Innovations in Early Education: The International Reggio Emilia Exchange

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Introduction

The Innovations Summer 2020 issue was compiled during extraordinary times. A global pandemic, COVID-19, has altered our lives and our schools for young children in dramatic ways. Further, society continues to suffer systemic injustices including racial, social, educational, and economic inequalities. NAREA continues to confront the issues of society through our work with young children, their families, communities, and teachers. For us, this is where our work begins and matters most. We advocate for the rights of children, their families, and communities, especially those from disadvantaged realities. As an act of love, we see it as our responsibility to always seek a more just future.

“Love is as love does, and it is our responsibility to give children love. When we love children we acknowledge by our every action that they are not property, that they have rights—that we respect and uphold their rights. Without justice there can be no love” (hooks, 2000, p. 30).

In this issue, we continue to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the birth of Loris Malaguzzi, whose words continue to inspire us today. We are honored to feature reflections on the words, thoughts, and ideas of Malaguzzi from several different perspectives.

The first article, “Educating: A Profession of Hope and Uncertainty,” written by Claudia Giudici, president of Reggio Children, invites us to keep our attention on children. Even during these times of uncertainty and unrest, “[w]e must ensure the survival of a network of exchange and professional learning that promotes a pedagogy respectful of children’s ways of learning.”

Next, powerful and contemporary perspectives are offered on Malaguzzi’s article, “The Image of the Child: Where Teaching Begins” from North American educators. One of those educators, Rukia Rogers, founder and curriculum director at The Highlander School in Atlanta, states, “Our image of children can be a source of strength for positive, necessary change, giving us the determination to make a positive difference in this nation and the world.”

Our image of children can be a source of strength for positive, necessary change, giving us the determination to make a positive difference in this nation and the world.

Rukia Rogers

These collected perspectives are followed by an interview with Baji Rankin, senior consultant for the non-profit, Excellence and Equity in Early Childhood Education. In the 1980s, Baji was one of the very first North Americans to encounter the schools in Reggio Emilia, Italy. Baji recalls her experience, “This window into understanding how theory and practice are interconnected in the Reggio approach has been very important for me. It has influenced me deeply, not only in my educational philosophy, but in my philosophy of life.” This article is written in two parts. The second part will be featured in an upcoming Innovations 2020 issue.
Next, in the “Perspectives on NAREA” column, NAREA board members Karyn Callaghan and Susan Redmond share a contemporary perspective in “The Joy of Rereading: History, Ideas, and Basic Principles: An Interview with Loris Malaguzzi.” The authors’ reflections on Malaguzzi’s words call our attention to the truth that, “The work we do in early childhood education is political. We are making choices about what collective life is worth living and creating courageous spaces where stories can be told and juxtaposed with other stories.”

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Karyn Callaghan and Susan Redmond

In the “Voices: Conversations from North America and Beyond” section, Dawn St. Amour and Barbara Barrington offer, “Portraiture,” which was written prior to COVID-19. Through a study of identity and self-portraiture, the authors’ story is a reminder of what life was like for children and teachers when working closely together was a reality for classrooms.

A second article in the “Voices: Conversations from North America and Beyond” section features Chiara Angelicola, head of Silver Lake Center for Creativity Preschool, who writes of her school’s experience moving to virtual platforms during the initial pandemic quarantine. Interacting with young children through virtual platforms was not easy, and certainly not something many early educators were prepared to do. Angelicola shares how her school worked together, alongside families, as they continued to stay connected.

The recent 16th NAREA Summer Conference is revisited in an article by the NAREA staff.

Next, Opal educator, Tara Papandrew, contributes a book review for the Reggio Children publication, The Future is a Lovely Day. Published in 2001, the book features a project told through children’s words and images on the subject of the future.

Lastly, we offer the Innovations 2021 peer-review topic: With the courage to leap: Responding to crisis with ingenuity, creativity, and love. We invite Innovations’ readers to consider submitting a proposal as a way to document the historical changes that have taken place within early childhood programs, including those that have occurred during the past year.

From Innovations and NAREA, we wish you all a restful, peaceful, and wonderful summer!

REFERENCES


Image Credit

Cover image courtesy of Latisha Flowers, The Highlander School.
Claudia Giudici psychologist, is currently President of Reggio Children where she has worked since 1996 in the fields of research, training, and consulting. For twelve years she was a pedagogista at the Preschools and Infant-toddler Centres - Istituzione of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia, of which she became President in 2009. She has coordinated, taken part in, and cooperated on research projects with universities and research centers in Italy and abroad, in a number of fields including teaching, children’s learning processes, assessment, documentation, and family participation. She teaches Psycho-Pedagogy at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, is the author of numerous articles and essays, and the editor of pedagogical and education publications.
This year, February 20 was a “normal” celebratory day. In Reggio Emilia’s Valli Theatre, the conference titled “If the eye leaps over the wall: Researching new paradigms for education” was taking place, the first act of what would have been a long year dedicated to Loris Malaguzzi’s birth centenary. The day’s conference ended with Reggio Emilia mayor Luca Vecchi engaged in a conversation that takes on further new significance when reading it today. Speaking of the Reggio Emilia Approach, of Reggio Emilia’s schools and infant-toddler centers, the mayor emphasised that:

This legacy is extremely relevant and has in it the values and tools for braving the contemporary world. However, having this awareness also means we have to take responsibility for looking towards the future, not only looking for innovation in a pedagogical methodology that develops every day in the schools in the constant interaction of the whole educating community; it means that starting from this system of values, from this experience, from this approach, we also have the ingredients, the values for writing a new civic philosophy and offering it to this national community, this European community, this global community [...].

This challenge interrogates societal and political innovation, but for us here it is the consignment of a great responsibility, a great trust, towards the future: that of being one of the very few cities in Italy, in Europe, or in the world that, by starting with education imagined in this way, can make its own authoritative contribution to imagining and realizing the idea that another world is possible, another way is possible, and that this culture of ‘we’ can begin contributing to the better overall quality of democracy and of our community.

...[A]nother world is possible, another way is possible, and that this culture of ‘we’ can begin contributing to the better overall quality of democracy and of our community.

Luca Vecchi, Mayor of Reggio Emilia

If these words were true then, on Thursday, February 20, 2020, the thinking has gained strength today. Just a few months have gone by, but our lives have been changed by a “thing” we could never have expected. In a handful of days our ways of marking time, our gaze on others, our daily horizons, were all changed. With the closure—temporarily—of infant-toddler centers and preschools, indeed of all schools, all our projects seemed to collapse, all our dreams seemed to vanish into thin air.

There was great uncertainty, but on emerging from this initial phase of disorientation, our response to the crisis, to these totally unforeseen events, was to build projects, to try to innovate and create... to try to keep one step ahead of what was happening, and continues to happen, because this is what we have learned by being with the children.

Speaking of the first steps in the history of Reggio’s infant-toddler centers and preschools, Loris Malaguzzi said, “[t]he problem was to ensure the survival of the schools and the survival of hope: above all the survival of the children” (Cagliari et al., 2016, p. 341).

Today, in a different context, we too must ensure the survival of a network of exchange and professional learning that promotes a pedagogy respectful of children’s ways of learning. We are forced not to travel, to work remotely, to collaborate in virtual spaces. The virus and quarantines have fractured consolidated ways of conducting relations and work, but at the same time they have forced us to imagine new ways of conducting relations and work.

Although the Loris Malaguzzi International Center and Reggio Emilia’s schools are closed, we wish to continue weaving threads and relations, to generate debate and exchanges of point of view; and so we have begun to design and construct a digital ecosystem to ensure this continuity, facing the challenge of exploring new ways of learning and maintaining relations.

We share this adventure with friends and colleagues in several countries, attempting together to stay connected with each other to speak of education, of children, of schooling,
and to build new conditions for children, not only children, in a world that has been completely altered in three months. Our commitment is to continue the existence of Reggio Emilia’s infant-toddler center and preschool community as representing a reality that is possible, a concrete hope for all those who believe education, children, and young people deserve society’s unreserved respect and attention.

Once again, for all of us, Loris Malaguzzi’s thinking can be a compass for finding our direction. In 1988, speaking on the subject of “designing” and planning in preschools, he expressed reflections and ideas that, opportunely transposed, can provide interesting and stimulating perspectives for the current situation:

Ours is the ‘profession of uncertainty’, but life is a profession of uncertainty. [...] It is dangerous to think our intelligence autonomously constructs the world; on the other hand it is just as dangerous to think the world constructs us. The problem lies in this unsolvable contradiction, and in finding the intersecting space that permits a capacity for collaboration, a capacity for hooking up, for professional development that translates into participatory working capacities, sometimes in antagonistic ways and sometimes in complementary ways. [...]

I am anxious now for us to confront a problem. A problem that comes into our daily work in a highly concrete way, into our relations with ourselves, with children’s culture, and above all with children’s learning. It hinges on issues connected with attempting to define programme and strategy in exhaustive terms, to clarify the precise differences that exist between them.

This means we will see [...] how far we can get with defining programme, which means planning ahead not only for final objectives but for the procedures that lead to the objectives. Instead we feel the necessity and urgency – not only professional but human – to face up to problems, events and situations in ways that are free of programmed restriction, and trust in a sort of strategic capacity, in strategies for intervening. [...] Strategy is at once a biological and a cultural necessity, because strategy meets with the willingness to live in symbiosis with uncertainty. [...] Therefore I believe uncertainty should be freed of its small degree of negativity and any denials of its virtuous nature; it must be brought back as a constituent element of our lives, of our relations with ourselves, with others and with nature. Bearing in mind we must fill uncertainty with a contents that is positive in some way if we want to be capable of restoring it as something we can live with and use in practical ways as a constituent element of our growth.

Then uncertainty becomes a constant and permanent reality, and can act as an alternative to less uncertain notions; it becomes a force, an energy we can always find inside us, in our capacity to problematise and give responses – sometimes connected with a hope, sometimes connected with a precise purpose and objectives, sometimes with precise and pertinent knowledge. Uncertainty can be turned into something positive when we start to test it and see it as a state of ferment, as a motor of knowledge” (Cagliari et al., 2016, pp. 332-335).

Certainly, we are immersed in uncertainty now, but we can try, must try, to interpret this as key to defining and acting on new strategies: those like us who work with children, all of us, are duty-bound to renew hope through our daily actions. Only hope is capable of moving people to agency, and to trying to generate change.

Hope is the message of trust that we must allow to put down deep roots inside us. We, with our responsibility and duty for young people’s education, are responsible also for our own.
“You understand something is alive if it grows... just like us.”
—Giovanni, 4 years

“You understand something is alive if it grows... just like us.”
—Giovanni, 4 years

Earthtree | Ada, 5 years

“Trees are connected to the world and they stay united.”
—Andrea, 5 years

Trees | Lara, 1.8 years

“The bark’s stories” | Camilla, 4 years

“The voice of trees is beauty.”
—Andrea, 5 years

REFERENCES

Loris Malaguzzi's philosophy was deeply profound for me as a young teacher and African American grappling with a society and educational system full of inequities and methods of teaching that separated the child from her community, her context. I found Malaguzzi’s ethical approach to education revolutionary. He challenged us to consider a pathway for a better world, not with politicians or adults, but with our image of the child—a strong, competent, and powerful human being, born full of compassion, empathy, and an innate sense of justice. Children are born ready to build loving relationships, eager to belong and make contributions to their community.

What we have to do now is understand our image of the child and how the images we hold, as Loris Malaguzzi states, influence our beliefs and actions. For the American educator, how has systemic racism influenced our image of the child and therefore our daily interactions with children, especially children of color?

If we notice details in the daily ways the child shows empathy and compassion, we see how children notice and appreciate differences. If we make visible the child with an understanding of fairness and morality, then the child will show us possibilities for confronting our own bias and help lift up how we all could be living together.
This strong image of the child has become a fundamental part of my beliefs and the practices of The Highlander School. We have an unwavering commitment to their rights as citizens. It wakes me up in the morning full of hope, despite the heartache of seeing black and brown people, including children, being murdered because of the color of their skin. It is this strong image that helps me look beyond the thickness of the smoky clouds to see the possibilities for us to construct a new world, a new way of being together with action, because we witness and learn from children’s citizenship lived into every day.

Our image of children can be a source of strength for positive, necessary change, giving us the determination to make a positive difference in this nation, and the world.

Kentucky. A well-positioned nest on my neighbor’s house is now occupied by an expecting mourning dove. Just weeks ago, a robin couple nested, hatched, and successfully raised four chicks. The “runt,” significantly smaller, left the nest days later. This all took place in less than two months.

Many things moved me about observing the birds and their nests. As a former Chicago Commons early childhood studio and education coordinator (ateliera and pedagoga in the Reggio Emilia framework), you can rest assured I seriously documented this two-month process! The reason I provide this background is because the way bird parents got each of those fledglings away from the nest made me introspective about human parenting and how American society figuratively and literally cages certain youth.

From Paucity of Progress to Rejuvenating Revolutions

Black folks noticing birds is old—this phenomenon goes back centuries. Birds have long
Many species of birds, like robins, innately know more about supporting and parenting than humans. The nest is a protective cage for every being inside—especially the young. When the last, smallest, and likely least fed robin fledgling came out days later, both parents equitably spent time walking with it for days before it could fly, and fly it eventually did. The first three fledglings flew within hours of leaving the nest, never caged by inequity or a restrictive environment.

We live in a country that claims to secure liberty and justice for all, and now equal access to high-quality early childhood education for children of color is paramount. Can’t all society aspire to be like the robin parents? If not, I’m willing to take to the streets, like I have been in Louisville, Kentucky, to ensure that our youngest and most vulnerable black children get the robin parent treatment they deserve.

The appalling early childhood suspension and expulsion data, disproportionately representing black children, are markers of where this systematically begins. Early childhood programs can and should work to change this perception. Failure factories [schools] disproportionately affect black children. Where they exist, we are likely to find that access to high-quality education, starting at the entry-point of early childhood, is sparse or non-existent.

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Your Image of the Child: Where Evaluation Begins

There are hundreds of different images of the child. Malaguzzi’s essay gives us two of them. He offers us his ‘strong’ image of the child—an image of every child as intelligent, strong, beautiful, and ambitious, most in need of the recognition of their rights and their strengths. Against this, he poses his ‘weak’ image of the child—the child as fragile, incomplete, weak, made of glass, and most in need of protection. But, what of the hundreds of others?

Observing and Judging

Malaguzzi calls on us to produce a higher level of observation that compares each child’s resources, potential, and present state of mind with our own, in order to work well together. At the same time, he warns us that the child
wants to be observed, but not judged—“when we do judge, things escape us, we do not see things, so we are not able to evaluate in a wide way” (p. 54). What he doesn’t say, however, is that this kind of comparative observation is always a judgment. That’s what allows it to inform action, so we can work well together.

