

PERSPECTIVES ON NAREA

The 10th NAREA Winter Conference

Ensuring All Children's Rights to Education Based in Relationship and The Hundred Languages

by the NAREA Conference Team

Since our first conference in 2005, NAREA, in collaboration with Reggio Children and local host communities, has built up a legacy of people and places that have participated in the ongoing effort to advance a new ideal in early childhood education. This requires rigor on the part of all invested in honoring children's rights. Against a backdrop of a hardening world, we seek to find points of contact and harmony to move Reggio Emilia's message forward.

Time and time again, we are renewed by the effort, community connections, and passion that we find in conference host communities—24 different communities to date. These North American communities tangibly express the wisdom that comes from knowing the critical importance of connecting, innovating, widening and strengthening relationships, and maintaining an ongoing dialogue of different points of view. Children's rights are made real not by one person, one school, one discipline, or one community. Children's rights are made real through a participating cross-section of an inter-connected society.

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Marina Castagnetti, Jane McCall, and Nunzia Franzese



Holding the 10th NAREA Winter Conference in Madison, Wisconsin, was a concrete way of responding to the desire of educators to continue designing new ways of working and living together with children and families. Here, we find inspiration and connection with the collegiality and determination of colleagues from Reggio Emilia, Italy.

Madison, with its strong emphasis on the arts, history, and design (the birthplace of famed architect, Frank Lloyd Wright), combined with the state motto, "Forward," reflects a particular identity. In connection with hosting "The Wonder of Learning—The Hundred Languages of Children exhibit," the theme, "Ensuring All Children's Rights to Education Based in Relationship and The Hundred Languages," was a natural fit in Madison.

The Wisconsin Historical Society Auditorium, on the campus of The University of Wisconsin, served as a place of opportunities: to share, exchange, dialogue, and think together.

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Ann Gadzikowski



NAREA board members Barbara Acton, Margie Cooper, David Fernie, Brenda Fyfe, Jeanne Goldhaber, and Susan Redmond, gave a warm welcome to the attendees and speakers, as they opened the conference. Ann Gadzikowski, director of Preschool of the Arts and member of the local host committee, continued the greeting and thanked those who worked so hard to make the conference come to fruition, including the venues where the exhibit is displayed, Madison Public Library and Overture Center of the Arts. With a feeling of solidarity, we came together, educators; members of community organizations; NAREA board members and staff; and speakers from Reggio Emilia, to dive deeply into the theories and practices in Reggio Emilia and within our own contexts.

Marina Castagnetti, from her many years working as a teacher in the Diana school and later in the Documentation and Educational Research Center of the Preschools and Infant-toddler Centers - *Istituzione* of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia, shared the history, values, and theories of the storied education project of Reggio Emilia. Marina began by looking back to 1860 and the contributions of Ferrante Aperti and Friedrich Froebel, continued through the Second World War, liberation, the “brick by brick” building of Villa Cella, the mobilization and emancipation of women in Italy, and the birth of preschools and infant-toddler centers as municipal services. It is a history of evolution, founded by those with a shared vision for education working in collaboration. Through additional presentations during the conference, Marina elaborated on the values of the educational project by sharing examples from the children, families, and educators—including Loris Malaguzzi, collegial founder of Reggio Emilia’s approach.

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Nunzia Franzese, pedagoga for Reggio Children, contributed presentations based on values and theories of Reggio Emilia’s educational project, including discussions of contexts within the infant-toddler centers and preschools and children’s learning processes. Nunzia shared, through images and narratives, examples of children’s and adults’ work where creativity is seen as a universal quality of the learning process. Speaking of schools as places of life, Nunzia captured the attention of the group as she talked about designing spaces and work in a process of circularity.

We think of our schools as places of life that elaborate a living culture—not just children’s culture but a culture of all the subjectivities. A place where different professional profiles come together, a place of parents, and where the community around the school has a relationship with the school.

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Marina and Nunzia continued in the spirit of exchange, building a structure to think together each day after the presentations. Questions and comments were collected both orally and in written form. It was a comfortable way to encourage participants to ask questions without constraints. Sometimes, questions were answered directly; sometimes, questions required more consideration and responses were deftly woven into the presentations of the following days. This style of being together mirrored an attitude that is reflected in Nunzia’s words,

We must tear teachers from the solitude that deforms them because this is an image that the old pedagogy gave us.... We must take this old idea and introduce it into a new construct, into a way of working which introduces exchanges, bringing together different points of view.

During announcements each day, an effort was made to highlight organizations and people who made a commitment to be in professional development in Madison. Kinderberry Hill Child Development was the first to register for the conference and received a complimentary registration to a future NAREA conference. Butler University brought the largest group from one organization with



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ten participants. To recognize the importance of collegial learning, NAREA recognized their commitment with two complimentary registrations to a future NAREA conference. Honorable mention went to Grand Rapids Early Discovery Center and Google Children's Center, each with groups of eight educators.

It was inspiring to be with educators who worked together on a daily basis and who invested in study and learning in a reciprocal and shared manner. Keeping with tradition, NAREA gifted a few books to participants as a way of giving value to study beyond con-



the process of building relationships through exchange, dialogue, and thinking together. It was not unusual to run into conference attendees at the exhibit after the conference had ended for the day. This illustrated the strong pull of the exhibit and the commitment of conference participants to engage with its messages.

It is with sincere appreciation that we thank our colleagues from Reggio Emilia, Italy, Marina Castagnetti, Nunzia Franzese, and Jane McCall who shared three days with us in professional exchange. It was delightful to work with Preschool of the Arts, Madison Public Library, and Overture Center for the Arts, and we are grateful for their generous contributions to the 10th NAREA Winter Conference. We extend our appreciation to the children, families, and educators of Preschool of the Arts for giving shape to this conference. We are encouraged and motivated by all the educators who, from various contexts, work to ensure all children's rights to education based in the highest ideals and knowledge are granted.

ference attendance. Marina Castagnetti, one of the authors of "Journey into the Rights of Children," was happy to personally present the book to Kellie Estevas from Indianapolis, Indiana, whose name was drawn from all those registered. We hope these books will serve as important touchstones for the teachers and increase awareness of the tremendous educational value in materials published by Reggio Children.

Participants eagerly greeted the sunshine each afternoon as they left the Wisconsin Historical Society Auditorium for breakout opportunities including: visits to "The Wonder of Learning-The Hundred Languages of Children" exhibit, small group discussions, school tour to Preschool of the Arts, and local cultural encounters. It was a time to digest and reflect upon the theories and practices discussed during the mornings and to continue



Our hope is that the time spent at Wisconsin Historical Society, engaged in the ongoing study of the Reggio Emilia educational project, thinking and learning together, will serve to support all who attended and that each participant will continue to progress in their efforts to give concrete reality to the rights of children. With Wisconsin's motto "Forward" coming to mind, we feel Nunzia's words offer us a way to continue the journey in that direction.

Educating adults really needs to concretely offer opportunities. . . curious adults for curious children, capable of feeling wonder when confronted with the wonder of children, a sense of wonder and marvel. If adults are capable of feeling it, it can transform our ways of being with children in the daily life.



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