

# Call for Proposals

Fall 2024 Peer-Reviewed Issue

## TOPIC: THE RECIPROCITY OF PRACTICE AND THEORY

### BACKGROUND

In an interview for *Innovations*, Baji Rankin recounted her encounters with Loris Malaguzzi during her residence in the schools of Reggio Emilia in the 1980s. She shared her growing appreciation of the complex and reciprocal relationship between theory and practice as explained by Malaguzzi:

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. (Rankin & Yu, 2020, p. 20)

The relationship between theory and practice is not a one-way street where theory only influences practice and not a binary where one is regarded as superior to the other (MacNaughton, 2005). The book *Shoe and Meter* (Castagnetti & Vecchi, 1997) offers an excellent example of the interplay between theory/practice and practice/theory among both the teachers and children where both are researchers as they respond to a carpenter's question:

In the story told here, the children are confronted with a real-life situation: the school needs another work table, one that will be identical to the others, the same size and same shape. So what can we do? The children suggest that we call in a carpenter and ask him to build us the table. But how can we show him what we want? The carpenter says: "Give me all the measurements and I'll make you the table." The children agree to give him all the necessary measurements. But the carpenter immediately puts them on guard by asking: "Do you know how to measure?" (p. 16)

As the story continues, the children are faced with a real-life situation, and the educators recognize that this is an opportunity for investigation, that begins from a problem that the children own. For the educators, it is an ideal situation for examining the meaningful ways the children develop their own theories and approaches to the problem (Castagnetti & Vecchi, 1997). They are patient in the process, allowing the children to think, act, and find ideas or revise ideas. The educators enter the research with the children by listening, exchanging in the dialogue, and reflecting on the meaning. They understand that the children must explore different ways to measure and come to an understanding about measurement. The teachers are careful to provide opportunities for the children to observe their inconsistencies when a unit of measurement is not consistent (Platas, 2017). Rinaldi (2021) asserts,

Very often the theories and understandings expressed by the child are defined as 'misunderstandings' or 'naïve theories', and as such not deserving to be listened to or of respect. This places the child on an inferior level, defines him as 'imperfect', his contribution not considered significant. By contrast, we know very well what it means to feel that you are the child's travelling companion in this search for meaning. The meanings that children produce, the explanatory theories they develop in an attempt to give answers are of the utmost importance. They strongly reveal the ways in which children perceive, question and interpret reality and their relationship with it. (p. 80)

An example of the reciprocity of practice and theory is illustrated in a story of children sharing their theories about trees in *Building Relationships with Trees* (Pineda et al., 2021). Teachers were inspired by David Sobel's (2008) theories about children and nature education. In this study, teachers observed children as they initially created observational drawings of trees in a nearby park. Later, children theorized what kinds of gifts trees would appreciate. Eventually, they created gifts and took them to the trees. Rinaldi (2021) proposes, "Children are the most avid seekers of meaning and significance, and . . . they produce interpretive theories. This idea is not only the genesis of this pedagogy of relationships and listening, but also the possible genesis of a 'relational creativity'" (p. 81). The children viewed trees as capable of relationships. While this theory might be considered naïve, we have learned about trees' tremendous capability to live in a community with a sophisticated means of communicating with one another (Wohlleben, 2016). Later, teachers asked parents to share a wish they had for their child's tree, and one father poetically stated,

As a father I would like this tree to share its shadow and air with my son. I would also like that in each of its leaves it could have life advice. We as parents can give them advice but we do not know everything, and it would be very good also that Victor could tell him things that he does not want to tell me. It would help him to express his feelings (Pineda et al., 2021, p. 34).

What is remarkable about this exchange is how the parent builds upon the children's theories about the relational aspect of trees. He hopes the tree continues to be his son's friend and confidant.