We compare where things are to where they could be (resources). We compare where things are to where they have been and to where they might go (potential). We compare what we’d like to do with what we think we can manage. We try things, with some sense of what we hope will happen as a result, and we check to see what actually happens. That our predictions aren’t always sustained isn’t necessarily bad. Sometimes things go better than we expect—or go in other, unanticipated, directions entirely. Surprise presupposes expectation! On occasion, we make predictions that we dearly hope will prove wrong. But, comparison, judgment, and expectation come as a package deal.

Of course, what we are comparing to what can have the most infinite variety. So, what we choose to compare makes a very great difference. This is where our images come in. All too often, as evaluators, we find ourselves using data for no better reason than that it is available. We have addresses in order to contact families, so we compare neighborhoods. We have attendance data, so we compare “dose” effects. We have screens, and checklists, and tests, and developmental assessments, for lots of reasons—not least because development is interesting—so we compare “achievement” and “progress.” But the images that go with these comparisons are ones that often we officially (supposedly) reject!

If we are truly to consider each child’s reality and to forge alliances with families, we need to go into Malaguzzi’s proverbial forest and find each other.

to consider each child’s reality and to forge alliances with families, we need to go into Malaguzzi’s proverbial forest and find each other. We need to consider not just one or two images of the child—the one we need and the one we don’t—but all those hundreds of images of children and how we might forge alliances, as full citizens, from them.

Yet, it really is a forest. We have only the vaguest idea what all these images (which may or may not actually be hundreds) are. If Malaguzzi’s strong and weak images aren’t the only ones, or the only axis of difference between images, the alternatives aren’t much more helpful. Few accounts go beyond two or three images. Some reduce vast cross-cultural variation onto a single axis of difference. The multiplicity of images of children in different demographic categories seems commonly treated as a separate question entirely. If our images of children are to become a common part of our working knowledge, and not just a heuristic for individual reflection, then finding a better way of articulating and observing them remains an outstanding task.

Our Images of Children

Because comparison, judgment, and expectation are a package deal, yet things escape us when we judge, it’s important to think about how we can evaluate “in a wide way”—keeping in mind that our goal is to build relationships and work well together. It would be easy enough to turn Malaguzzi’s ‘needs’ and ‘musts’ into a checklist and apply it to the evaluation of our systems of children’s services. But such a checklist would become a compliance exercise like any other. If we are truly
An Ecological Child

We are—and we must be convinced—within an ecosystem: our earthly journey is a journey that goes hand in hand with the environment, nature, cosmos; the organism, our morality, our culture, our knowledge, our feelings connect with the environment, with the universe, with the world. And here’s the web of our life. (Malaguzzi as quoted by Filippini, 2018)

As inhabitants of the world, creatures of all kinds, human and non-human, are wayfarers, and wayfaring is a movement

Julie Kelly

Kindergarten to grade 3 consultant, Rainbow District School Board, Sudbury, Ontario, Canada.

Sophie Anne Edwards

Environmental artist, geopoet and independent scholar, Manitoulin Island, Ontario, Canada.

Sharon Speir

Collaborator, researcher, and storyteller, Sudbury, Ontario, Canada.

Connecting the hand to the land: pen and watercolor pine branch (June)
of self-renewal, or becoming... Making
their way through the tangle of the
world, wayfarers grow into its fabric and
contribute through their movements to its
ever-evolving weave. (Ingold, 2007, p. 119)

Our image is of an ecological child—entangled
in a weave of relations. We see—in children’s
embodied ways of listening, of being and
becoming—the desire to encounter, to connect,
to dialogue, to be and become interwoven
and intersected within this meshwork that is
the web of life. Activated by encounters with
human and other-than-human beings, mate-
rials, and spaces, with friends, families, and
communities, the child, a sentient being, listens
empathetically, is sensitive to the patterns that
connect, gestures toward relationships, and
contributes a strong imagination. This child,
capable of speaking and listening in a hundred
languages, is attuned to the water speaking,
the song of the birds, the movements of the
trees and the interactions between them. In
our practice, we see hands that hold, that touch,
fingers that point, that track, that draw, that
outline, for example, the way the water goes.
We see an emerging agency in children to
treat the land as sacred and this relationship as
a sacred bond. In many ways, children want to
change what they see, redeem the devastation
of human impact and be part of the reconcili-
ation with the land on which they play, learn,
and live (Kelly, et al., 2019).

A relational ecological approach coupled with
an embodied practice connect hand and land,
heart and place, mind and the natural world,
moving us toward a cultural shift that under-
stands our place in the world as relational and
interdependent, rather than dominant and
separate: we are in the world, not observing it.

We see—in children’s embodied ways of listening, of being
and becoming—the desire to encounter, to connect, to
dialogue, to be and become interwoven and intersected
within this meshwork that is the web of life.

Natalie Kleefeld
Parent, director, teacher, The Willows
Nursery School, San Jose, California.

Your Image of the Child: A Reflection in Honor
of Loris Malaguzzi’s 100th Birthday

For years, Malaguzzi’s article has been foun-
dational to my thinking and practice as an
early childhood educator. But I find this call
to practice uncertainty and openness to be
the most challenging and provocative of
Malaguzzi’s messages, “play with the things
that are coming out of the world of children”
(p. 53)—welcome the agitation and restlessness
that come with the unknown.

In September 2019, I participated in a climate
march with my nephew and infant daughter
as part of the “Fridays for Future” movement
Reflecting on Malaguzzi’s words, I recognize this imaginative openness to be a critical need of the present moment. As educators, we have the great privilege of working and playing alongside children on a daily basis. Each day, we observe how children bring their whole being to bear on their ideas, wonderings, dreams, and fears. How can we as adults respond? Perhaps we can respond in small ways—by accepting the children’s invitations to dance like caterpillars do, to draw the faces of those we love, to build bridges to far-away places, or to learn to spot the most beautiful weed that grows just behind the cypress trees out back.

We educators and caregivers—we adults—are called to practice this more radical flexibility. Instead of sticking to our own plans for the day, we rise from our chairs, move away from our reliance on old habits and routines, and say, “So, you want to design a recycling truck? How should we start?”

Perhaps by accepting new ideas from children—ideas that change the very structures and sensibilities of the school, the community, the society—we can live into a more just, enabling, and sustainable world. This is the great experiential, pedagogical, and political invitation that children offer us each day. May we rise to the occasion.

where I live in Santa Cruz, California. There, a seven-year-old spoke to a crowd of hundreds. “Children’s minds are different from adult’s minds,” she said. “And, to be honest, we have more of an imagination.”

“How can we live in a more sustainable relationship to the earth? How can tomorrow be different, more kind, more just,” the young girl asked. “Look to children’s minds,” she suggested.

The children of the Willows Nursery School find ladybugs on the rosemary plants in the school garden.

The children consult a reference book for more information about beetles. This inspires some spontaneous observational drawing.
Embracing Uncertainty: Reflections on Loris Malaguzzi

So many of us have been inspired by the thoughts and words of Loris Malaguzzi, in our schools as well as in our lives. After reading Malaguzzi’s article, “Your Image of the Child: Where Teaching Begins,” I was struck by his thoughtful and elegant description of the cycle of research and learning within the school setting. To effectively embrace the role of researcher, Malaguzzi encourages educators to become “comfortable with the unknown.” He gives us the example of the game of billiards. Billiards is a game that is predictable. When you push a ball in a certain direction with a certain force, you get a predictable result. As teachers know, life at school is often not at all predictable. Malaguzzi encourages us as educators to be open to the unexpected, to change our plans, and to grow with the children in response to unforeseen circumstances.

During this past spring season, schools were plunged into uncertainty and the unknown when the COVID-19 virus swept our nation and the world. As educators, this crisis has caused us to adapt and reconsider our pedagogical approaches, as well as our school’s unique cultural identities. How will past approaches to teaching, that may have previously worked well, now evolve and change to fit the needs of a post-COVID era? Developing attitudes and mindsets of research within the school, and in the field education as a whole, has never been so important. While this moment of crisis is likely to continue into next year, we can take courage from Malaguzzi’s attitude of embracing the unknown, and that to fully engage with the children in cycles of research is the best way forward. The process of becoming comfortable with the unknown was not easy for any of us this past spring, but learning to live within uncertainty, and to find ways to grow and thrive within it, may help us to, as Malaguzzi says, “find each other in the forest and begin to discuss what the education of the child actually means” (p. 53).

If we redeem the child... we redeem ourselves

I was first introduced to the Reggio Emilia Approach and the work of Loris Malaguzzi while touring a Reggio-inspired program in college. Even as a teacher in training, I knew that I was witnessing something profoundly different from any of the preconceived notions I held about what school meant, or what a school could be.

Even before I could put a name to the principles of the Reggio Emilia Approach, the thoughtful displays of children’s work, words, and encounters resonated with me. Children are placed at the heart of the curriculum and viewed for their potentials rather than their deficits. Malaguzzi refers to this as a strong image of the child.

Charles Schwall
Pedagogical coordinator and consultant, The St. Michael School of Clayton.

Ian Schiefelebein
Preschool teacher, A Child’s Garden, Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Malaguzzi encourages us as educators to be open to the unexpected, to change our plans, and to grow with the children in response to unforeseen circumstances.
This image has since become integral to my work, though my understanding of what constitutes “a strong image” has evolved over time. In “The Image of the Child: Where Teaching Begins,” Malaguzzi states that “there are hundreds of different images of the child” (p. 52), and that each of us carries our own image within. These images, formed by our beliefs and experiences, can have major implications for how we perceive young children, and how we approach the act of teaching them.

In certain circles, there is a belief that we as adults need to act on behalf of children because they are either unaware of or incapable of acting in their own best interests. However, children’s actions speak volumes to those who are equipped to listen. Part of our role as educators is to foster the kinds of relationships that allow us to view children in all of their complexities so that we can interpret the rich meaning expressed through their use of the many languages, and help others to do the same.

This year, as we reflect on 100 years since Malaguzzi’s birth, we also find ourselves in the midst of a global pandemic and tasked with reconstructing a broken network of early education and care. For these reasons, it is more vital than ever that we heed Malaguzzi’s words and “draw out the image of the child, draw the child out of the desperate situations that many children find themselves in” (p. 56). A foundation for recovery cannot be laid in isolated skills. If we are to provide children with a “good school—a good building, good teachers, right time, good activities” (p. 56), as is their right, we must lead with an image of the child as strong, confident, and capable. For as Malaguzzi states, “If we redeem the child from these difficult situations, we redeem ourselves” (p. 56).

Part of our role as educators is to foster the kinds of relationships that allow us to view children in all of their complexities so that we can interpret the rich meaning expressed through their use of the many languages, and help others to do the same.

Reflections On and Celebration of Loris Malaguzzi

When asked how Loris Malaguzzi has influenced and inspired my work, I pause. Since 1991, I’ve been learning about and being influenced and inspired by the work of educators in Reggio Emilia. In the last 29 years I’ve read and reread various publications about the Reggio Emilia Approach—many written by Loris Malaguzzi. I welcomed NAREA’s recent invitation to revisit “The Image of the Child: Where Teaching Begins.” With each rereading, new ideas and inspirations present themselves because I bring my current lens/perspective to the publication. Not surprising then, in my/our present context of social distancing, global pandemic, and sheltering in place I am confronted with words from Malaguzzi that seemed new to me. Under the heading “Growing Comfortable with the Unknown,” I pause as I read (italics mine):

Julie K. Biddle
Professor, Antioch University, Yellow Springs, Ohio.
School can never be always predictable. We need to be open to what takes place and able to change our plans and go with what might grow at that very moment both inside the child and inside ourselves. Each one of us needs to be able to play with the things that are coming out of the world of children. Each one of us needs to have curiosity, and we need to be able to try something new based on the ideas that we collect from the children as they go along. Life has to be somewhat agitated and upset, a bit restless, somewhat unknown (p. 53).

Are there better words to describe what, for the past several weeks, educators, children, and their families have been experiencing? Life is somewhat agitated and upset, a bit restless, and somewhat unknown: What were predictable routines and schedules, inside and outside of school, disappeared as face-to-face interactions with children shifted to remote learning.

I am privileged to know many talented educators who have structured creative remote learning opportunities for the young children in their classrooms and programs. I follow Reggio Children on Instagram and am inspired by the “Playing Together at Home” provocations. As I reflect with Reggio-inspired colleagues, we wonder, as Malaguzzi suggested, perhaps this way of working with children will build a different understanding of our role than we had before. We wonder if perhaps our partnership with parents will be strengthened too. And even though Malaguzzi is referring to observing children when he said, “it takes wisdom and a great deal of knowledge on the part of the teachers to be able to work within this situation of uncertainty” (p. 54)—I can’t help but be inspired by the prescience of his words for the world we are living in today.

REFERENCES


Credits

Images courtesy of Highlander School (page 9), Sharon Speir (pages 12-13), and Natalie Kleefeld (page 14).

Link to Article

An Interview with Baji Rankin: Learning From My Encounters with Loris Malaguzzi 1981-1989
Part 1
by Baji Rankin and Gigi Yu

Baji Rankin is the senior consultant for Excellence and Equity in Early Childhood Education, a non-profit dedicated to ensuring that all children and families have access to high quality early childhood education and care. Baji has worked in early childhood education for 46 years as a teacher of children and adults, a researcher, a scholar, an executive, and an advocate. She served as executive director of the New Mexico Association for the Education of Young Children (NMAEYC) for 16 years. Baji works to develop a well-educated and fairly compensated early childhood workforce, the key to ensuring quality ECE. She is inspired by recognizing the amazing capacities of all children, celebrating and supporting the playful inquiries of children, and promoting excellence and equity in ECE for ALL children.

Gigi Schroeder Yu is an assistant professor of art education in the art department at the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico. She is also editor for the North American Reggio Emilia Alliance (NAREA) journal, Innovations in Early Education: The International Reggio Emilia Exchange. During 2012-2014, Gigi worked alongside Baji Rankin as the project manager for the “Wonder of Learning” exhibit in New Mexico.

Introduction

During a cool spring morning in March 2020, Gigi Yu met with Baji Rankin at her home in New Mexico for an interview and reflection on her time with Loris Malaguzzi. The interview took place just a few days before New Mexico went into quarantine due to the COVID-19 virus. In the early 1980s, Baji was one of the first North Americans to learn about the schools in Reggio Emilia, Italy. The following reflects the first of a two-part interview with Baji as she shares her early encounters with Loris Malaguzzi.

Mind Blowing First Encounters

Gigi: Baji, what do you remember about the first time you met Loris Malaguzzi?

