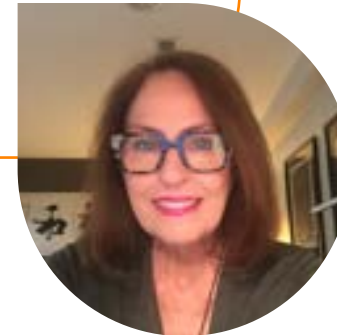


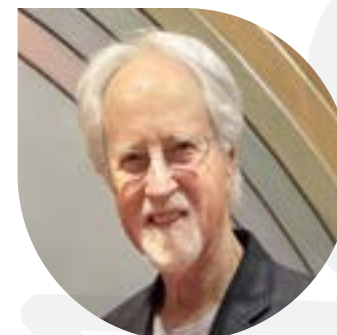
Tributes to Lella Gandini



B R E N D A
F Y F E

NAREA board member and
Webster University School
of Education dean and
professor emerita
Missouri

I was fortunate to meet Lella back in 1991 when she accepted my invitation to be a speaker for the grand opening of *The Hundred Languages of Children* exhibition in St. Louis at Webster University. This was a turning point for St. Louis early educators who were introduced to the Reggio Emilia Approach. Lella was the perfect spokesperson as she epitomized and communicated the essence of the Reggio philosophy while exuding warmth, energy, creativity, playfulness, and a desire to both share and learn from all of us. Over the next 30 years, I continued to marvel at Lella's ability to connect, to build relationships of trust and respect, to demonstrate her great intellect, and to convey her deep knowledge of the Reggio Emilia Approach. These attributes were paired with a lovely and loving sense of humor. I will always cherish the opportunities I had to collaborate with her when she returned to St. Louis to consult and speak, when we co-presented at conferences, and later served together on the NAREA board for several years. I will miss her kindness, gracious presence, and insights into the learning processes of children and adults. She left an indelible mark on me as a person and professional, and I know she did the same for so many others.



G E O R G E E .
F O R M A N

University of Massachusetts,
Amherst emeritus professor
Massachusetts

How I know Lella

- She was a graduate of our doctoral program in child development at the University of Massachusetts.
- She was a co-editor with Carolyn Edwards and myself on three editions of *The Hundred Languages of Children*.
- She was my partner in making video documentaries on long-term projects in the preprimary schools in Reggio Emilia.
- She was a co-presenter in workshops and at domestic and international conferences.

How I will remember Lella

- As the master liaison between teachers in Italy and the United States.
- As our gentle guide as we navigated the deeper meanings of our projects.
- But most of all, I will remember Lella with Lester, who calls her *Gandini*. The sweetness between these two was palpable and catching. At dinners with Marion and me, at their home on Washington Avenue and elsewhere, I am thankful to have been witness to and moved by their enduring love. May it live on... in all of our hearts.

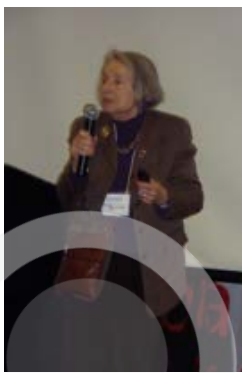


KAREN
HAIGH

Early childhood education consultant, former program director for Chicago Commons, and associate professor of early childhood education at Columbia College, Chicago Illinois

IMAGE CREDITS
Karen Haigh

Lella frequently worked with Chicago area early education programs, sometimes alongside Amelia Gambetti. She offered consultations and/or presentations while visiting the programs at least 14 times from 1994 to 2016. Some of the programs with which she consulted or shared presentations were Chicago Commons Association, the Chicago Public Schools (CPS), Columbia College Chicago, Crossroads for Learning, Governors State University, and the Winnetka Public Schools.



I remember years ago saying how Lella was a bridge—a bridge that connected the Reggio Emilia Approach with the varied U.S. approaches, the Italian culture with the U.S. culture, theory with practice, historical practices with current practices, children’s learning with adult learning, educators that served very different socio-economic communities learning with and from each other.

Lella valued the word *with*. She believed strongly in the importance of sharing with each other so we could learn with and from each other. Additionally, she encouraged people to connect with each other while valuing each and every voice.

I recall at Lella’s celebration of life, one of her sons spoke of her unique ability to make do with what she had. While working at Chicago Commons, I realized the value of educators’ learning to organize, prepare, and share presentations of their learning with children. I said to Lella that this had become such a valuable learning experience, but there weren’t enough places to do presentations. She suggested that teachers present to each other. As a result, teachers began to present at our agency workshops, in-service sessions, and parent meetings. Thanks to Lella, we realized there were enough opportunities for educators to present within our own agency.



Lastly, I want to share a story of Lella’s allegiance. Chicago Commons had, for the first time, planned and prepared a 2 1/2 day conference to share our experiences with Reggio-influenced learning in our context. Lella, a couple of visiting educators, and I were talking after the short, initial evening session was done. These educators began criticizing the conference, making various remarks about what was missing or what else should have been done. Suddenly, Lella said she was tired and was going to retire. When I saw her the next morning and asked about her sudden departure, she said she was so mad she had to leave when the visiting educators were criticizing the conference. She said this was just the beginning of the conference, and she wondered how these participants could go on like they did when there was so much more to see, experience, and reflect upon. This experience of Lella being clearly angry with these critics made me think about and appreciate her allegiance. Lella made you feel that she was on your side, no matter what! That is a strong motivational force.

Chicago area children, educators, and parents and families have been fortunate to have been supported by, inspired by, and motivated to learn from and with Lella Gandini.

- [1] Karen and Lella with Eva Tarini and Lynn White, