for at Sabot when we talk about intersubjectivity is a dialogue in which each person commits to participate in communicating and listening and is willing to revise their ideas in consideration of the ideas of the others.

–Marty Gravett, Anna Golden, and Mauren Campbell

Intersubjectivity

Seeking intersubjectivity—the extent to which people can transcend their individual motives and private constructs of a situation and reach a shared interpretation—has become important to this work as well (Wertsch, 1985, pp. 158–166). What we are striving for at Sabot when we talk about intersubjectivity is a dialogue in which each person commits to participate in communicating and listening and is willing to revise their ideas in consideration of the ideas of the others. It is a useful idea when considering how a small group works together in a classroom. On a larger scale, we have come to see intersubjectivity as crucial to the project of building a school in which all of the protagonists might have their own ideas and motives but maintain shared goals.

It is important to note that intersubjectivity doesn’t mean conformity. In a democratic community, diversity of thought is highly valued (Göthson, 2016). Because of our image of the child, we believe that children come to school with varied understandings as a result of their interactions with the world and experiences within their family culture. Each person negotiates ideas with others in order to move forward together. Intersubjectivity makes co-construction of knowledge possible. In fact, it is a necessary step for such construction together.

Studio Thinking and the Development of Intersubjectivity and Continuity

As social-constructivist educators, we believe that knowledge is created in a social context. It is therefore critical that each of us is able to represent our individual ideas and communicate them to others in the group. The hundred languages are the means by which we do this. Studio thinking and the hundred languages of children make communication and continuity visible. In the second edition of The Spirit of the Studio: Learning from the Atelier of Reggio Emilia, Vea Vecchi writes, “We should go further than materials and techniques and take time over the process of empathy and intense relations with things that the atelier promotes. It is necessary to think of the atelieristi (and teachers) as guarantors of the presence, in every discipline or language, of both the expressive and emotional part and the rational and cognitive part” (Vecchi, 2015, p. 20).

Over time, Sabot has developed an atelier and a materials center, as well as mini-studios in each classroom. Continuity develops as children bring their thinking back and forth between the mini-studio and the atelier. Classroom teachers collaborate with the atelierista in looking for potential new understandings within the children’s thinking. An idea that begins with the creation of representations in the atelier might evolve when teachers set up a related provocation in a classroom mini-studio. For instance, as part of the Our Richmond umbrella project, four-year-olds in the atelier began to represent hidden forest habitats of animals in the city with clay, seeds, and feathers.

This collective way of thinking about the studio is not bound to a place but exists wherever and whenever there is a desire to share understanding that is emerging from curiosity and inquiry.

–Marty Gravett, Anna Golden, and Mauren Campbell
Later, their classroom teachers created a provocation in their mini-studio that led the children to create a larger representation of the entire forest near our school.

This collective way of thinking about the studio is not bound to a place but exists wherever and whenever there is a desire to share understanding that is emerging from curiosity and inquiry. Studio thinking affects every corner of the classroom through teachers’ choices to set up provocations that engage children in creative relationships with materials. Studio thinking enhances parent dialogues during parent evenings when teachers and parents use media and materials to explore the work of the children together.

Thinking with media and materials is studio thinking. Studio thinking goes along on field trips, supported by clipboards, pens, and other materials. It is the idea that there are myriad ways to represent and share one’s thinking using the resources at hand. Teachers brought translucent materials and flashlights when children explored the lighted floor in Richmond’s Old City Hall, for instance. With curiosity and a desire to experiment, children began holding the colorful, translucent magnetic tiles to the glowing floor and then trying other surfaces. They soon discovered that the tiles stuck to the columns and railings around the building. A guard noticed the children placing the magnets on different surfaces with delight and surprise and explained to them that many of the painted surfaces in the building were made of cast iron. When children use media and materials to share their thinking with one another, they encounter challenges and discover puzzling questions.
Studio thinking represents the complex relationship between children’s ideas, teacher scaffolding, and provocations in the environment. Furthermore, studio thinking creates intersubjectivity when representations are created collaboratively over time. Children create individual representations and share them with each other in small groups or during circle time. As these singular ideas are shared, an elaborate and unforeseeable group representation develops, and the group can then move forward together.

Our City: Continuity Across Age Levels and Constituencies

The children encounter the city

Teachers enter each year’s umbrella work with their own assumptions and hypotheses about what the children might experience. While planning initial experiences in the city for Our Richmond, teachers might have assumed that children would be hesitant in unfamiliar places filled with people. Instead, what we observed were children engaging with public spaces in their own ways, by finding holes to poke sticks through or crevices in which to hide. From the very beginning of this research into the city, it was apparent that children occupy city spaces on their own terms. For children, the city is just another context in which to play and explore with great joy.

At first, teachers were surprised by the way the children encountered the city. Later, while compiling documentation about the Our Richmond project, Sara Ferguson and Tiffany Ferriera, teachers of three-year-olds, and Andrea Pierrotti and Mauren Campbell, teachers of third graders, noticed striking similarities in the ways the children encountered the city. They were inspired to reflect collaboratively on their observations:

For children, our city is a playground. Children delight in discovering places that are overlooked or neglected by adults. Children are masterful at uncovering the secret, hidden spaces in the city. Children constantly put challenges in front of themselves—whether climbing a tree, fitting under a railing, running an entire length of a field, or hopping over rocks in the James River.
When facing these challenges, children physically map out unfamiliar spaces with their bodies. In their eyes, all spaces have potential. Through their play, children reveal the beauty and magic of the city—beauty and magic that adults do not see or have forgotten. The children’s joy is infectious and brings smiles to those passing by. Their play fills our city with a new vibrancy.

We noticed that even the middle school students, whose explorations of the city were often more traditionally academic (studies of Richmond history and architecture, for instance), were also drawn toward playing in the city—sliding down rocks, jumping on walls, and racing one another down hills.

**Bringing joy to the city**

On a trip to visit a parent’s office downtown, a passer-by noticed the three-year-old children drawing, looking out the windows, and playing games with the furniture they found and said, “This is the most joy I’ll have all day.” This experience became the inspiration for the question the teachers later asked, “How can we bring more joy to the city?” The three-year-old children responded by designing buildings for a new downtown, providing a new skyline for Richmond that would encourage joyful participation. The children asserted that this new, alternative skyline would engage downtown workers by providing them with spaces that were “more beautiful and more fun.” Anna initiated a conversation with these three- and four-year-olds.

**Anna:** “What would make the buildings in the city better?”

**Hagen:** “Toys!”

**Kirsten:** “A flute! A trumpet! We could make them [the workers downtown] a party for work!”

**Anna:** “Lewis thought we could take them some paper to draw on.”

**Hagen:** “I want to give him [the passer-by who noticed the children’s joy] some friends.”

**Lewis:** “I will draw a Christmas tree for him.”

**Kirsten:** “The building that we went in is the only one that had Christmas [it was decorated for the holiday season]. And these are the snowflakes falling down.”

**Sammy M:** “They [grown-ups] have to work all day long but don’t play in the snow.”

**Kirsten:** “And like tomorrow and today and tomorrow and today. It’s like they go to work every day, so the snow time is so boring. How about we could make a little tiny, little tiny,
As the children talked, they began to draw plans for more interesting buildings for downtown Richmond. Later they built models of them out of cardboard and wood. Thinking of his mother at work, Jebediah made “a kissing building” for his mother to work in. Hagen designed “a game building” with built-in games that workers could play when they finish their work, and Ila made “a horsey building where you can take a ride when you need a break.”

Anna: “Oh! Do you mean you would put color on the street downtown?”
Kirsten: “So we can make them cheer up.”
Hagen: “And you could make them some people. Some friends.”
Ila: “I made a little surprise. It says, ‘You will be happy for every day.’”

little tiny street that’s orange? And we could say ‘Dear man, we would like to bring you a surprise.’

Through their designs for interactive buildings, these children verified our image of the child as resourceful and engaged with the world. Sharing this documentation allowed other adults to see three-year-olds who engaged in an empathetic relationship with the office-worker adults, picturing them in the midst of their busy “tomorrow and today and tomorrow and today” routines, with no time to play in the snow or draw a picture. The children’s design for a new downtown conveyed the gifts of play on swings, games, and rides. The new downtown also gave the gift of beauty through color and form. Later, the class and their families returned downtown to celebrate the children’s work and set up the buildings they designed against the existing skyline of Richmond. This image makes it clear to all of us the connections the children have made between whimsical imaginative play—the way adults play with them at home—and the world of work.