Another illustration of practice to theory is reflected in a 2016–2017 research project based on the study of metaphors coordinated by Reggio Children, the Preschools and Infant-toddler Centers – *Istituzione* of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia, and the Department of Education and Human Sciences at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia. The project was enriched because of the dynamic exchange regarding the theory of metaphors between the schools and the university. Reggio educator Cagliari describes "a very important aspect of the research was precisely this bringing together of the area of theoretical research, for a greater knowledge of human beings and their processes, with that of greater educational capacities, promoting the schools and adults that work with children in some way" (Bendotti & DePoi, 2018, p. 5). The research culminated in the exhibition *A Festive Thought*. Contini further describes the findings,

Here, giving value to the research attitude present in children has generated a context where children have produced metaphors, creative "new" metaphors, like the one where, in the words of an infant-toddler centre girl, workers coming to prune the trees are defined as "tree hairdressers". Our research project indicates that formulating metaphors as a learning process is innately part of children. (p. 7)

For this call, we seek exchanges that illustrate the recursive relationship of theory into practice and practice into theory. For some early childhood programs, engaging with theories is an opportunity to connect with others through formal and informal networks of educators by sharing an interest in building understandings together. Seeking different perspectives from different fields of knowledge—such as ecologists or carpenters—are opportunities to connect with others in the community. Additionally, engagements between children, educators, and faculty members from post-secondary education are opportunities to investigate the relationship between theory and practice.

This peer-review call explores what Baji Rankin (2020) describes as "back and forth and forth and back" encounters with theory and practice (p. 20). In the proposal, the authors should include clear examples of the meaning of the relationship between theory—practice—theory. In addition, the authors should include citations from references to support their discussion of the relationship between theory and practice.

### **Prospective authors should consider the following guiding questions in their submissions:**

- For your context, what is the meaning of theory and its relationship to practice? How do children's theories influence practice?
- How do you as an educator enter into dialogue with children and other adults to reflect on your practice and its relationship to building theories together?
- How do children and educators engage with theories with colleagues and/or with others who represent different fields of knowledge, and how do they benefit from multiple perspectives?

### **When we think of telling stories, we invite you to consider these guidelines:**

- Compelling stories have some sort of transformation over the course of the story. What changed you and why? Often stories hinge on a decision where you decided to do or not to do something.
- How can you describe this experience so that the reader feels as though they are going through it with you?
- Think back to moments in your work that transformed you in some way. Why were they important to you? Spending time reflecting, by yourself and with others, may help you see the flow of your story.

## **SUBMISSION GUIDELINES FOR PROPOSAL**

Interested authors must submit a proposal for their manuscript to Nora Thompson by **November 1, 2023**: [nora@reggioalliance.org](mailto:nora@reggioalliance.org). Those submitting will receive responses regarding approval by late December.

### **Proposals must include:**

- the intentions for the manuscript (1–2 pages or approximately 1000 words);
- a list of the images (photographs and children's graphic representations) that will support the manuscript;
- information about the authors and school, university, or center and community that is the context of the manuscript;
- a statement regarding whether the manuscript has been submitted or published elsewhere;
- a list of a minimum of four references that will be used to support the manuscript. This should include publications from Reggio Emilia educators and/or educators inspired by the Reggio Emilia Approach.

## **NAREA WEBSITE**

Authors will find more information about manuscript guidelines, the review process, and potential references on the [NAREA website](#).

## **REFERENCES**

Bendotti, M., & De Poi, S. (2018). Behind metaphor: A conversation with Paola Cagliari, Annamaria Contini, and Veà Vecchi. *Rechild*, 3–11.

Castagnetti, M., & Vecchi, V. (1997). *Shoe and meter: Children and measurement*. Reggio Children.

MacNaughton, G. (2005). *Doing Foucault in early childhood studies: Applying poststructural ideas*. Routledge.

Pineda, A., Rodriguez, S., & Magana, C. (2021). Building relationships with trees. *Innovations in Early Education: The International Reggio Emilia Exchange*, 28(1), 33–34.

Platas, L. M. (2017). Three for one: Supporting social, emotional, and mathematical development. *Young Children*, 72(1), 33–37. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/90001482>

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- Rinaldi, C. (2021). *In dialogue with Reggio Emilia: Listening, researching and learning*. Routledge.
- Sobel, D. (2008). *Childhood and nature: Design principles for educators*. Stenhouse Publishers.
- Wohlleben, P. (2016). *The hidden life of trees: What they feel, how they communicate—Discoveries from a secret world* (Vol. 1). Greystone Books.

**NOTE:**

1. Previously published manuscripts will not be accepted
2. More than one proposal from the same author group will not be accepted

Please contact Nora for further information: [nora@reggioalliance.org](mailto:nora@reggioalliance.org)  
Or visit the NAREA website at: [www.reggioalliance.org/resources/innovations/](http://www.reggioalliance.org/resources/innovations/)

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