Baji: The first time I met Malaguzzi was June 1981. I had been in Italy about three months, where I was doing a study on early childhood education in Italy—on the relation-

Loris Malaguzzi, in the 1980s, smiling and demonstrating enthusiasm, enjoyment, and passion that was embedded in all his work in Reggio.
ship between social policy and curriculum. I arrived in March and I was staying in Milan. Several educators there with whom I had shared my goals for studying early childhood education in Italy informed me that I needed to go visit Reggio Emilia. They described the Reggio Emilia educators and their resulting work as innovators, creators, and leaders in the field.

I hadn’t heard of the city of Reggio Emilia before I went to Italy, but hearing these things grabbed my curiosity; I was eager to visit the town and schools. At a certain point before the end of the school year, when I had some capacity in speaking Italian, I called up the program and asked, “Can I come and visit your schools? I’m from the United States studying early childhood education.” They said, “yes when do you want to come?” A week or so later I went. They were very welcoming. They took me around to different schools and showed me classrooms and invited me to parent and staff meetings. I got a good initial sense of the schools. We spoke in Italian most of that time. And there were a few Reggio educators who spoke English, and that helped as well. After I had been in Reggio a few days, I had an interview with Loris Malaguzzi. I had prepared my questions in Italian ahead of time and I had my tape recorder running.

I knew Malaguzzi was a major leader in the Reggio schools, but I hadn’t had any personal contact with him. I had no idea how important he was. And I did not know what to expect. The interview was just with Loris Malaguzzi and me and my tape recorder, in the rather small office of the schools. There was no Reggio Children at that point. I don’t think that Reggio Children was yet even a dream on the horizon.

During the interview, it was striking to see him working and thinking at the same time as he was talking. He was not reciting something from the past. He was actively thinking, working, and speaking about what they were doing and struggling with in the schools, right then and there. Now, nearly 40 years later, I see how Reggio educators are always studying and improving and growing and learning. I see this is part of Malaguzzi’s leadership: promoting, encouraging, and facilitating ongoing thinking and reflecting—that is fully a part of the life of the schools.

As I am talking, I notice that I often refer to Malaguzzi in the present tense. I talk about him in the present because to me, he is still very present. Even in my dissertation (Rankin, 1996). I wrote about him in the present tense. For everybody else who had died, I used the past tense. I used the present for Malaguzzi because he was, and is, so alive to me.

Malaguzzi talked about how they were working on the importance of having two co-teachers. It was important that the more experienced teacher was not calling all the shots or being referred to as a lead. Not at all!! They worked very hard for the two teachers’ points of views to be of equal strength so that teachers could learn from each other, bringing both perspectives to the conversation and to their work with children. When there was a third teacher in the room (in the case that there was a child with special rights) then there would be three points of view to be considered. From what I could see, Malaguzzi and Reggio educators were working on this theme, the importance of two points of view in a classroom, a lot at that time. For me, it was an amazing interview and I got the sense of how powerful and big-picture Malaguzzi’s thinking is. Also, how his passion about seeing the child—and all children—as strong, rich, and powerful, permeated all the work that he did.
I was not fully fluent in Italian, especially in abstract thinking, at that point. However, my tape recorder and I spent that whole summer together as I worked on translating the tape. I asked different Italian friends to help me because some of the thoughts—so big, so complex, and so abstract—went beyond my capacity. I needed support in understanding what he was saying and the context he was coming from. That was a wonderful exercise in learning the Italian language and in understanding more about the Reggio approach for me over the summer. I was highly motivated to understand as much as possible. I wanted to understand the educational approach and how it would affect me as a teacher, as an individual. I knew there was something new, something different from what I was used to.

Theory Connected with Practice

It wasn’t just abstract ideas and theory that Malaguzzi was talking about. It was theory connected with practice and how practice influences theory as well as how theory influences practice. That is one of the major strengths of Malaguzzi that I came to recognize then, and more and more over time, that his experience was embedded in and grew out of integrating theory with practice and practice with theory in the schools. It was back and forth and forth and back, where theory was learning from practice, practice was learning from theory. There was a rich exchange between practice and theory, instead of quite often, at least in the US, that theory influences practice. PERIOD. It’s different when there is an exchange.

Gigi: Do you think that was one of the main things that you remember from that first interview, his reflection on practice and theory?

Baji: Yes, and I see this especially as I look back on it. To clarify, in that June 1981 conversation, while he did talk about the value of theory helping improve practice, he did not, as I recall, explicitly reflect on the value of how intertwined practice and theory are; rather he was actively doing both at the same time. He was fully engaged in describing practice as he also offered theory and adjusted theory about how to improve practice.

While I was impressed with the passion and vision of Malaguzzi in that first conversation, I did not fully appreciate, in that moment, his ability to focus on both theory and practice at that same time with a focus on improving practice. However, when I look back on that interview and recall what I saw him doing throughout my 40 years of studying Reggio and also what I heard Reggio educators talking about in regard to their experience with him, that’s when I began to see his skills and capacities more clearly. Over time, I was able to see that and appreciate, more and more, what he was doing.

I saw him spending time in classrooms observing children. Afterwards, he would talk with teachers about what he saw and what they saw. This was a rich, intense, exchange with teachers about what was going on around specific examples from the classroom. I saw the way he interacted, with teachers and with parents. He was a theorist who was dedicated to working with teachers in a way that enabled teachers to observe children and be engaged in their work with children.

He was dedicated to providing the opportunity for teachers to talk with each other about what they saw, heard, felt, and learned. He believed that teachers must have, and take, the time to observe and reflect together on the children’s capacities. How amazingly simple that is and yet how much work is needed to organize a system of schools that provides the leadership and the staff time to ensure that this happens. At the same time, when the schools started in the 40s and 50s, the traditional Italian educational system was still securely in place and dominant in the nationally run schools for three to six-year-olds and in the elementary schools. In these schools, one teacher was instructing and providing knowledge to a large group of children.

The collaborative teaching and running of the schools in Reggio did not happen in a vacuum. These approaches happened because of consistent leadership and practice that strongly supported and pushed adults to talk deeply with each other.
sistent leadership and practice that strongly supported and pushed adults to talk deeply with each other.

Gigi: What are other key moments with Malaguzzi that stand out during that year of 1981-1982 when you first were getting to know the Reggio Emilia Approach?

Baji: During that period, March 1981 through June 1982, I was living in Milan. I visited the Reggio Emilia schools four times, for a few days at a time. I was able to observe more classrooms, talk with more teachers, and attend more staff and parent meetings. I attended parent/family meetings within individual schools as well as city-wide meetings. As I mentioned, Reggio educators drove me around to parent meetings and welcomed me at staff meetings. I felt very respected. I was very appreciative!

Learning From The Hundred Languages of Children Exhibit

Baji: On one of my visits, the exhibit “The Hundred Languages of Children” was back in Reggio Emilia for repair, maintenance, and upgrades. I went to see it. This was my first time to see the exhibit. It was in the basement of some large building, not a particularly inviting setting for the exhibit. And, lucky for me, Malaguzzi was there at the time. He gave me a tour of different parts of the exhibit, making it become alive for me.

I remember him pointing out the part of the exhibit where the teachers had put a silhouette of a bird on a high window and the shadow of that bird fell on the floor. The exhibit included photographs of young children who were noticing the shadow, noticing a bird on their floor. The children were talking to each other, wondering where it came from. Over that day, the children also noticed that the bird on their floor was moving and wondered why. As Malaguzzi was telling me about that learning experience, he was visibly excited as he explained to me that the teachers were not going to point to the bird on the window. The teachers had put the bird there as a provocation to the children; they wanted to let the children discover what they could. The children first saw the bird on the floor and wondered where it came from and then they saw that it was moving! They tried to tape it down so it wouldn’t move, but later they noticed the bird was still moving! As Malaguzzi was talking he was also pointing to the pictures of these things; he was excited about the children’s curiosity and the provocation that this bird on the floor provided for the children. Where did this bird come from? How could the bird move even when it was taped to the floor?

I also remember his excitement as he pointed out the role of the teacher, what the teachers had done to set up this provocation, and their role in valuing the children’s exploration and investigation. The teachers valued and gave space for the children to wonder about this, to ask themselves and to figure out where this bird came from. The bird on the floor was not there the day before. Where did this bird come from?

Then, at a certain point, one of the children noticed that there was a silhouette of a bird on the window; they began talking about that and eventually figured out that the bird on the window had something to do with the bird on the floor. Over time, this experience sparked many other learning encounters.

Again, I remember vividly Malaguzzi’s passion and enthusiasm as he pointed out to me the children discovering the paper bird taped high on the window. His delight in the children’s joy in their discovery was contagious; it is fortunate that I “caught” this condition, which has stayed with me since then. In reflection, this touched and reinforced something intrinsic in me, something that was already there but needed attention and light, something that needed strengthening and enlivening—the image of strong competent children and the practice that makes this visible. This is now more fully and more explicitly part of me than it was then.

In 1982, I began to wonder, wouldn’t it be great if this exhibit could come to the United States?! It was travelling around Europe.

Meeting Lella Gandini and Carolyn Edwards

Gigi: So at that time, did you know of any other people from the United States who were becoming aware of what was going on in Reggio Emilia?
Baji: At the beginning of that year I did not know anyone from the U.S. I learned that year that I was among the first handful of people from the U.S. to visit the schools in Reggio.

Gigi: Do you remember meeting other people while you were in Reggio Emilia during those early years?

Baji: Yes, meeting and connecting with Lella Gandini and Carolyn Edwards! This was major.

As I said, when I first arrived in Reggio, I didn’t know anybody from the United States who knew about Reggio Emilia. Over the course of that first year, especially after I saw the exhibit and understood it to be the amazing and powerful educational opportunity it is, I actively wondered what I would do after returning to the United States to let others know about this educational experience in Reggio. I’m one person. How can I take advantage of this as one person?

During that year at a certain point, Reggio educators told me about Lella Gandini, also living in the U.S., who was working with Reggio educators. I was eager to meet her.

That happened at a conference later on that spring in Orvieto, a beautiful small city in southern Italy, located on a hilltop, well known for its wine. The conference was about infant-toddler programs in Italy and people from all over the country came to participate and learn. I learned a lot about the state of infant-toddler programs in Italy. In the U.S., just before coming to Italy, I had been working to set up a family childcare network particularly for infants and toddlers. Connected to a large early childhood agency in Boston, this network supported educators offering childcare in their homes. I made a presentation at that conference about my work with family childcare homes, as a way of supporting those who care for infants and toddlers.

One of the highlights for me was that Lella Gandini and Carolyn Edwards were both at the conference! I was delighted to meet both Lella and Carolyn. That year, Carolyn was living in Siena, Italy. It was a sabbatical year from her work at University of Massachusetts in Amherst, Massachusetts, and she was there at the conference with Lella. For me, it was absolutely fantastic to meet them and to know that two other people from the United States were at this conference. They were both interested in the Reggio Emilia Approach. I learned that Lella had been working with Reggio educators for years. Carolyn was there and learning a lot about it at that time. It was great to meet both of them. I was living in the Boston area at that time and they were both living in western Massachusetts, only a two-hours’ drive away. I was ecstatic!!

Oh my goodness, colleagues, that I can talk with about Reggio!! That was really great. The idea of me going back to Massachusetts being the only person excited about the work in Reggio would have been really hard.

Gigi: How serendipitous that you were there together. That was really great. After meeting Lella and Carolyn how did it transpire to bring “The Hundred Languages of Children” exhibit to the U.S.?

Baji: After all of us were back in the United States, I remember going to visit Lella and Carolyn in western Massachusetts. We talked about the value of the exhibit and how we could get sponsors for the exhibit being in the United States. How can we spread the word about the experience in Reggio? We decided to present at national and regional early childhood conferences.

Staring in 1983 and continuing through much of the rest of the 1980s, we made presentations. I can remember some of the first workshops that we did at annual conferences of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). They started out as small sessions and over time they gradually grew in number of attendees. A turning point in attendance came in 1990, after the first article about the Reggio Emilia Approach was published in “Young Children.”

1987: The Hundred Languages of Children Exhibit’s First Visit to the United States

Lella and I continued to wonder how we could get “The Hundred Languages of Children” exhibit to come to the United States. We continued to look for sponsors. Fortunately, it turns out that there was a big cultural exchange that was going to take place in 1987 between the city of San Francisco, California, and the province of Emilia Romagna,
where Reggio is located. This exhibit included food, film, clothing styles, and many other aspects of cultural life in Emilia Romagna. All these materials were brought to San Francisco. Suddenly—and I still don’t know how this happened—“The Hundred Languages of Children” exhibit was included as part of this cultural exchange. That was fantastic. All of a sudden, the exhibit was coming to San Francisco. It was going to be in the continent of North America!

At the time, I was living in Boston and San Francisco was 3,000 miles away. I knew I had to go to see the exhibit in San Francisco. I also understood that Loris Malaguzzi would be there. I wanted to go to see the exhibit again to get more knowledgeable, to get more information, and also to re-invigorate my motivation to do the work ahead, fortunately working with Lella and others, to bring the exhibit to Massachusetts. So, I went to San Francisco to see the exhibit, and to see Malaguzzi.

Gigi: Was the exhibit up for a long period of time? Maybe you don’t remember that but I’m just wondering if it was like a moment, just for the event?

Baji: As far as I know, there was no public event at all to call attention to the exhibit in San Francisco. The exhibit, I think, was there for a short period of time, perhaps a month. It was at a shopping center, a mall of some kind in a central place in San Francisco. The exhibit was in a large corner of the mall. When I visited the exhibit, there was nobody visiting it. I was the only person there for most of the time. Loris Malaguzzi was there, and I was very glad to see him.

I spent of lot of time in the exhibit going through it carefully and watching the “Portrait of a Lion” video, which was part of the exhibit at that point—the wonderful film about children exploring the lions in the San Prospero Piazza.

The Italian consulate in San Francisco organized the exhibit. I understood that they sent beautiful exhibit catalogs to all the nearby elementary school principals. The elementary school principals must have been scratching their heads about how this exhibit related to their work in elementary education. You might remember the yellow catalogue, filled with beautiful pictures and thick narrative. This was outside the ordinary experience of elementary principals. I did not know early childhood educators in the San Francisco area at that time. I remember visiting the exhibit and realizing what an amazing resource that was not being used. I sat in front of a telephone while I was still in San Francisco and asked myself, “Whom do I call?” I didn’t even know whom to call. It was very frustrating. And it provided more motivation for me to bring the exhibit to Massachusetts and connect to the early childhood community there.

I talked to Malaguzzi at the exhibit and that was great. I had some conversations with him about the exhibit. I also asked him for an interview. I was pondering a question about how the Reggio schools support teachers to really listen to children and how the schools and infant-toddler centers engage teachers in being engaged with children. Malaguzzi was glad, very glad, to have that interview and he invited me to the home of his relatives where he was staying in Oakland at the time, to conduct the interview there.