_Telling jokes in the city_

“How can we bring joy to the city?” became the guiding question for many of the classes when the teachers learned how provocative the question was for children. When the third grade teachers asked this question, the children decided that telling jokes was a good way to bring joy to people downtown. They planned a walk from Richmond City Hall to Monroe Park, a gathering place near a university and a favorite of both students and homeless citizens. The children told jokes to people they met and left little cards with jokes printed on them along the way.
Later, teachers Andrea Pierotti and Mauren Campbell initiated a conversation to help the children reflect on the joke-telling interactions that did not go over well and people who didn’t want to hear a joke or didn’t laugh at the punch line. In this dialogue, we witnessed the third graders moving from their own view of something they love—joke books and jokes—to an expanded point of view that takes into account people who might not be in the mood for a joke, might not understand English well, or might not feel kindly toward an excited group of children approaching them on the street. These kinds of experiences, which happened over and over again during this two-year umbrella project, were provocations that created opportunities for the development of intersubjectivity and empathy within the groups of children and also between children and others in the community.

The teacher-researchers work toward intersubjectivity

In 2006, Anna decided that intersubjectivity among children would be the topic for her master’s thesis. As her study permeated our working lives, we teacher-researchers came to understand, little by little, the implications for our own work. We thought it was important to support the children in their daily conversation circles, and we encouraged children to develop the habit of sharing their drawings and constructions as ways to explain to one another what they were thinking. It also became more and more clear how important it was that each teacher-researcher work with an understanding of what our co-teachers, atelieristi, and pedagogisti were thinking. What were the other perspectives at play, and how could we understand one another’s points of view and then move forward together? Anna helped us see the value of working toward intersubjectivity with the children, and the children were helping us see the value of working toward it for ourselves. As is so often the case in Reggio-inspired work, the children were teaching us. In this case, they eventually made us aware of goals we did not even know we had.

While the word intersubjectivity did not enter our daily lexicon in the earliest years, the goal of ongoing conversation and learning from one another did. We faced the challenge most teachers face when they take on this approach and asked ourselves, “Can we teach in ways we were never taught? And if not, how do we address this in our practice?” (Gravett, 2013, p. 150). We could see that the Italian teachers, atelieristi, and pedagogisti set aside time to co-construct their plans. They created collective intentions; they took the time they worked together seriously. So from the earliest era, the director of Sabot, Irene Carney, made the decision to add planning hours to the teach-
We concentrated on how to support children's intentions, how to provide resources, and how to form questions and provocations that would relaunch their work. It was in these sessions, sharing our stories using our notes and photos, that many of us learned the language of listening well.

– Marty Gravett, Anna Golden, and Mauren Campbell

When the school added the kindergarten and then the primary grades, the new teachers adopted this same mode of in-depth faculty meetings focused on children's work. The middle school teachers have, in turn, added time for in-depth consideration of constructivist teaching. Adding a second pedagogista, Susan Barstow, who was devoted to the lower school teachers and children, gave real substance to the commitment to make these faculty conversations central to our growth.

Another of our most effective professional development strategies coincided with the adoption of our umbrella project, when we adults also began to mirror the experience of “messing about” that the children were experiencing in the classroom. As part of the preparation for a yearlong exploration of a given topic, teachers would themselves “mess about” with media and materials to explore our own understandings and questions about these topics. Afterwards, reflecting on these sessions with the full group and the pedagogisti, the teacher-researchers noticed many things about their interactions and compared these to the ways they wanted to support children in the classroom—collaboration, checking in with one another, trying different materials, testing the materials, and identifying those who might be communicating in different ways. A highlight of this professional development experience happened when several teachers noticed that if one person in their small group took control of the group, the exploration came to a halt and the group would rely on that “expert” to solve all of the problems. They compared this to traditional teaching and explored how this made them feel and how it affected their motivation.

Now, all of us, in mixed groups of teacher-researchers from the preschool through the middle school, give ourselves time at the beginning of each school year to learn in ways...
we did not experience in traditional schooling. During these sessions, we share and dialogue about our new understandings of the process, the media, the concepts, and ourselves. Interestingly, this process of bringing teachers together across age levels brings forward the tensions of trying to communicate across the teaching continuum of experience and always results in new energies, new understandings, and joy. We have found that this is not only a powerful precursor to the coming year of documenting and listening to children, but also a powerful way to develop connection, understanding, and intersubjectivity.

The parents invest in the life of the school

Our experiences with the umbrella project involving the full school community in an annual research project have also created a new avenue for parent investment in the curricular life of the school and for parent understanding of the Reggio Emilia approach. We often celebrate the parents’ strong history of involvement in the creation and development of the school. In fact, on her first visit to Sabot, Lella Gandini perceptively commented, “Your parents are your secret strength.” The umbrella project enhances this legacy and has provided one more way—a very visible way—for parents to join the intellectual life of the classroom. The parents truly embrace the possibilities that the umbrella project offers them and, in turn, the children and faculty have benefited. For example, parents explored tinkering materials together in order to better understand the experiences of the children and teachers.

In the second year of the umbrella exploration of Our Richmond, parents participated in a significant way. After the third grade rode the city bus downtown to deliver jokes to people, the teachers decided to use the city’s public bus system—the Greater Richmond Transit Company (GRTC)—for more field trips throughout the year. In the process of planning these trips and exploring the city’s bus routes, the teachers learned that most of their desired trips were not feasible by bus; a trip that would take 15 minutes by car would take 2 1/2 hours by bus. When the teachers shared this information with the children, they were amazed. They were even more astounded when the teachers asked them to think about how their life might be different if their families did not own cars. The children became fascinated with how the city’s bus system works—and does not work—for Richmond’s citizens.

Soon, as teachers shared their documentation of the conversations and blogged about their findings and about the children’s ideas for more efficient transportation systems—for example, Kaiya’s detailed plan for a city/county bus/bike system—parents in our school’s community began to reach out to the class and participate in advocacy for better public transportation in our metro area.

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—Marty Gravett, Anna Golden, and Mauren Campbell
As a result, the third graders met with a job counselor who struggles to find jobs that are accessible by bus for her clients, a university professor whose students spent the semester interviewing and photographing city bus drivers, and a member of the city government’s poverty initiative who is involved with the city’s work on a new rapid transit bus system. The third graders, eager to be advocates within their community for this new, more efficient system, helped a local transportation advocacy group conduct surveys of existing bus riders and spread the word about the city’s proposed new system.

By the end of the year, the children had become experts in their own right about the city’s public transportation system, and the teachers could see that they were committed to advocating for a problem that did not directly affect their own lives.

However, the children themselves were not the only members of our school community who took note of our city’s struggles with transportation. At the end of the school year, parents passed around an email prompting citizens to send personalized messages to their city council members in support of the proposed new system. In attempting to create an interesting provocation for students to connect more deeply to their city, the teachers initiated an experience that evolved into advocacy for a fairer, more efficient Richmond bus system and brought our school community along for the ride.

Conclusion

The creation of Sabot at Stony Point through merging two separate schools meant our efforts at collaboration have been both challenging and crucial. The building of any school is an ongoing task of weaving together the ideas and hopes of all of the constituencies—children, parents, teachers, and administrators. Finding continuity between these groups has been the work of the last ten years at our school. For the adults in the community, it has been an effort to unknot the thinking behind the question: Can we imagine teaching that is different from the way we were taught? The children have shown a way forward with their ability to willingly share their individual contributions while working toward a common goal. The umbrella project has been a way to honor each person’s individual participation in creating new knowledge in a new kind of school.

The following exchange between Carolyn Edwards and Tiziana Filippini (2015, p. 19) beautifully illustrates the process of finding continuity through a commitment to intersubjectivity:
Carolyn: This morning’s discussion seems to me an example of the way you work with children—continuing to stick with a discussion until the tension is resolved, and there is a solution, not simply quitting after everyone stated their opinion.

Tiziana: Yes, the important thing is not just to hear diverse points of view, but instead to go so far with the discussion that it is clear that each person has taken something in and moved in his or her thinking as a result of what has been heard.

There are many types of continuity simultaneously at work in a school community. The children are the strands that thread through all of them. Teachers reach out to parents both in person and through documentation. Parents talk to each other at meetings, at aftercare pick-up, and on the playground after school. A community grows when families share with one another on sports fields, at birthday parties, on outings with each other, and in friendship. They mark each other’s occasions of loss or birth with meals or moral support. Each of the protagonists’ contributions cannot be separated from the work of the community. Rather, these individual creators—children, parents, and teachers—form the fabric of a school together.

REFERENCES


Remembering Jerome Bruner

Jerome Bruner, 2007 recipient of the NAREA Lifetime Achievement Award, passed away on June 5, 2016. The following tributes are published in this issue of Innovations in honor of one of the great thinkers of our time.

Luca Vecchi, Mayor of Reggio Emilia, Italy

The municipality of Reggio Emilia issued the following press statement by Mayor Luca Vecchi on June 6, 2016.

Reggio Emilia has lost a beloved friend! Yesterday afternoon, Dr. Jerome Bruner passed away in the United States. In just a few months, he would have been 101 years old. Bruner was one of the most renowned and influential American psychologists of the last century, a key figure in what is known as the “cognitive revolution.” He taught at prestigious universities worldwide, including Harvard, Oxford, and New York University, where he was professor emeritus.

With his passing, the world has lost “an intellectual legend, which is difficult to encompass with the words of each of us,” as Dr. Bruner was described by Umberto Eco on the occasion of the conferral of his honorary doctorate by the University of Bologna. With his passing, our city also loses a dear friend, as well as an illustrious citizen. Indeed, in 1997 the Mayor and the City Council of Reggio Emilia bestowed him with honorary citizenship, and just a few years later, he was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia.

As mayor, I have had the opportunity to see what a deep and strong bond Dr. Bruner had with our city. He paid a visit to Reggio Emilia every year between 1995 and 2008, because—as he himself affirmed with the modesty typical of great men—he wanted to learn from our city, a leader in the field of education. Thus, he was an attentive and engaged protagonist of the events of our community. Right from the start, he appreciated and supported the Reggio approach and the idea of school as a place of ongoing cultural development, where children and students are the active and primary protagonists of their learning processes.

At the same time, he always underscored that the personal and cultural education of each person—beginning from early childhood—should be based on an educational project that was not rooted solely in the scholastic environment but which engaged in an osmotic process with the local community.

He always underscored that the personal and cultural education of each person—beginning from early childhood—should be based on an educational project that was not rooted solely in the scholastic environment but which engaged in an osmotic process with the local community.

–Jerome Bruner

–Luca Vecchi
We are infinitely grateful to Dr. Bruner for his friendship, for his capability and expertise, for the depth of his thinking, and for the joyfulness that he transmitted to all those who knew him. On behalf of the municipal administration, all those who work in the schools of our city, and the entire community of Reggio Emilia, we express our deepest and most heartfelt condolences to his partner, Dr. Eleanor Fox, and to his family.

Howard Gardner, Hobbs Professor of Cognition and Education, Harvard Graduate School of Education

Jerome Seymour Bruner died on June 5, 2016, at the age of 100. And what a century’s worth of living! Born blind, Bruner gained limited eyesight at the age of two—he was famous for his thick glasses, with which he insisted on gesticulating as he lectured. Bruner attended Duke University and Harvard University, receiving his doctorate in psychology in 1941. He then conducted research, wrote dozens of books, and taught for more than 70 years, most of them at Harvard University, the University of Oxford, and, for the last two decades, at the New York University School of Law, becoming emeritus in 2013.

Like an eager explorer, Bruner ventured across the entire intellectual landscape, tackling new topics at a dazzling speed. Beginning as an experimental psychologist working with laboratory animals, he ventured into the fields of human social psychology and developmental psychology. He first gained fame for his studies of perception—called “The New Look.” He demonstrated that our perceptions of simple objects like coins are strongly influenced by our wants and expectations—making science of what he had observed when he himself had to learn to see. He then played a principal role in the launching of the cognitive revolution—a computer-influenced approach to the study of the mind that explored the strategies that humans use to solve problems and to raise new questions. Donning the lenses of cognitive and developmental psychology, he explored infant perception and the emergence and uses of early language. And then in the latter decades of life, lamenting the over-rational view of cognitive research, he drew attention to the role of narrative, discourse, and cultural norms in the law and in life—building powerful bridges from psychology to the arts and humanities.

But while Bruner is likely to be remembered in many corners of the university, his most important and most lasting contributions are likely to be in the field of education. Shortly after the launch of Sputnik in 1957, Bruner called together leading thinkers to reconceptualize what he called, in a much-appreciated and much cited book, *The Process of Education*. Representing a sharp break from behaviorist views of teaching and learning, Bruner put forth an active, hypothesis-generating view of the learner; and in another influential book *Toward a Theory of Instruction*, Bruner demonstrated how, in the hands of mindful educators, even young students could be engaged in rigorous thinking in and across the disciplinary terrain, mastering the tools and languages of the culture, encountering and re-encountering important ideas in appropriate format as they passed through stages of development. (See also the article he wrote for *Educational Leadership* in 1963 entitled “Needed: A Theory of Instruction.”)

Many well-known psychologists have turned their attention, at least briefly, to education. Bruner did far more than that. In the middle 1960s, he masterminded the creation of a new and powerful approach to social studies called “Man: A Course of Study.” In this highly original curriculum, middle school children were exposed to powerful ideas from psychology, anthropology, sociology, and linguistics, and given the opportunity to engage, like young scholars, in exploring, elucidating, and even transforming key concepts from the social sciences. As a 22-year-old recent college graduate, I had the privilege of working on the

Howard Gardner, Hobbs Professor of Cognition and Education, Harvard Graduate School of Education

I believe that Jerome Bruner is the most important thinker and writer about education in our time—equal in importance to John Dewey in an earlier epoch.

–Howard Gardner
Innovations in Early Education

The development of this curriculum. Its three key questions have guided me throughout my own, by now, lengthy career: “What is human about human beings? How did they get that way? How can they be made more so?”

Bruner’s venture into curriculum was extremely exciting for those who had the privilege of creating it or using it in classrooms—as did three of my own children. But in the 1970s, its humanistic features alienated conservative members of the U. S. House of Representatives, and federal funding for such innovative educational work was halted—and has never really been re-activated.

Bruner’s interest in educational experimentation continued throughout his life. In his later years, he made annual pilgrimages to Reggio Emilia, a small city in northern Italy famous for its outstanding early childhood education, much of it in the Brunerian tradition; his own participation in the Italian educational efforts resulted in his being named an honorary citizen. When an observer pointed out that Bruner’s ideas were more honored in Italy than in the United States, he quipped “Well, then you’ve got quite a story.”

I believe that Jerome Bruner is the most important thinker and writer about education in our time—equal in importance to John Dewey in an earlier epoch. Indeed, his influence may be greater than Dewey’s, because Bruner wrote far more vividly and he entered directly into the classroom—politics and all—in a way that Dewey never did. At present, neither Dewey nor Bruner are much discussed among political figures involved in education. But we will only have truly effective education in the United States and the rest of the world, if we attend carefully to, and attempt to implement, the wisdom of these two scholarly giants.

REFERENCE


I had the pleasure of meeting him in Reggio Emilia several times as he became a friend of the schools during his frequent yearly visits. Bruner was also named an honorary citizen of Reggio Emilia.

Lella Gandini, Reggio Children liaison in the U.S. for the dissemination of the Reggio Emilia approach

I had the good fortune, beginning in the late 1970s, to serve as the link between Loris Malaguzzi and notable educators in the United States, as he asked me to interview Jerome Bruner, who accepted kindly and invited me to his home in Gloucester on the Massachusetts coast. His wife was a graduate of Smith College, where I had also studied and where I was at the time a part-time instructor of Italian.

To prepare for this task, I tried to read all of his writings that I could find to be ready to ask pertinent questions. In response to my questions beginning with, “You wrote . . .”, I remember Professor Bruner would say with humor, “I do not remember all that I wrote . . .” He discussed with me the importance of the development of the mind and how teaching is a central element in this development along with cultural transmission. In the curriculum he designed, “Man: A Course of Study,” he recognized the influence of Claude Lévi-Strauss. He discussed teaching and teachers’ attitudes toward children with difficulties while praising the experience of the School of Barbiana in Italy, where the children helped each other in the process of learning in a very democratic and effective way. In conclusion, he spoke about his strong interest in the development of language in infants and young children. He also showed me two important and beautiful things in his life: his sailboat—noting that he was, so far, the only social scientist who had crossed the Atlantic in a sailboat—and an enormous computer housed in a small building in his yard, saying that he was experimenting with this new gadget.

Jerome Bruner did not meet Loris Malaguzzi, but began to visit the schools of Reggio Emilia in 1995, the year following Malaguzzi’s death. He was invited by Carlina Rinaldi, who became his trusted friend and attentive host. Therefore, I had the pleasure of meeting him in Reggio Emilia several times as he became a friend of the schools during his frequent yearly visits. Bruner was also named an honorary citizen of Reggio Emilia. Our most recent encounter was in November 2015 at the 92nd Street Y, where I received recognition for my work with teachers.
and children and the introduction of the Reggio Emilia approach in the United States. Jerome Bruner was an honored guest at this initiative in connection with the presence of “The Wonder of Learning – The Hundred Languages of Children” exhibit in New York City, and once again, I had the pleasure to be with him and listen to his words and wisdom. [see “Dialogue of Two Cities – NYC and Reggio Emilia: Exploring Possibilities for Quality Early Education for All Children” in the March 2015 issue of Innovations.]