Interview with Malaguzzi in San Francisco: Democratic Engagement

A day or so later, I rode the BART rail system to Oakland and joined Malaguzzi and his family for a meal. Afterwards, we had the interview, another wonderful opportunity for me to listen and learn from Malaguzzi. The main thing that I remember learning from that interview was how he described teachers paying attention to what children are actually doing. When teachers observe in this deeply engaged way and are supported in doing this, they see the amazing things that children do, which in turn motivates teachers to continue their observations.

There is a sort of inherent motivation that comes when teachers have the opportunity, time, and support to closely observe and reflect on what children are doing. This is very simple, yet tough to achieve.

From my experience, when I look closely at young children and what they’re doing, it is amazing. It is like “what if the eye can jump over the wall” (the name of the first Reggio exhibit). What if we can actually see and value what children are doing? What if we observe children from an understanding
of the strengths of children, an image of strong, confident children? This, of course, is weaving throughout all of the work in the Reggio schools.

If you have an image of a weak child, an inactive child, a child who depends on adults for knowledge, then the question arises, why spend all that time and energy observing children?

Whereas, when you believe in the strong, capable child, then the amazement of children’s exploration, learning, and their capacities become clearly visible. It’s inspiring and motivating to be able to see that growth and be able to support the child in going even further.

Gigi: When you interviewed Malaguzzi, did he talk about how to support teachers to develop that sense of noticing children in that way? I think it’s poetic, but it is also, I will use the word, challenging. I think the strength of the Reggio educational project is that the image of the strong, competent child isn’t just an idea, but the whole system of schools puts this into practice. Teachers are supported in regard to time to do this kind of close observing and to reflect with each other on their observations. Also, there is a pedagogista who comes in to support and facilitate the dialogue among teachers.

Baji: Yes, exactly! And this is the genius of Malaguzzi! Theory and practice together supporting a system of early childhood programs based on seeing all children as competent. This leads to the necessity of an educational structure that supports teachers having meeting time for reflective practice with each other and at times with a pedagogista.

This window into understanding how theory and practice are interconnected in the Reggio approach has been very important for me, it has influenced me deeply not only in my educational philosophy, but in my philosophy of life. What impresses me about the history of the Reggio schools is that when they started back in 1945, right after the devastation of World War II. People were dedicated to ending fascism forever. Having schools where young children could thrive, grow, think together, and listen to each other, was so important to parents and the community. From the beginning, they promoted democratic engagement and wide-spread social participation in running the schools. They wanted the schools to be places where children could grow into engaged citizens and ensure an ongoing democratic society. This is theory and practice combined with social justice and a commitment to deep citizen participation.

The first schools in the 1940s and 1950s started with one teacher and a large group of children, perhaps 30 to 35 three to six-year-olds. That was the way education was organized then, big classes and one teacher. Over the years, as Malaguzzi went off and studied with Piaget and other educators across Europe, he brought ideas back and tried them out. Instead of just implementing what Piaget or others said, Malaguzzi tested out the ideas in the schools to see if/how they worked. So the educators in Reggio learned from Piaget, but they did not follow lock step in his footsteps. It was not just an individual child progressing, but it was children interacting with and learning from each other. Then the philosophy of Vygotsky came in with an emphasis on co-constructing knowledge.

While Malaguzzi and Vygotsky did not meet in person, there was a resonance between the ideas of these two men. Vygotsky’s view of learning in a social situation fit well with the Reggio schools where major emphasis is given to how children learn from each other and teachers learn from each other. Reggio educators studied Vygotsky’s ideas way before he was translated into English.

Over the years and decades, Reggio educators moved from one teacher with a large group of children to two teachers working and learning together while supporting children to learn from each other. When I bumped into the schools in 1981, I heard Loris Malaguzzi strongly emphasize the importance of two teachers learning from each other. He emphasized the importance of two equal voices. Even though one teacher might be more experienced and the other teaching for only a year or so, both have valid interpretations that are important to the dynamic life of the classroom. There are constantly two different ideas and perspectives, learning from each other.

In fact, one thing I remember Malaguzzi saying is that at some point, some teachers cannot work with each other anymore because
they think way too much the same and there are no longer two different perspectives. When this happens, they recognize this as a good reason to change teaching partners. In this case, it is not that co-teachers are not getting along but rather that they are getting along too well.

After I spoke with Malaguzzi in San Francisco, the exhibit then went to Dallas–Fort Worth, Texas, where it also did not get a large welcome. Then, the exhibit went to a university in New York, where Dr. Rebecca New was teaching early childhood and had taken student groups to Reggio Emilia.

1988: The Hundred Languages of Children Comes to Massachusetts

In the fall of 1988 the exhibit went to the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, Massachusetts, where Lella, Carolyn, George Forman, and many others welcomed it with educational events and community outreach. Malaguzzi came to Amherst to give opening remarks, along with others, where the exhibit got a warm welcome.

Afterwards, it went to Boston, the first big city in the U.S. to host the exhibit, and then it went on to Cambridge, and Newton—other cities in the Boston area. I was working with the Early Childhood Educational Exchange (ECEE) and we organized multiple events and outreach activities to bring early childhood educators, stakeholders, and others to the exhibit.

In January 1989, four Reggio educators came to Boston, including Sergio Spaggiari, Carlina Rinaldi, Amelia Gambetti, and Giovanni Piazza, a representative from the Reggio Emilia mayor’s office and a reporter from a Reggio newspaper. We had a wealth of people and resources to present the exhibit to the early childhood community in Boston and beyond. Wow! It was wonderful that these four amazing people came to Boston for the exhibit. Over 300 early childhood educators came to the educational events and to welcome the exhibit. We had multiple learning sessions led by Reggio and U.S. educators. The exhibit caught the attention of the early childhood community!

I took that opportunity to ask Sergio Spaggiari, the director of the Reggio schools at that time, if I could come and study in the Reggio schools for several months to learn more about the approach. He said yes! He was very grateful for the time, effort, and leadership that I—and others—had put into organizing efforts in Boston. I ended up going to Reggio Emilia the next fall, October 1989, and spent 10 months there, deepening my understanding of the Reggio approach.

Stay tuned for the forthcoming article in Innovations Winter 2020 issue, continuing Gigi’s interview with Baji on her stay in Reggio Emilia, and the implications for her ongoing learning from Malaguzzi into present times.

REFERENCES

PERSPECTIVES ON NAREA

The Joy of Rereading: "History, Ideas, and Basic Principles: An Interview with Loris Malaguzzi"

by: Karyn Callaghan and Susan Redmond

Karyn Callaghan was a professor in college and university early childhood education programs, learning with children, educators, and families for over forty years—whose life was changed when she began to learn about Reggio Emilia’s education project. She founded and coordinated the “Artists at the Centre” project in Hamilton, Ontario, that brought artists into early learning programs. She is president of the Ontario Reggio Association, a board member of NAREA, and co-representative of NAREA in the Reggio Children International Network. Karyn has been a keynote speaker at conferences across three continents. She consulted with Ontario’s Ministry of Education as it developed its pedagogical document, How Does Learning Happen?, and shares stories of her learning on several videos on the ministry website. A book entitled Documenting Children’s Meaning, co-authored by Karyn, Carol Anne Wien, and artist Jason Avery, has been published by Davis Publications.

Susan Redmond is the pedagogical coordinator at First Baptist Day School in Greenville, South Carolina, where she began her career working with children and families 35 years ago as a classroom teacher. Inspired by the infant-toddler centers and preschools of Reggio Emilia, Italy, Susan works to elevate the image of the child within her own community as well as through initiatives of Project Infinity, a collaborative research project based in Atlanta, Georgia, comprised of Reggio-inspired schools for young children. Susan studies frequently in Reggio Emilia, has supported her school in hosting the “Wonder of Learning” and “Mosaic of Marks, Words, Material” exhibits in Greenville, and serves as a member of the NAREA board.

Please Note - The Following Reflection is Based On:


As educators who have studied Reggio Emilia’s education project for decades, we had read Lella Gandini’s interview with Loris Malaguzzi that was published in all editions of The Hundred Languages of Children more than once over the years. Rereading it again as we prepared to write a reflection for this issue of Innovations reinforced for us the importance and joy of revisiting articles and chapters that have influenced our thinking. When we do this, seeing what we have underlined, reading the notes scribbled in margins, we are not only entering into dialogue with the author(s), but also with our younger selves, rediscovering passages that still resonate, and recognizing that we have changed, that ideas we may not have engaged with before are capturing our attention now. This interview is rich and layered. There is so much to think about that we are bound to miss aspects of what Malaguzzi offers the first time through—perhaps even the second or third time through. We “get” what we are ready
for, and perhaps more accurately, we engage with what speaks to us at a point in time. This interview is not intended to be consumed. It is not a collection of quick tips or a fast food drive-through. It calls on our intelligence to work with, question, and challenge the ideas. We can continue to make meaning from what is offered as our experience and roles change, knowing that these ideas continue to inform the work in Reggio—that the educators there are constantly bringing current thinking into dialogue with these foundational values and ideas. It struck us that in many cases, current thinking in education is just catching up with Malaguzzi’s philosophy and the practice that embodies it. In this article, we will identify some of the provocations and delights that caught our minds and hearts this time.

“I realized that the impossible was a category to be redefined…” (p. 28)

Perhaps this statement by Loris Malaguzzi (Barazzoni, 2000, p. 15) offers us one of the most poignant insights into his spirit. There are so many forces at play in today’s culture that seem to present serious challenges to the possibility of embodying the pedagogy he created. We may take a deep breath of optimism when we remember that it was from the devastation of war that people in the village of Villa Cella found the motivation to build a school that would educate their children in a different way, so they would not have to endure fascism in their lives.

[All] that suffering was pushed away by a day in spring, when ideas and feelings turned toward the future seemed so much stronger than those that called one to halt and focus on the present. It seemed that difficulties did not exist and that there were no insurmountable obstacles to overcome. (p. 35)

Malaguzzi recalls “a simple, liberating thought” formed with parents weary from war: “Things about children and for children are only learned from children.” (p. 30) This novel premise for an early childhood education paradigm, starting with the child, originated with the parents who expressed “a universal aspiration, a declaration against the betrayal of children’s potential, and a warning that children had first of all to be taken seriously and believed in” (p. 36). These courageous parents advocated for the rights of their children, and “it opened up completely new horizons of thought. History can be changed and is changed by taking possession of it, starting with the destiny of the children” (p. 28). He was not calling for a child-centered pedagogy, but rather one that positions adults alongside children, respecting them as co-constructors of knowledge and capable negotiators of decisions and strategies, always in relationship with the world they are in. In some ways, in our current era of standardization, commercialization, and testing, adopting this view might seem impossible. And yet, we have seen that it is possible to redefine that category. Malaguzzi’s thinking has helped to create a generative crisis in our own thinking. What he is offering is not a set of ideas or techniques that can be cherry-picked and laid on top of curriculum approaches that originate from a different set of views. He calls upon us to rethink our assumptions, to check for congruence between stated values and practice. As French philosopher and contemporary of Malaguzzi stated, “[A]s soon as one can no longer think things as one formerly thought them, transformation becomes both very urgent, very difficult, and quite possible” (Foucault, 1988, p. 155). And now there are educators in countries all over the world who, despite challenges, are redefining what is possible and working to transform education in ways that incline toward Malaguzzi’s views. The work we do in early childhood education is political. We are making choices about what collective life is worth living and creating courageous spaces where stories can be told and juxtaposed with other stories. One example of such courage comes from the ongoing
projects of “The Tucson Children’s Project,” Reggio-inspired programs in Tucson, Arizona, a location adjacent to the Mexican border where there are many overarching issues related to immigrant rights and the need for ongoing advocacy to give a face and a voice to those who are marginalized. “We assume professional responsibilities that are not without great risk. Nevertheless, we are firm in our knowledge that there is no meaningful change without risk” (Acevedo et al., 2007, p. 22).

While clearly a responsive listener, Malaguzzi was also an instigator, a disruptor. Integral to his life work and the history of the educational system in Reggio Emilia is an image of the child as rich and competent, an innovative idea in the 1950s as well as in some educational communities today. He asks what the child’s place is in our society, what the purpose is of schooling, what the responsibility is of pedagogy to shape the future of our planet. These questions should be at the heart of public debate today. Malaguzzi also looks to children for greater understanding, describing with delight their “previously overlooked desire to be mature with peers and to find in them points of reference, understanding, surprises, affective ties, and merriment that could dispel shadows and uneasiness” (p. 40). He highlights proclivities they have, including “the privilege of not being excessively attached to their own ideas, which they construct and reinvent continuously” (p. 51), and their expectation of discrepancies and surprises, and he appeals to educators to nurture the same inclinations in themselves. The profundity of the values and principles of the Reggio Emilia Approach, as well as the thinking of Malaguzzi, can be overwhelming when encountered initially. Susan recalls Malaguzzi’s influence early in her teaching career:

As an educator in the 1990s new to the ideas of Malaguzzi, his powerful words about the openness of children hung on the wall of my preschool classroom, a constant reminder of the influence children can have as catalysts for change in the adult world. Years later, the same quote beckons this seasoned educator to reexamine the essence of identity, the meaning of creativity, and the value of social constructivism. The words remain the same; the individual has changed. Transformation is quite possible.

"Imagination was cultivated here..." (Bruner, 2004, p. xvii)

As Malaguzzi redefined the impossible, he also crossed boundaries and challenged the status quo. Perhaps his innovative approach emerged at least in part from his dedication to advocacy for the rights of children and also his deep awareness of the need to stay close to the characteristics of childhood that often elude adults, much less scholars. He knew that the relationship between theory and practice had to be reciprocal. In the introduction to Loris Malaguzzi and the Schools of Reggio Emilia, Peter Moss (Cagliari et al., 2016) describes characteristics that Malaguzzi embodied, “Rather than a longing for predictability and regularity, Malaguzzi valued uncertainty, desired wonder and amazement, loved to marvel at the totally unexpected” (p. xvii). Malaguzzi’s intellectual curiosity, his hunger for the complex, and his pedagogical sagacity undergird his work, but perhaps it is his interconnectivity with the essence of children that provides insight into the magic of the multi-faceted educational approach he envisioned. Imagination played a role in the shaping of the Reggio experience we speak of today. Jerome Bruner remarks in the introduction to The Hundred Languages of Children, “What struck me in Reggio Emilia was seeing how imagination was cultivated there, reinforcing at the same time the children’s sense of the possible. It was the expression of something profoundly rooted in the city itself” (pp. xvii-xviii). Bruner’s unexpected discovery in Reggio Emilia relates to the spirit of creativity others have perceived within the schools of Reggio. Bruner continues, “It is imagination that saves us all from the obvious and the
The forest growing in the piazza as each school brought boxes upon which there are drawings of trees done by the children.