Lilian Katz, professor emerita, University of Illinois

During the last 60 years as a teacher, graduate student, and professor, I have gained both knowledge and understanding from Jerome Bruner’s provocative and insightful writing, from listening to his presentations and from working alongside him on various committees. His work has been very helpful to the field of developmental psychology and to early education, and it will continue to enrich generations to come.

Margie Cooper, NAREA standing chair and executive director of Inspired Practices in Early Education

Jerome Bruner passed away recently at the age of 100. He was a brilliant mind and a true friend of Reggio Emilia, as Reggio Emilia was also a true friend of Jerome Bruner. There may be a bit of a renaissance in studying some of the contributions of Jerome Bruner and why it was that the educators in Reggio Emilia found a relationship of exchange with Bruner so satisfying, inspiring, and motivating. I want to share just one paragraph from one of Jerome Bruner’s books, which was published in 1986 and bears one of my top two favorite book titles: Actual Minds: Possible Worlds. He wrote at the conclusion of this book:

> When and if we pass beyond the unspoken despair in which we are now living, when we feel we are again able to control the race to destruction, a new breed of developmental theory is likely to arise. It will be motivated by the question of how to create a new generation that can prevent the world from devolving into chaos and destroying itself. I think that its central technical concern will be how to create in the young an appreciation of the fact that many worlds are possible, that meaning and reality are created not discovered, that negotiation is the art of constructing new meaning by which individuals can regulate their relations with each other. It will not, I think, be an image of human development that locates all of the sources of change inside the individual solo child. For if we have learned anything from the dark passage of history through which we are now moving, it is that man surely is not an island entirely onto himself but a part of the culture that he inherits and then recreates. The power to recreate reality, to reinvent culture we will come to recognize is where the theory of development must begin its discussion of mind. (Bruner, 1986, p. 149)

Considering the news of the past weeks, months, and years, this book written in 1986 calls us to think about our work as educators with the young, who also educate us. I believe that we can see the possibilities that open before us if we find a way to relate to one another, to find styles of negotiation that generate and do not denigrate, and to build a hopeful possibility for the many generations coming after us.

REFERENCE

On the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Loris Malaguzzi International Center, a celebration in Reggio Emilia, Italy reflected on both the Reggio Children company and the International Center in a style characteristic of Reggio Emilians: with “nostalgia for the future.” On the morning of May 23, 2016, Reggio Children presented to shareholders the fiscal results for the previous year, shared descriptions of the social balance (the projects and advancements of the organization), and featured assessment remarks by the President of Reggio Children, Claudia Guidici and Mayor Luca Vecchi. Later in the evening, a second gathering assembled in the auditorium of the International Center as a continuation of the annual meeting of Reggio Children. Citizens, guests, board members, educators, and study group participants convened to hear further remarks from President Claudia Guidici and Mayor Luca Vecchi, as well as Carla Rinaldi, President of the Reggio Children–Loris Malaguzzi Center Foundation, and Aaron Sherinian, Marketing and Communications Director of the United Nations Foundation.

As NAREA is one of three founding networks of the Reggio Children–Loris Malaguzzi Center Foundation, the newest body within the system of Reggio Emilia, excerpts here are remarks made by its President, Carla Rinaldi:

"Allow me, first of all, to express my joy for a day like today. Yes, certainly, for the joy of the success of Reggio Children and its balance sheet, but also for its activities and its spirit. Not only will I always feel a part of Reggio Children, but I also believe that our city is becoming increasingly aware and proud of it."

I especially want to express my joy for your presence in this initiative organized for the 10th anniversary of this International Center, as Claudia also said, highlighted by the presence of our esteemed guest, Aaron Sherinian. Ten years is an important anniversary to celebrate. Ten years can be an instant, but at the same time, an eternity for those who have lived them day by day; a short-long time, but a time necessary to achieve an undertaking that ten years ago some considered to be impossible. Tonight, we are here together sitting inside the impossible! And we are here together to continue the beauty of the almost impossible, which is the courage that we inherited and that we want to transmit to the future. So, we are together in not only the beauty of the possible, but in the beauty and the challenge of the impossible. Impossibility is embedded in part in the dreams, the desires, and the rights that we are talking about today.

This center is our “WE.” It is the place from which the Foundation, which I represent here today, takes its meaning. The Foundation, made possible by my friends and colleagues,
is a young foundation—very young—established in 2011, but it has very deep roots in the history and experience of the city of Reggio Emilia, of the infant-toddler centers and preschools, and of Reggio Children. We have both an important and demanding inheritance, but also a very long history ahead of us—a long history of future.

But why did we establish a foundation at a certain point of our experience? Many different reflections and considerations could be made, but I would like to summarize in this way. We possess a deep desire and responsibility for taking the experience to the borders and peripheries of the world, keeping in mind that each of us is a periphery of the world. Our desire and responsibility is to go where children and youth are not seen, because they are invisible and are ignored—ignored first of all as human beings, ignored even by their own cultures and societies. Many images could come to mind; they are offered to us every day. I am speaking of the children that no one asks about or fights for—children that don’t even exist for themselves. They don’t even know that they exist. They don’t even know that they have rights. Here, then, we draw strength from our roots. This is another value of the Reggio approach, of this experience, of this city, and also of this Foundation. In fact, a key element of the Reggio approach is the value that is given and the faith and the listening that is offered to children and to human beings in general, who acquire dignity because they are listened to, because they are made visible.

And so, with the infant-toddler centers and preschools and with Reggio Children, we would like to inhabit those places of periphery—not a geographical periphery but a cultural periphery. It is a periphery that does not recognize the rights of children and, thus, of human beings, to be—not only to exist, but also to have the dignity of being seen. As I said, there are many things we could add, but it is important to say why, and with what resources in addition to why, this work should be done.

The Foundation’s funds are derived from economic investments made by local businesses and foundations, international investments, and also by individual citizens who want to ensure that objectives like the ones mentioned earlier can be reached. We have some examples that we can share. At the national level, for example, the collaboration with the non-profit association ENEL Cuore for the “Fare Scuola” (“Doing School”) project, aims to reignite for schools, beginning with the schools of the peripheral areas of Italy, the idea that it is possible to change. Beginning with the architecture of the schools, the project seeks to also modify or update the “architectures of doing school.” Another project at the international level, possible thanks to AMREF and in collaboration with the colleagues mentioned previously, is called “Orti di Strada” (“Street Gardens”). Through exchanges with the colleagues who are here with us in the study groups, it has been possible to continue the “Learning Teachers” project. In this project, educators who come from some of these global peripheries can have the study tour experience, thanks to financial support from their colleagues. As they return to their countries of origin, accompanied by the experience of having been with us, that spark truly becomes a tree with deep roots.

The ultimate objective of the Foundation is to give meaning to this Center, to improve the lives of children and youth and their families and of entire societies, but also to seek collaboration with states, governments, foundations, communities, and humanitarian organizations like UNICEF, Save the Children, the United Nations, and other organizations of this type to rediscover value and quality so that we can rediscover the value and the quality of childhood. Because
while we talk about the rights of children, not much is said about the rights of the society to have childhood, because a society without childhood is a society, as Claudia said, that does not have a future.

What strategies will we and do we use in these and other projects? The work starts with a form of solidarity, which we have interpreted as research. Our foundation aims to create solidarity through research. What research? As we learned from the infant-toddler centers and preschools and have practiced, the real research, which involves doubts and questions, the kind that requires the partners to share equality and dialogue. Solidarity is not only benevolence, not just providing prefabricated kits—‘I’ll teach you how to do it’—that are the same for all, but research viewed as reciprocity, that recognizes the knowledge of the others, whoever and wherever they may be, and that recognizes equal dignity.

This is the value that we would like to offer, along with our natural partners and our city, to all the organizations—national and international—that want to do something, but I repeat, “not just anything,” to establish a school, a place of childhood, an experience, that not only recognizes the rights of childhood, but also—I repeat—rights that require the responsibility of each society to have childhood. Childhood is not just the sum of the children. It is something more. It is, as we have seen in the history of this experience and in the first teachings of Loris Malaguzzi, a political and cultural choice that each city, each community, each country has and must have the sense of duty and the courage to make, each assuming their own responsibility. This is why today being here together is for all of us, for the foundation that I represent, a true joy, because in this joy lies the indispensable hope for the future that we all share.

NAREA’s founding partnership in the Reggio Children–Loris Malaguzzi Center Foundation with the Reggio Emilia Institutet in Sweden and Red Solare in Argentina is a way of realizing our own mission and vision, which seeks to craft “a world where all children are honored and respected for their potential, capabilities, and humanity.” By not just holding a vision, but acting on it through collaboration, participation, and fiscal investing, the coalition of NAREA members and friends makes possible the type of projects highlighted in President Rinaldi’s remarks.

Since the first municipal preschool, Robinson, opened in 1963, the education project of Reggio Emilia has never stopped transforming itself. The full political investment of six decades has left innumerable traces not only in Reggio Emilia, but also throughout the global community, including North America. When, in the summer of 2010, the NAREA board welcomed then-Mayor Graziano Delrio to its regular board meeting and summer conference in Chicago, the first seeds of Reggio Emilia’s idea for an international foundation were shared. From the Foundation’s eventual establishment in September 2011 to the present, important initiatives, projects, and investments have been made in the peripheral communities mentioned in President Rinaldi’s remarks. Certainly the distinct histories of Italy and the United States make political comparisons difficult, but few would argue that political will for the well-being and rights of very young children remains one of the most significant features of Reggio Emilia’s legacy. NAREA has learned, and continues to learn, through participation and exchange with Reggio Emilia and colleagues around the world that the opportunities and responsibilities of our time are wisely carried out when there is commitment to a common good. In this way, the collective voice of all those who share a mission for children, families, and educators is amplified.

NAREA can be a voice for change and a voice for what is possible when “going beyond” replaces “staying within.” Advocacy for the rights of all children can be the mutual purpose that propels us forward. We welcome the participation of all.

By not just holding a vision, but acting on it through collaboration, participation, and fiscal investing, the coalition of NAREA members and friends makes possible the type of projects highlighted in President Rinaldi’s remarks.

–Margie Cooper
The logistics email sent to participants set the stage for the Twelfth NAREA Summer Conference: “Get ready, because we are going back to college with early days, presentations in auditoriums, intellectual discourse, plentiful coffee, and campus food! The conference will take place on the Ryerson University Campus.” From June 23–25, 2016, 380 educators from 6 countries, 27 U.S. states, and 7 Canadian provinces gathered in Toronto, ON for an intense three days of discourse, dialogue, and exchange inspired by the educational project of Reggio Emilia, Italy. The conference featured Reggio educators Moira Nicolosi and Giovanna Cagliari. With their ever-present interpreter, Leslie Morrow, Moira and Giovanna invited participants to encounter the children, families, and educators of Reggio Emilia each morning in profound plenary sessions.
The first day began with warm greetings from NAREA and the Ontario Reggio Association. On behalf of the local hosts, Chief Stacey Laforme of the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation welcomed the group to Toronto with this eloquent message:

*Aaniin, Boozhoo
Niigaani Anishnabe Inini, Stacey Laforme nindizhinikaaz, Credit indooneji, miinga indodem, Mississaugas Anishnabe*

Toronto is a sacred place to many First Nations. It was a land of medicine, and it is the traditional territory of the Mississaugas, so I do welcome you today. I would say that we have a vision for my people—our people—and we are determined to see that vision become a reality. It is a vision of unity, of respect, and of enlightenment. I was told you were visionaries as well—people who see the world as it is but do not accept that it must stay that way—people who see the potential of what could be—for that alone and for what I am sure is a troubled journey, for many times a visionary walks alone in a world that loves to follow the crowd.

If I was able, I would gift you with an eagle feather for your journey to this point and the work you will do beyond that. Now an eagle feather, to my people, is sacred and once you are given one, it is your responsibility to live your life in a good way, according to the seven teachings of my people. The seven teachings are wisdom, love, respect, bravery, honesty, humility, and truth. I envy you a little bit. You stand upon the path of our future, and you can provide guidance and assistance to the next generation of leaders. Your work is arguably more important than any technological breakthrough—any modern marvel, for you can free a mind that will actually perform those marvels.

Yet, you are surrounded by heroes everyday.
People who receive very little acclamation for their passion and commitment
Those who will not sit back and watch
Those who go above and beyond duty and obligation
Those who believe in what they do and through this belief, make others believe
Where success isn’t measured in mass or even in money
It’s measured by a twinkle in the eye and a smile on a face
Where it’s not about numbers but the accomplishment of others
A hero can’t always be identified by the lives they save
Sometimes it’s by the lives they touch
*Miigwech* for that.

Our children are our future and the most precious gift we receive. Sadly, the legacy we will leave our children and their children will be a world that is ravaged by the thoughtlessness of our generation and the ones before us. We have established ourselves as the most important thing, when in truth, we are but a part of the ecological system, and now we are paying for that blindness. If we remembered our connections and relations to the planet, we would not have left the legacy that we have. So I ask you to remember your connections to the land and the animals and the earth. It may be a connection that is very deep inside or it may rest on the surface. But we must not move forward without that connection.

It is my humble opinion that the only way true transformation can occur to affect substantial and enduring change is to begin with the recognition of the universe around us and our place within it. We have to stop seeing with our eyes and feel with our hearts, recognize the spiritual connections of all things, embrace that recognition even if it is buried under layers and layers of so-called civilizations. It is the simplest and,
Policy, politics, and engineering won’t stop climate change and, right or wrong, our children and their children are the hope for our future and will bear enormous responsibility. They are the leaders of tomorrow, and we must seek their wisdom and their knowledge.

–Chief Stacey LaForme

at the same time, the most complex undertaking you will ever encounter. However, the results could change the direction of civilization for all nations on this planet.

Everything else is merely a stalling tactic. Policy, politics, and engineering won’t stop climate change and, right or wrong, our children and their children are the hope for our future and will bear enormous responsibility. They are the leaders of tomorrow, and we must seek their wisdom and their knowledge. I believe you are in the best position to assist. Your vision is in keeping with the future we must achieve. Your methodology strives to utilize respectfully the world around the child, and your idea of the child at the center is in keeping with indigenous knowledge and in keeping with bringing forth the true child—a confident child who will grow into a strong adult and give us our best chance at a bright future—a child who will be all that he can be.

I will read you one more poem that has to do with the environment and the planet. It is from the perspective of my people, but I do not think it should be. I do not think it has to be. I believe it should be from the perspective of everybody. It is called “Sacred Trust.”

We are the keepers of these lands
She shelters and sustains us
Long after the flesh fails the spirit, we will care for these lands
Our drums will be heard upon the wind
Our voices in the rustle of the leaves
My people have a sacred trust with the land
A trust no man may break
A trust that death cannot sever

We were here when you first stepped foot upon this land
And here, we will remain long after the last step has disturbed her soil
I will end by saying I believe that children are limited only by the imagination of those who surround them. I believe that each generation can be more inquisitive, more intuitive, and more attuned to the universe that surrounds us, and I believe that you can play a key role in that, and for that I say chi miiigwech.

The first day’s plenary session was entitled “Experiences, Contexts, Theories, and Values: Dialogues on the Educational Project of Reggio Emilia,” which established an historical foundation for the values of the educational project in Reggio Emilia. Moira told the audience that she had read in the Toronto guidebook that the word Toronto means “a place of encounter” and that we would adopt this as our guiding thread during the next three days together. Then she said, “What we would like to try this morning is to look at the idea of theory, practice, and shared meaning.” The speakers offered participants questions that served to frame the viewing and discussion of the videos that they shared. This strategy of framing documentation allowed the speakers to go deeper into their own theories. The videos entitled “It’s a Whale” and “A Fragment of a Day in School” were viewed, discussed, and reflected upon. Giovanna reminded us, “It’s important to have dialogue and to create together what we mean by words and listening.” The speakers concluded the session by circling back to an essential principle that they had spoken of earlier in the day: the value of participation.

It’s important to have dialogue and to create together what we mean by words and listening.

–Giovanna Cagliari
Absolutely loved the presentations from the educators from Reggio Emilia. Moira and Giovanna did an amazing job sharing their work, and I especially really appreciated their presentation on documentation and how they went through the process at their schools. It never ceases to amaze me how central their image of the child is to everything they do in Reggio Emilia! Bravissima!  

–2016 NAREA Summer Conference participant

The organization and offerings for each day were varied and complex. The mornings were dedicated to plenary sessions with the featured speakers and the afternoons were filled with a variety of breakout and atelier sessions. Having breakout sessions throughout the campus gave everyone the chance to see beautiful Ryerson University and enjoy the spectacular Toronto weather.

The afternoon sessions on the first day were designed for small breakout sessions, a request from past participants. Five sessions were offered over the course of the afternoon, and each participant could choose one. “Meeting the Exhibit” was geared toward those who had been to the exhibit multiple times and was another opportunity to hear from the Reggio
We are not educators who teach children. We are educators who are with children.

—Moira Nicolosi

Educators from Bishop Strahan School, Rainbow District School Board Kindergarten Program, Algonquin College Early Learning Centre, Jacob Hespeler Childcare Centre, Compass Early Learning and Care, and Schoolhouse Playcare Centre of Lakehead, Inc. shared the contexts of their schools and centers during the afternoon. In addition to the virtual school tours, a session with the featured speakers was offered for those following the “Beyond Preschool” track.