Excerpt from the introduction to the exhibit of trees displayed throughout the city of Reggio Emilia, Italy: “The future of the planet and defending the environment are themes of true world emergency, and among those children and young people feel most strongly. Children relate to the natural world with an empathy that is innate, asking questions about what can be considered ‘living’, what elements living beings have in common, and what elements differentiate them. From these questions by children, and from their desire for knowledge of the natural world, the project ‘Imagine a forest’ was born. Its protagonists are children, trees, and the language of mark-making and drawing. Trees as representatives of the vast world of living subjects that inhabit the earth together with us. Trees that children and humanity must learn to respect, love, and perceive as kindred, recognizing them as fundamental for the survival of the planet.”
This is the centenary year of the birth of Loris Malaguzzi, and on the eve of his birthday, February 24, 2020, a city-wide exhibit was launched, sharing with the community the work the children had done as they considered the future of the planet and defending the environment. Seventy-seven businesses throughout the city participated by displaying a wide variety of posters of the children’s drawings and words that reveal their thinking about what it means to be living, and in particular their thoughts about and relationship with trees, representing the world of living subjects with which we co-inhabit this planet. This long-term project, “Imagine a forest,” involves all the preschools and infant-toddler centers, provoking us to consider trees as kindred and recognizing them as fundamental for the planet’s survival.

The ability to imagine a better world and work toward realizing it is an important goal for us all. Reggio Emilia inspires us to choose a life of research, to have an open mind, and embrace change that moves us toward greater congruity between values and practice, to imagine and to be playful, to take risks. Nothing is ever static. As stated in the introduction to The Hundred Languages of Children, “The educational work in Reggio Emilia never becomes set and routine but instead is always undergoing reexamination and experimentation” (p. 13). Reflection led Malaguzzi and his colleagues to reinvent their thinking over and over, reconsidering the relationship between theory and practice. Lella Gandini reflects on her interviews with Malaguzzi in her notes at the end of Chapter Two, “His thoughts were in continuous lucid progression in search of a deeper respect for the culture of childhood” (p 70).

“Generating complexity and new tools for thought...” (pg. 49)

This interview provides insight into the thinking behind the innovations that were introduced in the schools. Malaguzzi described the atelier as “the school studio and laboratory as a place for manipulating or experimenting with separate or combined visual languages, either in isolation or in combination with the verbal ones” (p. 41). He also describes the atelier as being, “subversive—generating complexity and new tools for thought” (p. 49). While we may think of subversive activity as something that would be covert, Malaguzzi’s intention is the opposite. The work generated in the atelier, in 100 languages, allows the public to be invited into dialogue about the purpose of education. And because the work and processes that take place in the ateliers and classrooms have always been documented and displayed, the pedagogy is democratic, relying on ongoing reflection and public dialogue.

Malaguzzi is revealed here as someone who read extensively and critically. Piaget’s theories of ages and stages have been learned by students of education as facts to be committed to memory. While Malaguzzi found some of those theories to be helpful for thinking about children and expresses gratitude for those insights, he is critical of others that he found to be incongruous with the view of the child that is foundational to the educational project of Reggio Emilia. “Now we can see clearly how Piaget’s constructivism isolates the child” (p. 56). He also criticizes several other of Piaget’s views: the “undervaluation of the adult’s role in promoting cognitive development...the lockstep linearity of development...the way that cognitive, affective and moral development are treated as separate, parallel tracks...the overemphasis on structured stages, egocentrism and classificatory skills,” among others (pp. 56-57). Nonetheless he speaks of “our Piaget” and also of “our Vygotsky,” whose writing about the Zone of Proximal Development fit well with the pedagogy in Reggio.
His energetic curiosity is evident. We see in the sources of inspiration he names that Malaguzzi looked beyond those related to education to include psychologists, philosophers, theoreticians, and neuroscientists, seeking the emergence of new problems and soul-searching questions. Who would he be reading now? Current presentations by the educators in Reggio incorporate engagement with ideas of architects, Indigenous scholars, physicians, biologists, linguists, jurists, and ecologists. It is apparent that the culture of the schools in Reggio includes deep awareness of the responsibility of educators always to be seeking other perspectives, recognizing that our knowledge is partial. This sensibility seems to be embedded in the DNA of the system. Although crossing boundaries and weaving different knowledges together is an approach that is gaining momentum today as transversality between fields of study becomes more widely embraced in universities, silos continue to dot our landscape. Preservice programs and ongoing in-service professional learning for educators today seldom incorporate such breadth. Many educators reject the view that they are doing political work.

Such talk [about education], which is also political, must continuously address major social changes and transformations in the economy, sciences, arts, and human relationships and customs. All of these larger forces influence how human beings—even young children—’read’ and deal with the realities of life. They determine the emergence, on both general and local levels, of new methods of educational content and practice, as well as new problems and soul-searching questions. (p. 39)

For Malaguzzi, it was essential to have multi-disciplinary curiosity and awareness, as these perspectives weave together both to strengthen culture and education and to identify and challenge discordances. Broader awareness of ways of seeing and understanding the world also helps us to notice and think differently when we are observing children’s strategies and relationships, to recognize more than evidence of stages of development. He also traces the contours of his views with words of caution: “It is important for pedagogy not to be the prisoner of too much certainty but instead to be aware of both the relativity of its powers and the difficulties of translating its ideals into practice” (p. 37).

"A choice toward respect..." (p. 38)

Malaguzzi’s communication is rich with metaphor. He sought clarity, even if his ideas might cause upset and disequilibrium. He was a provocateur who embodied the approach he advocated for the education of young children in his relationships with adults. It was all integrated. This is not artifice—tricks of the trade to be turned on while working. It is a way of living a rich life in communion with others. Even after the passage of time, some of his metaphors can surprise us. “We think of a school for young children as an integral living organism, as a place of shared lives and relationships among many adults and many children...continuously adjusting itself...while the organism travels on its life course...” (p. 41). This metaphor has vitality. This school is vibrant; it reinvents itself relationally. Throughout this chapter, it becomes clear that the centrality of relationship contributes to this vitality. The pronoun Malaguzzi uses is “we.” He thought collectively, and the collective included everyone—the children, teachers, pedagogistas, atelieristas, cooks, families, poets, philosophers, scientists, puppeteers, academics from a wide range of fields of study—all were welcomed—expected—to actively participate.

In keeping with the value of participation and civic engagement, families and the citizens of the city were considered to be essential to the educational project, with a strong focus on activating participation and research in schools that provide “a sense of positive receptiveness to all concerned” (p. 43), and inviting an exchange of ideas. This basic principle of respect for others emerged in the 1960s as Malaguzzi worked to create a new culture of education in Reggio Emilia, “It seems to me that this choice toward respect gave
strength to our autonomy as we elaborated our educational project” (p. 38). Years later, on visiting Reggio for the first time, Jerome Bruner described this explicit partnership as “meeting a rare form of courtesy, a precious form of reciprocal respect” (p. xviii). Thousands of educators who have participated in study weeks in Reggio have experienced this respect and genuine interest in their thinking and practice. And at the same time, what we might think of as respect—a kind of politeness—in Reggio is based on recognition of the intelligence of each person and the ability to engage in critical reflection, not on nodding acceptance.

The educators in Reggio engage in “confronto”—the comparison of ideas on an ongoing basis. They challenge themselves and each other, seeking clarity and complexity, and see this as a responsibility that extends to their work with children, families, and the community. This is a stance of ongoing research. It prompts us to wonder what it means to engage families and the community in research in our current contexts, to see them not merely as consumers or providers of services, requiring reports on progress and scores on measures of quality. Adopting this perspective would certainly require continuous adjustment, and would also contribute to Malaguzzi’s intention that pedagogy embrace uncertainty.

We see in this interview Malaguzzi’s clarity and courage. Alongside the aforementioned ‘rare form of courtesy’ found in Reggio, he did not hesitate to call out injustices and deceit:

If teaching is monodirectional and rigidly structured according to some “science,” it becomes intolerable, prejudicial, and damaging to the dignity of both teacher and learner. But even when teachers assume themselves to be democratic, their behavior still is too often dominated by undemocratic teaching strategies. (p. 57)

This sensibility of having a responsibility to hold ourselves and each other accountable to our stated values is evident among the educators in Reggio today, and is a challenge we could all embrace.

This sensibility of having a responsibility to hold ourselves and each other accountable to our stated values is evident among the educators in Reggio today, and is a challenge we could all embrace.

We must also acknowledge the inestimable gift that Lella Gandini gives in this interview. Lella was and is a superb listener who set the stage with rich, open questions. Her role as translator has helped us to know at least to some extent the Malaguzzi she knew. Because Lella was born and lived for much of her life in Italy, but has also lived in the United States for several decades, she is not only able to translate the words, but also the cultural nuances and sensibilities. It is a delicate and complex role that she accepted at Malaguzzi’s invitation. As an informed participant in the work of the education project in Reggio Emilia, Lella is the consummate interviewer and interpreter of Malaguzzi. She has a gift for asking exquisite questions that invite both his directness and his metaphors. “A visit to your schools always gives a sense of discovery and serenity. What are the ingredients that create such an atmosphere and level of positive tension?” (p. 41). Malaguzzi’s response incorporates again the image of an organism, this time “an inexhaustible and dynamic organism” (p. 41). He does not shy away from addressing the challenges, stating that this organism, “...has its difficulties, controversies, joys, and capacities to handle external disturbances” (p. 41). As someone who always sought other perspectives, he does not expect that there would be compliance or conformity of thought among the educators. Rather, “What counts is that there be agreement about what direction the school should go and that all forms of artifice and hypocrisy be kept at bay” (p. 41).

That “inexhaustible and dynamic organism” has included outstanding educators, families, and the citizens of the city, who have not only thought and worked together to build the system of education in Reggio Emilia, but they have done so publicly, inviting the world
to think with them through study weeks, conferences, publications and videos. The past few months of the COVID-19 crisis in Reggio Emilia has given greater visibility to the strength of a system that values relationship and collaboration, even as the basic relationships of everyday life have been challenged. The "dynamic organism" has continued to be in relationship through technology, rising once again in the face of great adversity, as a source of inspiration and partner in perseverance. It is possible that a major catastrophe offers the possibility of re-cognition of our assumptions and potential for transformation. As we have been dealing with a global pandemic, Malaguzzi’s words have great relevance: "...a new educational experience can emerge from the least expected circumstances" (p. 35). What will we do with this opportunity?

This interview itself is in many ways like a piece of pedagogical documentation, in that as we read it and reread it, we discover more about ourselves. After multiple readings, there is more underlined than not, and the margins become more crowded with penciled-in comments. The first edition of *The Hundred Languages of Children* was published in 1993, a year before Malaguzzi died. We appreciate how timely it was for Lella to have interviewed Malaguzzi at that point. Thanks to this, we have his own words and recollections about the transformation that was ignited and has continued to burn bright since that "day in spring" in Villa Cella. As we face a global pandemic together, we can consider what we might build from the rubble, how we might live better with others in relationship with our planet, inspired by Malaguzzi’s words, “The continuing motivation for our work has in fact been an attempt...to liberate hopes for a new human culture of childhood.”

As we face a global pandemic together, we can consider what we might build from the rubble, how we might live better with others in relationship with our planet, inspired by Malaguzzi’s words, “The continuing motivation for our work has in fact been an attempt...to liberate hopes for a new human culture of childhood.”

REFERENCES


Credits

Images in article courtesy of Karyn Callaghan and Margie Cooper.
Barbara Burrington is serving in her third year as interim director of the University of Vermont (UVM) Campus Children’s School, where she worked as head teacher from 1993 through 2007. For the previous ten years, Barbara served as both a principal and a superintendent in northwestern Vermont. Her reflections on inspirations from Reggio Emilia have been published in early childhood education journals and as chapters in edited volumes. Her current focus is on collaborative partnerships that better connect the Campus Children’s School and the UVM early childhood programs with the pre-K to three-year-old community throughout the Chittenden County area, the Vermont Agency of Education, Vermont policy makers, and federal agencies and foundations—with commitments to the provision of high-quality early childhood education for all children.

Dawn St. Amour is a mentor teacher at the University of Vermont Campus Children’s School in Burlington, VT, where she has taught for the past 15 years as an infant-toddler teacher and as a preschool teacher. Dawn participated in a study tour of the schools in Reggio Emilia in 2005 and 2006 and joined a delegation to Pistoia in 2011. She has focused her work with children, families, and student-teachers on building curriculum through the lens of community development and the deep knowledge of the individual to inform the power of the group.

Introduction

by Barbara Burrington

Since 1991, the staff at the University of Vermont’s Campus Children’s School have been studying the work of the municipal preschools and infant-toddler centers in Reggio Emilia, Italy. This has resulted in deep and meaningful analyses of our own context and practices. In particular, the practice of observing, documenting, and interpreting children’s investigations has supported our efforts to advocate for children and to create responsive curriculum. In this context, documentation serves as the means through which we demonstrate the growth and development of children and teachers over time.

This article describes a series of experiences that found their beginning over five years ago, when at the start of a new school year, preschool teacher Dawn St. Amour, declared her intent to build the foundation for relationships in her classroom so solidly, that the foundation would serve as a cornerstone of support for the educational experience of every member of the classroom community. That intentional decision, “to create a purposeful experience at the beginning of a school year, inclusive of everyone,” led to an unintentional discovery that has become the basis for an annual revisiting of the original investigation. Why would
Dawn, a teacher inspired by the Reggio Emilia Approach, revisit the same experience every year? Wouldn’t that be akin to doing the same “unit,” over and over, similar to the obligatory and annual unit on apples in the fall we observe in many classrooms?

While school years come to a conclusion and new ones begin, the teacher’s experience does not “end and begin.” She is continually observing and responding to not only the children with whom she engages, but also to what is happening inside herself, as she grows, learns, and authors her own story.

Dawn’s observations of the children captured them accessing their peers as a kind of mirror, as they referenced one another’s faces, the details of their eyes and mouths, the particular expressions each used for communicating. The children recognized that other’s faces are both alike and different than their own. Through the drawing process, the children became very familiar with each other’s unique attributes and grew to discover how to illustrate the distinctions. What appeared to matter the most to the children was the connections they were making with one another. Their work integrates the physical characteristics that are visible to the outside world, the person they are coming to know, and likewise, the person they are becoming.

This act of learning and invention is made possible because the teacher embraces the process of documenting every experience in order to revisit and consequently rethink and continually learn from past experiences. The teacher recognizes her own growth through the stories of the children and embraces the uncertainty of how all children will face the challenge of conveying how they see themselves and how they see one another.

Each one of us needs to be able to play with the things that are coming out of the world of children. Each one of us needs to have curiosity, and we need to be able to try something new based on the ideas that we collect from the children as they go along. Life has to be somewhat agitated and upset, a bit restless, somewhat unknown. As life flows with the thoughts of children, we need to be open, we need to change our ideas; we need to be comfortable with the restless nature of life. – Loris Malaguzzi (1994, p. 2)

By Dawn St. Amour

The following story represents an essential piece of my identity as a preschool teacher. I was a teacher of infants and toddlers for nearly nine years before transitioning into a preschool classroom. As a school, teachers loop with the children the first three years. Then, the children move into the preschool program where they stay for two years. Ten new children join the other children who rotated into the preschool program the previous year. Thus, in my initial year of changing from a teacher of infants to a teacher of preschoolers, I was fortunate to remain with the same group of children for five years.