Many participants entered on the last day pulling suitcases behind them, but eager to hear Moira and Giovanna speak on the topic of “Beyond the Linearity in Teaching.” During this time, the speakers shared stories of work with primary school children. They invited...
participants to experience further evolutionary processes in the creation of children's theories and reminded us that children's intuitions are very close to scientific research. Moira said, “This seems like a simple thing, but it requires very deep listening, whether it is listening to children’s open words or other forms of expression.”

Emanuela Vercalli from Reggio Children joined the group and gave an update from Reggio Emilia on past and present exhibitions, publications, and professional development opportunities. As Emanuela concluded her talk, she referenced the “Reggio movement” and encouraged everyone to participate.

As they wrapped up the morning, Moira and Giovanna shared one last thought: “Our hope is to try to contribute to the construction of a school, a city, possibly a world inhabited by the rights of all.” Encouraged by their words and the beautiful video “A Journey into Rights,” participants were invited to atelier sessions, where they had the opportunity to work with their hearts, hands, and minds. Local artists and atelier facilitators offered experiences with storytelling, fiber arts, drama, and wire.
It was with great pleasure and appreciation that we welcomed our colleagues from Reggio Emilia, Italy: Giovanna Cagliari, Moira Niclosi, and Emanuela Vercalli. We offer thanks and deep gratitude to the educators and families from Bishop Strahan School, Rainbow District School Board Kindergarten Program, Algonquin College Early Learning Centre, Jacob Hesper Childcare Centre, Compass Early Learning and Care, and Schoolhouse Playcare Centre of Lakehead, Inc. for all they did to prepare for and host the conference. Our hope is that the time spent at Ryerson University, participating in the ongoing study of the Reggio Emilia educational project and reflecting upon the responsibility of early education, will serve to support everyone who attended and that each participant will “see the potential of what could be” in education.

We believe the following words from participants accurately reflect our collective thoughts:

This conference was very informative. I took more notes than I ever have at a conference. Location was great. Could have been a week-long conference.

I was overwhelmed in a good way! Just listening to the keynote speakers was amazing. Their passion and love for children was evident in every presentation!!

I was in Italy in 2002, and the time spent with the people from Italy was reminiscent of that experience. Leslie is a phenomenal interpreter. The understanding of what was said made the conference excellent!

Summary of Innovations Peer Review Process for September 2017 Issue

The June 2016 issue of Innovations featured the Call for Proposals for the first peer-reviewed issue of Innovations, which is also posted on the Innovations Peer-Reviewed page of the NAREA website. The topic for the first peer-reviewed issue in September 2017 will be “Building Collective Knowledge in a Learning and Democratic Community through the Processes of Documentation.” The following is a summary of the peer-review process for these annual issues. You can also find this information on the NAREA website. Please contact the editor Judith Kaminsky [judy@reggioallliance.org] for further information.

Proposal review (September 2016)

- Proposals due by September 1
- Editors and consulting editors review all proposals according to:
  - Proposal criteria
  - Essence of call for proposals
  - Consistent with principles of Reggio Emilia educational project
  - Includes focus on as many as 3 aspects of this topic
  - Diversity of authors, contexts, and communities
  - Whether previously published (will not be accepted) and whether more than one proposal submitted (only one proposal/group of authors/issue will be accepted)
- Editor notifies submitters by September 30 whether:
  - Proposal approved, offering invitation to submit manuscript
  - Will offer suggestions to pursue compelling, interesting, innovative aspects of proposal
  - Will encourage integration of reflections on experience
  - Goal to establish collaborative reflective process that offers meaningful
Manuscript review (January–May 2017)

- Manuscripts due by December 31, 2016
- Editors and consulting editors read and review all manuscripts according to essence of call for proposals and guidelines and requirements for submitted manuscripts
- Editors and consulting editors collaboratively decide which manuscripts to send out for review
  - Authors notified by February 28 whether manuscript will be sent out for review, or if revisions are requested (to be submitted by March 31) in order to be considered for publication, or not appropriate for publication
  - One consulting editor and two reviewers with particular knowledge regarding topic will review each manuscript
- Reviewers are former Innovations editorial board members, former and current NAREA board members, former Innovations authors, and NAREA exhibit project host community representatives
- Reviewers and consulting editors read manuscripts and offer perspectives based on the following considerations:
  - In what ways do you believe this manuscript supports the topic of the September 2017 issue, “Building Collective Knowledge in a Learning and Democratic Community through the Processes of Documentation”?
  - How does the experience of research and inquiry shared in the manuscript support the value of learning as a process of individual and group construction fostered by strategies of research, exchange of ideas, and co-participation?
  - How does the experience of research and inquiry shared in the manuscript illustrate the value of participation that generates and nurtures the culture of solidarity, responsibility, and inclusion in this educational community?
  - In which ways does the process of documentation give value and visibility to the individual and group learning processes of the children and adults participating in the experience of research and inquiry shared in this manuscript?
  - Which of the aspects of the issue’s topic from the call for proposals is addressed in this manuscript and what role did these aspects play in supporting the shared experience of children, educators, and families?
  - What specific suggestions for revisions do you have that would improve the quality of this manuscript and/or strengthen the way in which it supports the topic of this issue?
- Reviewers and consulting editors submit a report to editor by April 15 that addresses above considerations
- Editors and consulting editors discuss reviewers’ reports and collaboratively decide on which manuscripts to publish in peer-reviewed issue
  - Editor communicates to authors by May 31 re: acceptance for publication with no revisions required or interest in publishing following specific revisions (to be submitted by June 30)

Manuscript preparation for publication (June–July 2017)

- Editor edits and prepares accepted manuscripts for publication and sends to authors for review
- Authors complete publication agreement and submit photo permissions by June 30
- Consulting editors draft introduction and concluding reflections for issue
Voices: Conversations from North America and Beyond


By Edna L. Hussey

Edna Hussey has been the principal of Mid-Pacific Institute’s lower school, which includes a Reggio-inspired preschool, in Honolulu, Hawai‘i, since 2004. Prior to working at Mid-Pacific, she was head of Epiphany School in Honolulu for seven years. Edna participated in the May 2010 North American study tour to Reggio Emilia. Together with Mid-Pacific Preschool pedagogista Leslie Gleim, she organized Nā Liko Mōhala, a community-based organization of public and private entities to bring “The Wonder of Learning – The Hundred Languages of Children” exhibit to Kapolei, O‘ahu, from June through December 2013. Edna aspires to extend Reggio inspiration from preschool through the elementary grades at Mid-Pacific Institute.

From the island of O‘ahu in Hawai‘i, my colleagues and I crossed the Pacific and the entire expanse of beautiful Canada to participate in the Twelfth NAREA Summer Conference and to experience once more “The Wonder of Learning” exhibit. We traveled nearly 5,000 miles east, anticipating the what, why, and how of this “spiral of learning” in the conference theme. Then we flew another 5,000 miles westward after the conference, reflecting on what this phrase—“embracing openness and uncertainty”—would now mean to us.

We slowly began our ascent on our own spiral of learning with Moira Nicolosi and Giovanna Cagliari guiding us on a cyclical path. Aware of varying levels of familiarity with Reggio Emilia principles, Moira and Giovanna walked us through an understanding of key beliefs and values:

- Children’s citizenship rights to high quality learning
- A powerful image of the child as naturally complex and creative and capable of co-constructing knowledge with others (peers and adults)
- School as a system of interactions and a place of encounters and exchange of ideas
- Documentation as a way to make learning processes visible
- Parents as co-participants in “participated projects” with their children and teachers

All of these ideas became landmarks on our journey.

The framework for our learning experience over the three days was effective: identify the pathways ahead through Moira’s and Giovanna’s explications (Italian, even when translated, is lyrical, poetic, and mesmerizing), carefully observe video of classroom scenarios in which the “protagonists” gave visibility to their learning processes, then reflect on the discoveries we made about learning from the perspective of the children’s and teachers’ intentions. The reflection periods following each video were engaging and stimulating.

Each day of our journey took us to another level of understanding about the nature of documentation as a way of making learning visible, referring to the what (content) and how (process) of learning, and the generative and recursive process of reconstructing through re-reading in the good company of children and colleagues. Another pathway led to a
better understanding of knowledge as a subjective process nurtured by reflection and back-and-forth dialogical engagement between children and between children and adults. Yet another pathway led to the notion of the “transversal functions” of learning: planning, making decisions, identifying resources, and evaluating options—always in social contexts as opposed to talking superficially about learning as skills and abilities. These transversal functions cut across all disciplines and subjects and relate to the idea of learning to learn and the process of constructing knowledge as part of the nature of a group.