My educational values are grounded in the development of community. I am also influenced by several educational thinkers, especially the experiences of Reggio Emilia. I have a sense of urgency to build a deep knowledge of each child. If my documentation of their work was to become a lens for the children and others to examine the world around them, I had to get comfortable with group work and experiences where the children are unified through questions, materials, and experi-
Taking a Deep Breath and Diving In

When the spring semester began, I was ready to introduce the idea of portrait drawing and a plan slowly emerged. With so many ideas and questions, I wondered where and how to start. In truth, the delayed start was in large measure due to my own lack of confidence with drawing! I appreciated Carlina Rinaldi’s words, “We should be ready for the unexpected, for reassessing our initial hypotheses, for constructing strategies and for readjusting our course if we make mistakes (which we have the right to make and are part of our professional growth)” (Gandini et al., 2005, p. 125).

The initial classroom setup included a table with one tri-fold mirror and the book *On Monday When it Rained*, by Cherryl Kachenmeister with images by Tom Berthiaume. I also included mirrors and pre-drawn head forms. The pre-drawn head forms were more for my comfort. I feared that some children would not be drawn to the table because they would be intimidated with where to begin. In small groups, children were invited to look closely at themselves in the mirror with a focus on how their faces changed when they expressed a particular emotion. I hoped the focus on expressions as a form of communication would cause the children to be less concerned with drawing realistic depictions of their faces and more inclined to represent from a place of invention and creativity.

I sat with the children and made a sad face alongside them. We talked about the similarities and differences between our faces and the photos in the book. I asked them how they knew the boy was sad by looking at the photo and listened carefully to how they formed their ideas and articulated their interpretations. I
was intrigued by the children’s astute attention to detail in their description of what they saw as sad: “your mouth goes down”; “your eyes no longer sparkle like when you are happy”; “sometimes sad is when you are crying”; “your whole body might collapse.” Through the intricate study of their faces, they started to take notice of others, “Look! Look! When I am sad, my whole lip sticks out.” “When I am happy, my eyebrows go up.” “When Dylan smiles really big, his eyes almost disappear.”

Children took the time to look at others—really look at them—so much so that they became aware of the smallest facial attributes and the underlying emotions.

Children were also curious about the presentation of materials. Some were uncertain about what to do and others appeared less confident in their drawing skills. However, the children actively participated from afar through observation and conversation with their peers. The children studied the emotions represented in the book and attempted to emulate them in the mirror and with each other. They commented on who had the saddest face or which peer made their eyebrows come together to show a thinking face. The children began drawing eyes, noses, mouths (mostly smiling), hair, and gradually adorned themselves with jewels, colored hair, and what appeared to be eyelashes and makeup.

Two children, Dylan and Klara, began drawing without the pre-drawn heads. In addition, Klara added her body adorned with clothes.
This experimentation inspired a freedom to move away from the initial confined pre-drawn heads to more complex and authentic drawings. The children’s drawings were like an invitation for me to let go of some of my own apprehensions and concerns with “getting it wrong.”

As the children’s drawings changed, so did our conversations. We shifted from talking about emotions to descriptions of unique facial features as embodying one’s identity. Working again from a place of uncertainty but a bit braver, I continued to invite children to draw portraits in small groups. I asked the children to study their unique features. They described their clothing choice, hair type and color, freckles, and spaces between teeth.
Simultaneously, families started to take notice of all the children’s images displayed in the room, not just their own child’s. Often during morning drop off time, children invited their families to look at their latest portrait as they described their work and distinct color choices such as “purple hair.”

Throughout the project I made close observations using the classroom camera for photos and video recordings. I later shared the images with the children so they could reexamine their previous work. The images and video recordings also allowed me to notice what might have escaped my full attention during the live process, such as a focus on the facial expressions or instances where they were seeking a bit of scaffolding from either their peers or myself. I was also fortunate to collaborate with several colleagues who pushed me to think deeper about the project and what was unfolding for children. Revisiting with my colleagues provided an objective lens for interpreting the work and inspiration to continually offer children ways to go further.

**Seeing Each Other In New Ways**

In late spring of the following year, portraiture took on a new role in the classroom. The children remembered seeing their work displayed in an art exhibit in the Davis Center on campus that included drawings, paintings, work with clay, and photographs the previous spring. Seeing their work displayed in such a public way—in a space that welcomes people to our college community, filled the children with great pride. I proposed that the children create portraits for an exhibit to be displayed at the preschool end of the year celebration, as a way to commemorate the passage to kindergarten. Rather than drawing “yourself,” the children decided instead to draw each other’s portrait and then later expanded this idea to include photographing one another. The children recalled drawing each other in previous experiences and they were eager to try it again.

Many of the children’s initial pencil renderings reflected an intentional and detailed approach to the work. Before starting, the children asked each other questions such as: “What color are your eyes?”; “Can I look?”; “What do you want in your picture?”; “What color hair do you want?”; “Is it ok if I put a costume on you?”; “Is it ok if you have blue eyelashes?” At times, children even stood up to “model” so the artist could see the stripes, patterns, and design of what they were wearing. They also offered each other assistance in noticing unique and different characteristics that would enhance their drawings such as eye color, length of eyelashes, hairstyles, signature clothing or accessories that the child might wear, and the child’s height relative to their own. They provided each other with encouragement when a child was struggling to draw something that was especially challenging.

Once the children had completed their portraits of each other in pencil, I asked them to draw a second portrait in fine point Sharpie pen using their previous piece as a guide. I was interested in how revisiting their first drawings would inform their second rendering. The children’s approaches to their second portraits surprised me. For example, the children often executed them more quickly and with less detail. Some children found it challenging to draw the effect that they wanted with marker, so they returned to drawing in pencil first and then adding color.

Often children adjusted their drawing techniques based on observations of their peer’s drawing techniques. For example, bodies originally drawn with larger shapes such as circles or rectangles, now transformed to two straight lines down, and large hands drawn at the end of two small arms became smaller. In these cases, the children considered the relationship between the sizes of body parts, resulting in figures that were more in scale.
Photographic Portraiture

Our children have familiarity with photography as a language, thus a suggestion to combine the portrait drawings with photography was met enthusiastically by the children. Photographing each other brought children a great deal of excitement and pride. They seemed to equally enjoy being the subject or the photographer. Often the photographer would encourage his or her “subject” to pose in a certain way with specific facial expressions like a happy, sad, or bored face.

Children chose their favorite place on campus for their photograph to be taken based on an important place that held a significant memory of their time at our school. Cooper decided to have his photos taken on the playground. He wanted people to see him jumping off one of the boulders on the playground. When I asked him about this, he shared, “I love to move, to bounce, to jump, and that is how people know me.”
In creating these panels, I reflected further on the experiences the children and I shared throughout this process. In particular, I was reminded of the dedicated effort and collaboration that the children devoted to an experience that unfolded over the course of several months. This experience also marked my first attempt at creating a legacy project, a culminating project for others to remember and celebrate our time together in the preschool.

Both the process of taking the photos and choosing the final images for the exhibit revealed a lot about the children's identity. We created documentation panels organized in pairs that described the children's identities as both the artist and the subject. Each panel showed the process from a practice pencil drawing, a second drawing in fine point marker, a photograph chosen by the subject, and a series of three photographs. These panels were displayed on easels lining the hallway as families entered the room where we were hosting graduation.
Ongoing Portraiture Investigations

In the subsequent year, I became even more committed to the idea of offering the preschoolers the opportunity to frame their “legacy” through the lens of portraiture. As a more experienced preschool teacher, I gradually felt more comfortable with my role in having deeper discussions with the children regarding each other’s differences, including skin color. In return, the children noticed the inadequacy of the drawing materials in the classroom. When we tried to add color to our drawings and demonstrate the range of our skin shades, the materials failed us. This problem led to adding paint, a medium that was transformable in the ways we needed. Children worked to mix colors that were unique to them—creating a color recipe in paint that resembled their individual hue.

Children also added “selfies” as a form of portraiture. Children captured themselves from their point of view which was very different from the idealized “selfies” seen in popular culture. They negotiated the camera in one hand while photographing their faces. Sometimes this resulted in holding the camera straight into their faces as they snapped close-ups of just their eyelashes, veins, hair, and mouths. Many of their comments reflected their intentions, such as: “I want to show my loose tooth.”; “I have to show Pikachu on my shirt.”; “I need to include my baseball hat and my shirt because they are my favorite teams.”
Our study of portraiture grew to include individual interviews in which the child reminisced about time at school, shared hopes for her/his future self, and desires for bettering the world that we live in. These sentiments supported a holistic view that perhaps was missing from previous projects and also served as an example of the growth and knowledge on the part of the children as well as myself.
Each year the children’s work was prominently displayed in the classroom. Families took in all of the portraits and worked to guess which portrait was which preschooler. They shared things they knew about the preschoolers like, “long curly red hair—that must be Maddie,” and, “I see that there are pierced ears here, that must be Rani.” Throughout the creation process, the children relished the praise they received from families who took time out of their day to appreciate the work.
Afterward by Barbara Burrington

What have we learned from one teacher over five years, hundreds of individual portraiture experiences, and an extensive variety of documentation? Foremost, I believe this perspective allows us to witness that the teacher was empowered to revisit the accumulation of past experiences through the processes of observation, documentation, and her ongoing interpretation of children’s learning. Consequently, she is able to make space throughout her practice to continually rethink and reimagine her earlier understandings, and to make room for new ideas, new experimentation, and research.

Also notable, we observe that the risk of repetition, repetition, repetition, simply never occurred. Each iteration of children’s portraiture work is unique from the one before. Why? I believe because this type of educational environment, strongly inspired by the experience of the Reggio Emilia municipal infant-toddler centers and preschools, creates a context where a teacher can become aware of her own educational values. Her pedagogy became a mechanism for interpreting learning and relationships. And, by better understanding the learning happening for and among the children in front of her, things are constantly evolving and therefore are being seen anew. I believe these are central components of Malaguzzi’s (1994) philosophy that places teachers and children at the center of the creation of the school’s culture, a social culture where learning, being and becoming, and building a community with healthy traditions, buoy and strengthen the school. Because, at the center is a teacher who is continually developing as an educator, capable of developing a true curriculum, a curriculum produced from all the children.

Conclusion

As I work alongside children, portraiture continues to be an opportunity for professional and personal growth. I have gained more insight into myself as a teacher and the ever-evolving subjective lens with which I enter each interaction. The personal fear of failure and uncertainty around this work allowed me to appreciate further the bravery and openness that children bring to their learning. Trusting children to show us the scaffolding they need and understanding that they do not shy away from moments that are hard, but rather dive in—ready to look deeper and grow our collective learning in the process, are gifts from the experiences we lived together.

Trustimg children to show us the scaffolding they need and understanding that they do not shy away from moments that are hard, but rather dive in—ready to look deeper and grow our collective learning in the process, are gifts from the experiences we lived together.

REFERENCES


VOICES: CONVERSATIONS FROM NORTH AMERICA AND BEYOND

Resilient Inquiry Through Uncertainty: An Early Childhood Director’s Reflection on Teaching and Learning through the Pandemic

by Chiara Angelicola

Chiara Angelicola is the owner, founder, and head of school at the Silver Lake Center for Creativity (SLCC) Preschool, a Reggio-inspired and research-driven preschool committed to providing hands-on, collaborative learning experiences that help develop a child’s creativity, imagination, and problem-solving skills in Los Angeles, California. Prior to opening SLCC in 2018, Angelicola was an early childhood educator for over 15 years. She continues to devote her pedagogical practice to implementing research-backed education for the first five years of life, emphasizing the value of collaboration, problem-solving, and creativity.

It was the start of March when I noticed a sense of unease amongst our school community members. New York was already reporting cases of COVID-19 at an accelerated rate, and parents in our school were beginning to linger in the classroom at drop-off and pick-up times to discuss the latest case developments in LA County. Although our staff-maintained presence and calm each day while the children remained in school, we were all beginning to worry—earnestly hoping nothing would progress into what it ultimately turned into, a global pandemic.

I quickly became enveloped by my priority to ensure the health and safety of our whole community and by mid-March, I closed the campus. As our teachers prepared for at-home learning experiences, I was remiss to consider that as our physical doors were forced to close for an extended period of time, our hands-on, research-driven approach to learning as we knew it, would be forced to adapt. We were unprepared for the logistical and pedagogical challenges that would lie ahead. I felt the fear of failure I had experienced in my first year of teaching accumulating again. Although I have been teaching for 15 years, I felt new to this profession. Would I be able to successfully lead a school through a pandemic? How could I uphold my personal values as an educator and leader of our school community in order to inspire and propel others to do the same?

As our days at home progressed, our team of educators and I continued to collaborate and ideate the myriad ways we could provide rich inquiry for children to engage with on a screen.

As our days at home progressed, our team of educators and I continued to collaborate and ideate the myriad ways we could provide rich inquiry for children to engage with on a screen. We pondered what the children loved most about being at school, the types of communal experiences they seemed to engage with in person the most, and how effectively we could provide a routine to help build their sense of control and consistency during this period at home. Additionally, we realized we had to newly implement practices that would not only benefit our mixed-age group of children, but their caregivers as well. We wondered what parents needed most from this home-learning experience, how we could support the family’s routine so everyone could engage in their needed daily tasks, and how we would best support the family unit as a whole.

We immediately encountered several setbacks and complications upon launching our online program. Daily Zoom meetings became...
As we employed our own creative faculties as educators, we began to find novel ways to approach meeting the children’s myriad developmental needs and to help ease their frustrations with the new virtual medium. Our educators built an online portfolio filled with hands-on and tactile provocations parents could help to facilitate at home. We recorded various read-aloud stories, yoga, and movement experiences for the children to engage with at their desired time. Additionally, we implemented a collective nature log so individual children could upload, document, and study their own findings from nature while on walks or in their own backyards.

Before we addressed these initial hurdles, we realized we had not yet faced the elephant in the room: We were attempting to engage preschoolers on a computer screen and construct learning experiences for lengthy periods of time. These expectations alone went against our principles and pedagogical pillars of hands-on, active, and co-constructivist learning in our brick and mortar classroom. Thus, our first step towards ideating solutions was to acknowledge this seemingly impenetrable obstacle and to relinquish our control as educators to the idea that there was a perfect scenario available. Once we were able to come to terms with our new and unprecedented limitations, we could begin to harness our equally important educational pillars of flexibility, divergent thinking, and resilience.