Perhaps the most challenging pathway Moira and Giovanna described was that of viewing learning as research and developing schools as places of pedagogical research. Why challenging? We know for the most part that what began as systematizing education into factory-model schools in early 19th century United States, which led to the standardization of curriculum and instruction and the current mandatory, standardized curricula and testing of learners, has created an enormous system. In many schools, students and teachers have little to no time to cultivate learning as a process, to reflect together, to construct powerful knowledge together. The notion of making learning visible is narrowly limited to test results and products of learning, which is why the challenge of developing schools as places of research is so much more intensive and vital to the future of education and the future of all children.

On the last day of the conference, Moira and Giovanna moved this challenge to the forefront by sharing compelling research of what happens when the desire to learn is cultivated in preschool five-year-olds and children in grades one through three of the primary school that share the same space in the Loris Malaguzzi International Center. Observations in nature and theories about seeds developed by the five-year-olds led to their insightful comments about birth as transformational. First graders who had been observing trees and plants constructed theories with each other about roots anchored in the earth, giving life to plants, then connecting respiration to sustaining life. Documentation via drawings and photo images added depth to the children’s theory-making conversations while developing linguistic references for their theories. When these children became third graders, revisiting their documentation relaunched their theories and prompted them to revise them by making new connections to their developing scientific knowledge of respiration and photosynthesis. We were amazed by the children’s revisiting of their root study, leading to theories about the origin of the universe! Like an image finally coming into focus through a camera lens, this image of the “spiral of learning” was concretized through the video documentation and ensuing discussion.

The atelier experiences—wire, storytelling, drama, and fiber arts—brought the conference to a meaningful close. I participated in the storytelling atelier, which began with the rendering of an indigenous legend about a traveler who is lost and asks a wolf, a snake, and a bird how to get back on the pathway. After tasting fresh strawberries and blueberries, the fruits the traveler was provided on his journey, we turned to view a landscape of natural materials aesthetically arranged in groups around a 20-foot blank canvas on the ground. Inspired by the story’s foundation in the natural world, we worked in silence except for the flute music in the background, selecting a variety of leaves, Perhaps the most challenging pathway Moira and Giovanna described was that of viewing learning as research and developing schools as places of pedagogical research.

—Edna L. Hussey
grass, nuts, berries, flowers, fibers, branches, shells, and rocks to create narratives side by side. We were then invited to make connections with other narratives using the materials. As we stepped back, a breathtaking mural of natural materials emerged. We discovered our narratives blending into one another, as if in dialogue, without boundaries. The atelier was a rich sensory experience integrating taste, sound, touch, and sight. We experienced beautiful, calming, reflective learning that made visible our embrace of openness and uncertainty.

“Pathways” is an apt metaphor for the concepts and beliefs that conference participants considered. In addition to those mentioned earlier, these also resonated for me:

- The theory of knowledge is dynamic.
- The fluid, dynamic nature of knowledge is knowledge constructed between two or more others actively seeking meaning, whether children or adults.
- Collect children’s ideas, then give them back to continue the “redescription” of ideas.
- “Relaunching” requires careful listening to children’s ideas, words, and recordings.
- Think of school as an atelier that cultivates the desire to learn.

I am sure other conference participants would be able to add which pathways were meaningful to them.

As one of nearly 400 participants representing 6 countries, 27 states of the U.S., and 7 Canadian provinces, I have returned to Hawai‘i with my colleagues, pondering the pathways that we choose to embrace with openness and uncertainty. There is much more my colleagues and I need to understand about the context in which we teach—a school with a Reggio-inspired preschool and elementary steeped in inquiry-based practice and a middle school and high school infused with state-of-the-art technology, project-based learning, and an International Baccalaureate approach. How can we grow a culture of research on our campus? How can we shift the focus from teaching to learning in our school community? What internal structures best support the mindset that views the process of learning, the process of communicating, and the process of “visibility”? How can listening deeply improve learning and teaching? The school year begins in August, when we will continue our journey along a spiral of learning.

In addition to the conference experience, Leslie Gleim and I participated in meetings with the representatives of 11 of the 13 exhibit host communities from 2008 through 2014 (Phase One). These conversations, running parallel to the conference and the following day, further deepened my understanding about the impact of “The Wonder of Learning” exhibit on thousands of educators across the U.S. and Canada. In sharing our triumphs and challenges hosting “The Wonder of Learning” exhibit, a sense of solidarity emerged among us, as did the resolve to continue to make the voices of children heard and their image as capable learners visible across our home states, provinces, and regions. This is our individual and collective challenge as teachers, whether in Honolulu, HI; Chicago, IL; Henderson, KY; or Toronto, ON—to raise awareness, to advocate, and to take action on the rights of children, parents, and families to high quality education.

Mahalo (thank you) to our Toronto hosts, the NAREA board and staff, Ryerson University, and lei of aloha to Moira and Giovanna, who strengthened our convictions and inspired us to embrace openness.
Inspiration from the Twelfth NAREA Summer Conference: What Meaning Do We Bring to the Zone of Proximal Development in Relationship to the Reggio Emilia Approach?

By Gretchen Reynolds

The Early Childhood Education program, a 2-year diploma program at Algonquin College in Ottawa, ON, was Gretchen Reynolds’ teaching home for 22 years. She retired as full faculty two years ago and since then has taught a course with pre-service early childhood education students every semester. Algonquin’s campus lab school is the Early Learning Centre, a valued community early learning environment. Gretchen and Elizabeth Jones collaborated on a partnership project of Pacific Oaks and the Pasadena Unified School District kindergartens. Inspired by their work with teachers and directors, they co-wrote two books, The Play’s the Thing: Teachers’ Roles in Children’s Play (2nd edition, 2011) and Master Players: Learning from Children at Play (1997), both published by Teachers College Press.

“What is the intention of the teacher?” “Did you see abilities or discoveries that were brought into play?” Moira Nicolosi, pedagogista, and Giovanna Cagliari, former primary school teacher and Reggio Children consultant, offered these questions (among others) for discussion at the Twelfth NAREA Summer Conference in Toronto, “Engaging Children, Families, and Educators in a Spiral of Learning: Embracing Openness and Uncertainty.”

The values and practices of the Reggio Emilia educational project are inspiring. My first study tour to Reggio Emilia in 1998 was like the stalk of wheat each participant received—an experience of love and charity. I discovered why the Reggio Emilia municipal preschools (represented by the Diana School) were named in 1991 by Newsweek magazine, “the most advanced in the world for early childhood education” (Istituzione of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia, 2011, p. 210). In everything they do, the preschools and infant-toddler centers bear witness to the core values of listening, reciprocity, mutual respect, equality, transparency, beauty, and participation.

In Jerome Bruner’s words, Reggio’s educational project makes manifest “…‘education, the cultivation of ways of going from the past and present into the possible. Indeed, we even teach our young how to learn productively: the art of learning in ways that promote elaboration on what has been learned and not just the acquisition and storage of information” (Istituzione of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia, 2011, p. 10).

I decided to focus my personal and professional development on acquiring a deeper understanding of Reggio’s pedagogical philosophy. With good fortune, I participated in two return trips to Reggio Emilia and several NAREA conferences and workshops. Each one, for me, is like immersion in the culture of Reggio. I am glad to share ideas and experiences with colleagues sitting beside me, in small groups, and through the Internet with dear friends who are on the same journey. I leave every encounter with disequilibrium that I grapple with later. The disequilibrium and the new ways of thinking about children and educational institutions that I learn about keep my curiosity alive.

My first experience of “The Wonder of Learning – The Hundred Languages of Children” exhibit in Boulder, Colorado took my breath away. The exhibit provokes wonder—a bold
In June 2016 in Toronto, I was pleased when Moira and Giovanna explained to us that, so as to “push forward disequilibrium,” the intentional teacher matches a child’s or the group’s ZPD (zone of proximal development) with considered invitations or provocations.

Gretchen Reynolds

I am grateful that my own values about children’s early experiences of school have a home and an identity in the Reggio Emilia approach. Through the lens of Reggio pedagogical philosophy, I am a better educator today. My perspective on the educational systems in my small professional circle is multidimensional. I infuse my understanding of Reggio’s pedagogy into classes with college students, workshops, and my writing. For two decades, my challenge has been to articulate Reggio-inspired practices well enough that colleagues committed to traditional techniques may appreciate Reggio’s alternative approach and perhaps discover that they are like-minded in some respects.

I like to focus on a particular aspect of the Reggio Emilia approach and experience until I understand it well. In 1998, especially on visits to schools, inside and outside, I paid attention to children’s social imaginary play. Later, I wanted to learn more about progettazione and its relationship to documentation—documentation of the type that narrates the learning, not documentation that is limited by a purpose to name skills and development.