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We then approached our Zoom meetings with flexibility, preparedness for improvisation to meet the various changing needs at hand each day, and incorporated several brain breaks for the children’s bodies to move, dance, and be free. We encouraged children to establish an area in their home as their designated “classroom” so our meetings could become rituals

Edwin Comic

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and so they could remain nurtured in a consistent space to keep distractions at bay. Art supplies, recycled materials, sensory tools, and cozy cushions were suggested items for children to keep in their new classroom space as well.

Additionally, we implemented our classroom practice of establishing class agreements to our new online format and asked the children to think of ways the Zoom meetings could be fair and fun for all. Their seamless adaptability to their own suggestions began to smooth out the wrinkles and we began to see the nuanced changes take place each day in our meetings. As I observed the teachers and children collectively responding with their own flexibility and solutions, I simultaneously began to realize that our practice as a research-driven learning environment would not be forfeited as I had previously feared.

As we continue to foster our relationship as a class community, the children’s thirst for meaning, prosocial skills, and emotional security, we are concurrently sowing the seeds for resilient inquiry through uncertainty. Our homes are new working models for creative education as we are tasked with the responsibility of designing a new virtual application of curricula steeped in problem-solving, collaboration, and creativity.
As a class, the children and educators are beginning to co-construct a culminating art project for the semester, which emphasizes the sense of safety through the building of hideouts. Teachers will incorporate each child’s individual interests and their respective materials from home into the collaborative hideout. Children will add to their respective piece of the project each day and drop it off at school once complete. Our teachers will then be compiling the various elements and installing the community hideout in our classroom. The class has decided to then offer a virtual art exhibit of their installation to their parents via Zoom at the end of the semester.

Although our current circumstances seem like a time when foreign pedagogy is being applied for the first time, we must remember that we are embodying the practices we have implemented all along: risk-taking, trying again, finding solutions to problems, working together, and being creative.

Hope has been defined as an evolutionary tool. Societies would not have been able to reform and reconstruct themselves over the course of human history without the belief in the possibility of a new and better future. In 2019, the United States Department of Labor stated 65 percent of the children entering primary school now will ultimately work in a job that doesn’t exist today. When this current world pandemic passes, we can anticipate this percentage of children being higher. Innovation, collaboration, and creative thinking will be required tools in educational systems, governments, healthcare systems, and the workforce in order for our society to rebuild in a more sustainable way.

Research in early childhood education defines creativity through the measurable impact collaboration, flexibility, confidence, and resilience have on our long-term successes, both academically and in the professional world. Thus, we should continue to model and foster these creative faculties for our young children regardless of our current limitations as educators, so children will be prepared for the future that lies ahead.

Whether we’re on Zoom or back in our physical classrooms, educators currently have a very important job to do: to model what resiliency looks like. How will we contribute to this part of history with our beliefs, words, and deeds? It begins with hope and ends with resilience. We will then see the fruit of all our possibilities. I am hopeful that when we come out the other side of this, teachers, families, and children alike will have developed the creative, social, and emotional antibodies to walk through any uncertainty with resilience.
We say we love children. For our love to be effectively worthy of the task, expressed in activity that is capable of and affects the results we hope for, first we must know who we love, be clear and aware in ourselves about the journeys they make to become adults and citizens, and the collaboration they expect from us. In this sense educating means perfecting our knowledge, our conduct, and our feelings.

- Leaflet No. 1 of Scuola per Genitori, 1957 (as cited in Cagliari et al., 2016, p. 56)

It was fitting, in the centenary year of Loris Malaguzzi’s birth and celebration of his life’s work, that Margie Cooper, NAREA standing chair, began the conference with these words. She continued with hope for the participants, “With that notion, may today and tomorrow be a contribution to your ongoing efforts to better know the child and yourself.”

Together, we represented five countries: Canada, Italy, Nicaragua, Romania, and the United States. From Canada, participants from three provinces attended, and from the United States, participants from 24 states joined the summer conference. In total, 240 educators and advocates joined together in a virtual piazza.

As Margie Cooper turned the program over to the Reggio educators, Daniela Lanzi shared, “It’s an emotional moment to begin this first experience for us, myself, and Filippo, of this summer school in this exact way. In this time, rather than entrusting communication to your physical presence and seeing you here with us, we have to trust a video camera in the back of the room. We trust the communication and we are embarking on the new ways of meeting with you over the next two days.” At that moment, words of welcome and solidarity flowed in the “chat” function of the webinar, underscoring the desire we had for being together in the exchange.

The speakers developed a flow whereby Daniela Lanzi, pedagogista, presented a pedagogical, cultural, political, and social
They told of the very recent reflections made by the network of preschools and infant-toddler centers on the topic of living beings with the language of graphics/drawing, which included the video Imagine a Forest. In the year of Loris Malaguzzi’s 100th birthday, the current work brings together the temporary nature of the delicate moment we all are living and an optimistic view of the future.

The second part of the day included time for questions and responses and presentations about the “Language of Clay” professional development process involving all the municipal infant-toddler centers and preschools. A new Reggio Children publication about clay is forthcoming. “We are trying to reveal the tools we work with, starting with the words of the children,” remarked Filippo.

Friday’s presentations focused on the work of “Piazza, Piazzes,” and “The piazza is a continent.” Daniela and Filippo shared presentations that highlighted the community dimension of the Reggio Emilia educational experience, particularly through the encounters and the exchanges with the children, families, and the city. It was clear through the comments, participants enjoyed hearing and thinking about past, current, and evolving experiences in Reggio Emilia.

discussion followed by Filippo Chieli, atelierista, who presented examples from the children’s and adults’ experiences in the daily life of the schools.

The first day, Thursday, Daniela and Filippo shared the story, One city, many children – The Educational Project and Learning Contexts of Reggio Emilia | Living Beings: Experiences at the Nilde Iotti Infant-toddler Center. It is a story of a strong relationship between the experiences of the infant-toddler centers and preschools of the municipality of Reggio Emilia and the city itself, giving value and visibility to the culture of childhood. Filippo presented the story, Exchange of Life - Exchange of Sound | The Gaze of Pre-school Children on Living Beings, the genesis of which emerged in the rap songs children were singing. “You can see the children’s thinking about rap songs. It gives us clues. We can see the elements of voice, breath, and air—all are indicators of something being alive. The genesis came to us naturally because we were listening to the children. We got closer through something we cannot see—the voice.”

“Thank you for sharing your children’s voices and your perspectives.”
– Gina Wong, participant
“What a generous presentation, leaving us all in a state of wonder. Thank you!”
- Mary Jane Maguire-Fong, participant

Throughout the two days, a rhythm of collecting comments and questions to weave into the discussion underscored the desire to be in dialogue. In response to a question that had been very much on attendees’ minds, “What did you do during the lockdown?” Daniela shared,

When the schools locked down . . . we tried to understand which words were most pertinent . . . to talking with parents in this situation. We thought about words that might be important to bear in mind and to use when thinking about communication with families . . . . These are some of the words . . . listening, caution, being prudent, silence, and respect for the sick, the grief, and the situations of pain and suffering that many . . . were experiencing . . . . We found these many different episodes of listening to the families . . . a kind of capillary listening. The relationship we have with families is a pool of narratives. These words, the grammars, have built up a basis for dialogue.

These words, the grammars, have built up a basis for dialogue.

This summer conference was one with a particular backdrop. A global pandemic, a focus on social justice around the world, and a year of honoring the life’s work of Loris Malaguzzi brought our attention to concepts, values, and principles within society and education. Daniela commented,

We have invented new words to talk about experiences we didn’t have the language for before. I hope it has been used to open a little window on our idea and our feelings about participation. Participation has been a fundamental value . . . and it includes some very important ideas. The first of those is the right to education from birth. This right of children from when they are born is a responsibility of the whole community . . . to make places of education which aren’t just any place but places of quality, places that legitimize and provide favorable conditions for constructing a culture of childhood. When I talk about education as a right . . . I’m not simply thinking of education . . . from birth to six. I’m thinking of all children, all young people of any age. I’m thinking of all the different levels of schooling in any community. Another very important idea connected with participation is the idea of our infant-toddler centers and preschools as public places. These are places that are respectful of the subjectivity of each person, of every person, every child . . . respected for their own subjective ways of feeling. In public places, we affirm and confirm the rights of all people.

Daniela and Filippo highlighted vital concepts within the words and experiences they shared. Listening, democracy, citizenship, and participation were embedded in the daily life experiences children had with drawing, clay, and sound. They shared the space with children’s vocabularies of living beings and soundscapes. The many videos, images, and audio recordings illustrated the fundamental values and gave us a glimpse into life with children, families, educators, and the community in Reggio Emilia, Italy.

It is with deep appreciation that we thank our colleagues from Reggio Emilia, Italy: Daniela Lanzi, Filippo Chieli, and Jane McCall. We are grateful and inspired by all who joined us from a variety of contexts and who are working diligently to create a world where all children are honored and respected for their potential, capabilities, and humanity. Filippo gave us the gift of words spoken by a young girl, Gabriele, “A habitat is a place to live in blessed health.” Inspired by her wisdom, we hope that we all inhabit a world of blessed health as we continue to grow in the complexity of trying.

REFERENCE

From: Giselle gcarp27@gmail.com
Subject: NAREA Picture
Date: June 27, 2020 at 2:57 PM

To: thresa@reggioalliance.org

Hello Thresa Grove,

My name is Giselle Carpenter and I am sending you a picture of my amazing virtual NAREA conference experience! I am an Early Childhood Educator at Paradise Valley Community College working with Christie Colunga. I also am a PreKindergarten teacher at Pinnacle Presbyterian Preschool in Scottsdale, Arizona with Sabrina Ball. I have been very fortunate to work with these two amazing women and have had many wonderful Reggio Inspired experiences as I have met Lella Gandini and Tiziana Filippini! Lella Gandini has been a part of many beautiful experiences here in Arizona that has continued to fill us with wonderful inspirations! I am also very blessed to have two beautiful Italian parents that were born in Italy. I have many great life memories and experiences through the Italian heritage. I am also so very fortunate of being a part of Loris Malaguzzi’s work through where I am working!

I want to thank you, Daniella, Fillipo, and Jane for this wonderful NAREA opportunity through our virtual new life! Their shared experiences with us give us many thoughts to think about and new innovations to bring forward in our future! I wanted to share a virtual picture of the beautiful Arizona desert with you all.

Thank you again for everything!

Giselle Carpenter
BOOK REVIEW

The Future is a Lovely Day
by: Tara Papandrew

Tara Papandrew is a teacher-researcher and administrator at Opal School in Portland, Oregon. Opal School began as a seed of an idea inspired by a study tour a group of educators took to the municipal infant-toddler centers and preschools of Reggio Emilia, Italy, in 1999. Her recent work includes contributing to the Framework for Inspiring Invention created by Opal School in partnership with Project Zero of the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

The scientist thinks with his imagination. You can do lots of nice things with your imagination. Sometimes you have to wait for other scientists to invent what you thought of. At first inventions look like impossible things, like those of Leonardo da Vinci, but then they turn out to be really useful. But to invent things you have to go to school a lot, have a lot of brain, lots of ideas and discover new things in your study. – Dario, The Future is a Lovely Day (p. 56)

Dario’s idea of having a lot of brain might also be translated as having a lot of imagination. Many people think the imagination is an escape from reality, but the children of Reggio Emilia continue to remind us that it’s actually preparation for it.

Just like Dario, geneticist Eric Lander believes scientists make discoveries by learning to play with lots of ideas. Author Preet Bharara (2020) asked Lander during a podcast, “What’s your theory of the qualities that are in people who are capable of innovation and scientific discovery, and what’s the DNA of an innovator?” Lander quickly rejected the idea that scientific innovation—what he calls “really bold stuff”—comes from our DNA. Rather, he believes scientific discovery comes from a series of learned skills, such as the willingness...
to float lots of ideas, a real persistence with ideas, comfort with failure, and approaching problems from different perspectives. This is how novel ideas are generated, Lander says. And yet, we fail to teach people how to be good scientists. Instead, teachers often emphasize facts so students can pass exams—and that’s nothing like the science Lander describes. Science is playing around with ideas, looking for patterns, learning to ask good questions, failing, and bringing a fresh perspective to a puzzlement.

Lander thinks children are natural scientists, curious about the world, asking zillions of questions, experimenting with ideas and tinkering with materials. So, perhaps it is in our DNA? Oftentimes adults actively drive that natural disposition out of them. Since children show up in the world as curious, creative, and competent beings, our work, as the adults in their lives, is to keep these innate gifts animated.

Dario’s theories, woven among those of his friends and educators, fill a captivating book called The Future is a Lovely Day. This delightful and engaging book shines a light on the children’s thinking, in words and materials, as they make sense of the unknown, grappling with the uncertainty of the future.

Throughout the book, many divergent perspectives are offered. The future is ubiquitous. Federico, for example, says that “the future is like the air…it is all over the sky” (p.19).

The future is predestined, as when Elena proposes that “it’s the future that decides” (p. 37) and the future is manifested by us. Davide says that “no-one knows your future, you have to think it up yourself” (p. 19).

As a writer, I’m delighted by these children’s ideas; as a teacher, I’m attentive to the conditions that catalyzed them. I know children don’t exist in isolation. They’re part of a cultural context in which the values of inquiry and inventiveness are alive. The Future is a Lovely Day demonstrates the adults’ competencies too, their deep respect for the children’s intelligence and imagination, as well as their abilities to document and interpret the quality of the children’s thinking. It’s a stellar example of the culture of inquiry, created by the children and adults within it, which relies on the unique gifts of childhood to play with unanswerable questions in complex and surprising ways.
As I read this book, some of the children’s expressions from 20 years ago felt familiar to my work today at Opal School in Portland, Oregon. One day, as we were thinking about what lives beyond the present moment, four-year-old Eliana told me:

The most important word is yet. It means you can’t do something now. It also means that you can do it later, but you just need to practice! Practice means that you keep doing something over and over until you get it. It feels good to practice, to me it feels loving. And it makes me feel strong next to my heart.

This idea reveals a belief about the future being inside us, as Davide said in the book, “No-one knows your future, you have to think it up by yourself” (p. 32).

As I read The Future is a Lovely Day, I was not only drawn in by the children’s imagery, but the cadence and beauty of the adults’ words too. As someone who creates documentation, I recognize that there’s an inherent tension in the relationship between the children’s artifacts and the teacher’s synthesis. With this in mind, I wonder about the space between these two places in this book, and I’m curious about how that may have evolved over time. The work presented in this publication makes me more sensitive to the work I’m doing. I feel driven to continue elevating the ideas of young children, since they’re often discounted, while being even more careful about maintaining the integrity of their meaning and not projecting mine.