At the NAREA Winter Conference in New York City in March 2015, “Exploring Possibilities: Viewing All Children as Citizens, Researchers, and Innovators of the World,” we watched videos of very young children experiencing the disorienting effects of virtual reality generated when digital technology—a web cam and computer screen—are an integrated part of the environment. Encounters with digital images on floors and walls provoked children’s curiosity, action, and subsequent surprising interactions with natural materials, spaces, and each other. Inside a changed reality of space, the children’s responses could not have been predicted. I admire Reggio strategies that include taking risks. I wonder at the power of innovative teaching.

In June 2016 in Toronto, I was pleased when Moira and Giovanna explained to us that, so as to “push forward disequilibrium,” the intentional teacher matches a child’s or the group’s ZPD (zone of proximal development) with considered invitations or provocations. My surprise on hearing them speak of the importance of ZPD was probably because I am used to the current educational discourse, which is dominated by technical terms such as learning outcomes, developmentally appropriate, objective observations, common core, state standards, skills, abilities, testing, assessment, readiness, accountability, student success, technology skills, etc. Like a breath of fresh air, Reggio educators are reminding us of the value of the learning relationship—the interactions between the child and the teacher, the child and the group, and the child and materials.

Are our students in education programs learning Vygotsky’s theory of social constructivism? How do they describe the concept of the zone of proximal development? Are they able to apply the theory of ZPD when working side by side with a child? Are they learning to use metacognitive awareness to name their own thinking? Are they comfortable with the subjectivity inherent in knowing a child’s ZPD?

The zone of proximal development is a subjective moment in time, a space or an opening that is made possible within a specific context, wherein the child is enabled to behave “...as though he were a head taller than himself” (Vygotsky, 1933/1978, p. 102). Bruner’s words echo this concept of expanding on what one knows into what is possible: “...the cultivation of imagination” (1960, p. 3).
of ways of going from the past and present into the possible” (Istituzione of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia, 2011, p. 10).

The zone of proximal development is the child's growing edge; it is learning with the support of a caring adult, with exchange between peers, or with the right materials. The child is enabled to act in a way she could not without support. Aligning her or his thinking with the child’s ZPD, the adult reads the child’s motivation or disequilibrium. The adult's support sustains the child's engagement and cultivates possibilities for new ways of acting and knowing. Imaginary play unites peers inside a shared drama when a child’s abilities are naturally scaffolded. Older children contesting a peer’s explanations become co-participants in the construction of knowledge through shared disequilibrium.

Being in tune with a child's or children’s ZPD is a teaching skill worth cultivating. It cannot be easy on the first try, because recognizing possible ways of scaffolding that match the child's ZPD demands a metacognitive awareness of one’s own understanding of the child in the event. It requires an adult who practices authentic listening, a state of “welcoming and being open to differences” (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 65).

How does an educator know when the ZPD context has had a positive effect on children’s learning? A question asked of us by Moira and Giovanna provides a possible answer: You see abilities or discoveries that were brought into play. In the video “It’s a Whale,” three girls and two boys are offered a large and open blue-floored space and different textures and lengths of rope. They began to “draw” on the floor with the ropes. The teacher intentionally watched from close by, but she did not interrupt. At one point, the teacher asked about a large enclosed shape on the floor, “What does it look like?” The child responds, “Dolphin.”

Quietly, a boy who was standing aside to observe enters the space making gestures with his rope as if he is casting a fishing line into water. Not only do his gestures express his meaning, he tells others that he is fishing for a “tiddler” and a “whale.” He magically brings a new tone to the play, from expression through designs to social imaginary play, in which there are indicators of an understanding of size concepts: “small” (tiddler) and “large” (whale). This video is a wonderful example of a scaffold appropriate to children's ZPD, when an intentional teacher designed a fitting invitation, using space with a blue floor, materials, silence, and time.

Thank you to the Reggio Emilia educational project and NAREA for their gifts of understanding.

REFERENCES


Resources

Organizations

**NAREA**
North American Reggio Emilia Alliance
reggioalliance.org

**Reggio Children**
info@reggiochildren.it
www.reggiochildren.it

Reggio Children Publications

Resources published by Reggio Children are available:
- In the U.S. from Learning Materials Workshop
  802-862-8399
  info@learningmaterialsworkshop.com
  www.learningmaterialswork.com
- In Canada from Parentbooks
  416-537-8334
  orders@parentbooks.ca
  www.parentbooks.ca

Bibliography

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

North American Study Groups in Reggio Emilia, Italy

**October 15–22, 2016:** U.S. Study Group
**March 25–30, 2017:** U.S. Students and Professors Study Group

**Contact:** Angela Ferrario, Reggio Children liaison in the U.S. for study groups
aferrario@comcast.net

International Professional Development Initiatives in Reggio Emilia, Italy

**November 13–18, 2016:** International Study Group
**November 20–23, 2016:** Study Group on Children with Special Rights

**Contact:** Reggio Children
www.reggiochildren.it

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

**June 23–November 13, 2016**
Toronto, ON
Hosted by the Ontario Reggio Association, the exhibit is located at the Fairmont Royal York Hotel and accompanied by a series of professional development initiatives.

**Contact:** Karyn Callaghan
karyncallaghan@gmail.com
ontarioreggioassociation.ca

**January–May 2017**
Durham, NC
Hosted by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Education Early Childhood Program, Carolina Friends School, Lakewood Avenue Children's School, and Duke Sanford School of Public Policy, the exhibit will be located at Northwood Mall and accompanied by a series of professional development initiatives.

**Contact:** Sharon Palsha (general information and college/university group visits) or Carmen Raynor (professional development and early education program visits)
NCWonderofLearningExhibit@gmail.com
www.northcarolinawol.org

**June 15–August 27, 2017**
Ann Arbor, MI
Hosted by the University of Michigan Children's Centers and the University of Michigan-Dearborn College of Health, Education, and Human Services, the exhibit will be located at the University of Michigan Stamps School of Art and Design and James and Anne Duderstadt Center and accompanied by a series of professional development initiatives.

**Contact:** Jennie McAlpine or Seong Hong
wonderoflearning@umich.edu

**January–May 2018**
Seattle, WA
Hosted by WA Collective for Children as Citizens, the exhibit will be accompanied by a series of professional development initiatives.

**Contact:** Paula Jones
paula@ourbeginning.com

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.

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

**June 23–November 13, 2016**
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**Contact:** Karyn Callaghan
karyncallaghan@gmail.com
ontarioreggioassociation.ca

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**June 15–August 27, 2017**
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**Contact:** Jennie McAlpine or Seong Hong
wonderoflearning@umich.edu

**January–May 2018**
Seattle, WA
Hosted by WA Collective for Children as Citizens, the exhibit will be accompanied by a series of professional development initiatives.

**Contact:** Paula Jones
paula@ourbeginning.com
June–November 2018
Boston, MA
Hosted by the Boston Area Reggio Inspired Collaborative, the exhibit will be accompanied by a series of professional development initiatives.
Contact: Kelly Pellagrini
kelly@charlestownnursery.org

January–May 2019
Madison, WI
Hosted by the Preschool of the Arts, 4-C, WECA, Madison Public Library, The Overture Center for the Arts, Madison Children’s Museum, One City Early Learning Center, and Little Explorers, the exhibit will be accompanied by a series of professional development initiatives.
Contact: Paul Brahce
pbrahce@preschoolofthearts.com

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

NAREA-Related Professional Development
Discount for NAREA members at all initiatives listed

**Michigan NAREA Brick by Brick Series – A Study of the Principles of the Reggio Emilia Approach and “The Wonder of Learning – The Hundred Languages of Children” Exhibit**
October 22, 2016: Dearborn, MI
May 12, 2017: Flint, MI
Contact: Judith Kaminsky, judy@reggioalliance.org or NAREA reggioalliance.org

**New England NAREA Brick by Brick Series – Reflecting on Multiple Potentials of Documentation**
October 29, 2016: Brookline, MA
April 22, 2017: TBA
Contact: NAREA reggioalliance.org

Toronto, ON
November 11–13, 2016
Speakers: Amelia Gambetti and Lella Gandini
Contact: Karyn Callaghan, karyncallaghan@gmail.com, ontarioreggioassociation.ca

**Eighth NAREA Winter Conference – Cultivating the Strong Potential of All Children: Growing a Community Vision for Education**
Durham, NC
March 9–11, 2017
Speakers: Two educators from Reggio Emilia, Italy
Contact: NAREA reggioalliance.org

**Thirteenth NAREA Summer Conference – Early Childhood Education as Activism: Stewardship, Social Justice, and Global Engagement**
Ann Arbor, MI
June 22–24, 2017
Speakers: Two educators from Reggio Emilia, Italy
Contact: NAREA reggioalliance.org

Visit 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