While The Future is a Lovely Day is a solid collection of these children’s ideas, I wish there was a companion piece, documenting the adults’ pedagogical questions, their dialogue about how to move the work forward, their uncertainty, their missteps, the patterns they noticed along the way—in essence their research as scientists. I’m curious about this part of the story, not in an effort to replicate any of it, but rather because I’m really eager to understand the greater context in which this project sits, to know more of the invisible interplay among the children and the adults as they constructed these theories together.

I noticed that these young children have an awareness of the beautiful parts of the world, as well as the painful parts. They aren’t shielded from knowing about the impact of human choices on our planet. This reveals even more about the adults’ beliefs about children’s emotional capacities and cognitive abilities to consider tensions related to interdependence. This pushed on my own comfort and challenged me to consider trusting the children I work with in new ways—to narrow the gap between my values and my practice.

I believe children are capable of grappling with complicated, even devastating, ideas. Yet, if I’m honest, in practice, I sometimes make choices to protect them from encountering the stuff that makes my heart ache. The Future is a Lovely Day nudged me to pay attention to this tendency and ask what I can learn from children about how they make sense of turbulent times.

I believe children are capable of grappling with complicated, even devastating, ideas. Yet, if I’m honest, in practice, I sometimes make choices to protect them from encountering the stuff that makes my heart ache. The Future is a Lovely Day nudged me to pay attention to this tendency and ask what I can learn from children about how they make sense of turbulent times.
Turbulent times are ubiquitous. Times were turbulent in post-fascist Italy when Loris Malaguzzi and others built the schools of Reggio Emilia, brick by brick. They were also turbulent in 2001, when this beautiful book was published and Opal School opened its doors—right after the World Trade Center towers fell. Times are certainly turbulent now. The stories we read from the past—and the stories we dream of the future—guide us in the present. Dario’s words, “sometimes you have to wait for other scientists to invent what you thought of. At first inventions look like impossible things, like those of Leonardo da Vinci, but then they turn out to be really useful” (p. 56), made me think about the cumulative nature of research, how it spans generations, connecting thinkers of the past and future. As a teacher-researcher, I like to imagine I’m walking amidst a lush and layered ecosystem, absent of space and time—alongside Dario, Davide, Eliana, Vea Vecchi, and Loris Malaguzzi. Their provocative ideas are alive in the work we—you and I—are continuing to construct, and deconstruct, and reconstruct today—about what it means to live and learn alongside children, about what it means to be human in this complex and uncertain world.

REFERENCE


Call for Proposals for the Fall 2021 Peer-Reviewed Issue of Innovations

About Innovations

Innovations in Early Education: The International Reggio Emilia Exchange is a quarterly periodical published by the North American Reggio Emilia Alliance (NAREA) that focuses on the Reggio Emilia Approach to early childhood education. Innovations was developed in 1992 through an agreement with Loris Malaguzzi, founder of the Reggio Emilia educational project, and continues to be developed in solidarity with the Preschools and Infant-toddler Centers, Istituzione of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia, Italy; Reggio Children; and the Reggio Children – Loris Malaguzzi Center Foundation. The mission of Innovations is to provide an ongoing professional development resource that respectfully represents the values and educational principles of the municipal infant-toddler centers and preschools in Reggio Emilia as well as those of educators in schools, centers, universities, and colleges in North America and beyond who are actively engaged in the study of the Reggio Emilia Approach with children, colleagues, and families in their community.

An Annual Peer-Reviewed Issue of Innovations: Rationale and Description

In an effort to include more and diverse voices in an increasingly democratic dialogue among early childhood educators who are engaged in the study of the Reggio Emilia Approach, Innovations will publish one peer-reviewed issue annually. This annual peer-reviewed issue will include articles that are meant to support collaboration among teachers by integrating reflection and analysis of the shared and reciprocal research and inquiry of teachers, children, and families. In addition, the peer-reviewed issue will include reflections related to each article, written by one of the Consulting Editorial Board, with the goal of inviting readers to relate to their own contexts what they have read and experienced as members of a collaborative. Our intention is to support the work of Reggio-inspired teachers in North America by thinking together through deeper and more complex analysis of, and reflection on, our own work and that of our colleagues.

The peer-review process has been designed to reflect a shared view of learning as a process of individual and group construction and to support the learning processes of children and adults through educational documentation, which includes listening, observation, and interpretation. Our goal is to establish collaborative partnerships among educators, children, families, and community members for systems change and social justice that recognizes the rights of children to quality education.

Topic for the Fall 2021 Issue

With the courage to leap: Responding to crisis with ingenuity, creativity, and love

The first exhibit of the children’s work and accompanying documentation from the schools in Reggio Emilia was entitled, “The eye, if it leaps over the wall.” As Loris Malaguzzi explains:

The meaning behind this was that the eye (the mind, pedagogy, the education of a child) begins to see, to reason and to renew itself to the extent that it is able to leap over the wall…the wall of the banal, the rhetorical, the wall of conformity, of inertia and official reticence (Malaguzzi, 1987, p. 16).
Perhaps the most important word in that title is “if.” Sometimes, events help us to be aware of the walls we have built, and the walls that perhaps have defined us. These walls may be made of assumptions, of power imbalances, of long-established practice that has become invisible, of comfortable banality that has seduced us with feelings of confidence in the absence of questions and challenges. Walls can define binaries: qualified, unqualified; in, out; good, bad. They can also help us to see when we have made a change, when we look back and see that we have made the leap, that the wall is behind us.

The pandemic we have all faced can certainly be seen as a wall, a demarcation of before and after. Through this globally shared experience we have strengthened our awareness of how deeply we value relationships, of how we have taken for granted people who are doing jobs that are now recognized as essential, and of how citizens can come together to act in the interest of all. We discovered that when we pressed pause, our planet began to breathe again. What will we do now? We can see it as Malaguzzi did, as a call to leap. Will we race to re-establish the old “normal,” or blow on the embers of these fragile sensibilities to build a bonfire around which we might gather? Will we build a new road to walk on, together? Can we summon the courage to embrace uncertainty, knowing that the word “courage” comes from the French word for heart?

We have here children and adults who are looking for the pleasure of playing, working, talking, thinking and inventing things together. They are trying to get to know both each other and themselves, and to understand how the world works and how it could be made to work better and be enjoyed in friendship (Malaguzzi, 1987, p. 22).

Embracing nostalgia for the future, Malaguzzi’s words are timely. We invite educators to consider with optimism the intentions that you will be foregrounding in coming days, months, and years. What changes will become urgent? What stories will you tell of this difficult but crucial and exhilarating task of the leap over the wall, when you walk with children and families and communities to see how the world “could be made to work better and be enjoyed in friendship”? How will you respond to the provocation of Malaguzzi’s “if”?

To help illustrate the topic—With the courage to leap: Responding to crisis with ingenuity, creativity, and love—the following are guiding questions to consider in your work:

- What are you now recognizing as “the wall”? What policies and practices were taken for granted before that are now seeming to be unnecessary, or perhaps would even be impediments to building a new road to a different world? What is different? Are some words that were commonly used before standing out now, calling for reflection? What changes are you noticing among the children, colleagues, and families?

- There will always be pressures to “stay the course.” What are you doing now to ensure that “the leap” maintains momentum and to resist being pulled back by the strong magnetic force of nostalgia for the past?
• Are you rereading documentation differently, perhaps recognizing assumptions that were not evident before and that you might want to interrogate? Are you documenting with different questions in mind now? What are you noticing about your noticing?

• As the context of teaching and learning shifted during the pandemic, how have experiences and encounters been designed, organized, and planned? What processes have been helpful?

• How has the climate of uncertainty challenged and informed beliefs and practices during this time?

• How have you considered the principles of the Reggio Emilia Approach in your work moving forward? How are the principles of the Reggio Emilia Approach guiding your work? Are you seeing the principles in new ways?

• How have the relationships and participation of the families, educators, and children evolved during and after the pandemic?

• How have you supported dialogue, exchanges, and collaboration with children and adults during the pandemic? What are some examples of experiences used to foster relationships among the participants in the learning process?

• What ways has the role of teacher as researcher supported, listened to, and documented the creative processes of children?

Proposals for Manuscripts

As in the past, we are asking authors to submit a proposal describing the context, focus, and key elements of the experience that will be more fully discussed and analyzed in their manuscript. Interested educators must submit a proposal to Thresa Grove (thresa@reggioalliance.org) by October 5, 2020. Those submitting will receive responses regarding the status of their proposal by November 20, 2020.

Proposals must include:

• A statement regarding whether the manuscript has been submitted or published elsewhere – previously published manuscripts will not be accepted.

• Title and summary (1-2 pages), which includes information about the author(s); the school, university, or center; and the community that is the context of the manuscript.

• A list of selected references in APA Style (7th edition). Reference list should include works by Reggio Emilia educators that will be used for analysis and writing of the manuscript.

• We are seeking representation from a variety of contexts, a broad range of ages of children, and multiple perspectives of people who come into and who are part of the children’s world.
Guidelines and Requirements for Submitted Manuscripts

Authors of accepted proposals must submit their manuscript by January 15, 2021. We ask you to submit a manuscript that includes information detailed in the proposal (see above) as well as the following additional elements:

- A discussion of how the Reggio Emilia Approach informed the author(s) “leap over the wall” during this unprecedented time.

- A discussion of the major points, questions, theories, and interpretations that were generated through the collaborative exchange of perspectives between teachers, children, and families?

- Questions that the author(s) are considering as they plan for the future in the weeks, months, and years ahead.

- An analysis of the authors’ professional learning and development.

Additionally, please follow the manuscript formatting guidelines:

- Write in an informal, conversational style rather than in an academic style, characteristic of university term papers. Manuscripts written in active voice rather than passive voice are preferred.

- Submit unformatted, double-spaced manuscript in an electronic Word file in 12-point type. A typical manuscript length is 3,000–4,000 words.

- Include the name of the author(s) as well as title, affiliation, and history of interest in the Reggio Emilia Approach. In addition, each author is asked to submit a thumbnail photograph (head and shoulders, 1.25” wide x 1.5” high, 300 dpi in original JPG or TIF file).

- Photographs should be submitted in high-resolution images (8”x10”, 100% @ 300 dpi in original JPG or TIF file). Drawings/representations should also be submitted electronically in JPG or TIF files. Authors must submit written permission for all photographs from parents or legal guardians. The NAREA Photographic Release form is available upon request.

- Provide accurate and complete information for references and resources formatted in APA Style (7th edition).

Peer-Review Process

Further details will be posted on the Peer-Review Process page of the NAREA website.

REFERENCES


Resources

Organizations

**NAREA**
North American Reggio Emilia Alliance
narea@reggioalliance.org
www.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 NAREA
770.552.0179
narea@reggioalliance.org
www.store.reggioalliance.org

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

**International Professional Development Initiatives in Reggio Emilia, Italy**
To be announced.

Innovations

*Innovations* has an open call policy for article submissions for the Spring, Summer, and Winter issues annually. For information on the annual peer-reviewed issue published in Fall, please see the NAREA website.

Contact: Thresa Grove
thresa@reggioalliance.org
www.reggioalliance.org

**NAREA Brick by Brick Series**
To be announced.

**NAREA Consulting**
NAREA offers consultation services to schools and educators who are interested in further developing their understanding of the Reggio Emilia Approach through exchange and research together. NAREA is dedicated to an elevated image of early childhood education seen as a profession committed to understanding children and education through research and innovation.

Whether you are new to this way of teaching and interested in learning about the fundamental values of the Reggio Emilia Approach; or you have been studying this approach and are interested in a more specific focus of learning, the NAREA consulting team will listen carefully to your wishes and interests in order to design a personalized consultation tailored to your individual context.

Consultation may occur in-person, virtually, or a combination of the two. There is limited availability for in-person consultation, especially during this COVID-19 period of time. There are distance learning possibilities where live meetings can take place accompanied by readings, videos, and discussion/reflection.

The cost for these services is individually determined by the NAREA office and you can contact narea@reggioalliance.org for more information.
NAREA Professional Development

Discount for NAREA members

The First NAREA Fall Conference - Livestream
Further information to be announced
Save the dates:
November 13-15, 2020
Speakers: Representatives from Reggio Emilia

NAREA & Reggio Children Resources

NAREA is the official distributor of Reggio Children resources for the United States, and will perform this activity along with other collaborations between NAREA and Reggio Children within the International Network framework. These collaborations include organizing conferences and seminars with participants from Reggio Emilia, Italy, and "The Wonder of Learning - The Hundred Languages of Children" and "Mosaic of Marks, Words, Material" exhibit projects.

**Charter of Services of the Municipal Infant-toddler Centres and Preschools**
Through the combined efforts of Istituzione, Reggio Children, and NAREA, we bring you a resource from Reggio Emilia: the English translation of the Charter of Services of the Municipal Infant-toddler Centres and Preschools. This book is given to every family as they begin in the infant-toddler centers or preschools to qualify the public services. Included are descriptions of how a school day is organized, the culture of the atelier, the way the kitchens work, and the priority access for the children with special rights, for example.

Cost: $15 + S/H

**Bordercrossings**
In digital environments, as with all educational contexts in Reggio Emilia’s municipal infant-toddler centers and preschools, children act as authors and constructors of their own knowledge, and of their own individual and collective imaginaries, disproving the idea of anaesthetising technology at the center of attention, and making visible a different amplificatory and generative idea. This catalogue recounts an exhibition, “Bordercrossings – Encounters with Living Things / Digital Landscapes,” which has gathered and exhibits projects realized in Reggio Emilia’s municipal infant-toddler centers and preschools: nature close-up, seen and investigated by the senses, theories, and actions of today’s children, and by analogical and digital equipment connected.

Cost: $52 + S/H

**Mosaic of Marks, Words, Material**
This catalogue presents the exhibition “Mosaic of Marks, Words, Material,” a collection of works by children of the municipal infant-toddler centers and preschools of Reggio Emilia. Drawing and telling stories means imagining, analyzing, and exploring spaces, forms, colors, words, metaphors, emotions, rhythms, and pauses, entering into a narrative dimension that is both internal and external to the self, playing on reality, fiction, and interpretation. Though drawing and words are autonomous languages, for the children words and stories, silent or spoken, almost always go hand in hand or intertwine with the drawing, creating an intelligent and often poetic mosaic.

Cost: $40 + S/H

If you are interested in purchasing these resources, please visit the shop section of the NAREA website: [www.store.reggioalliance.org](http://www.store.reggioalliance.org)
Infants and children in all places in the world cannot continue to have rights only on paper; the right to have good parents, good housing, good food, good schools, good teachers, and good government is what they ask for and what is urgently needed. If we adults will keep in mind that the children are always the holders of new possibilities and perspectives—and not only in the field of learning and of knowledge—perhaps we will not carelessly dissipate, with guilty nonchalance, the good that they, along with we, possess.

– Loris Malaguzzi, Innovations, vol. 1, no. 1, Fall 1992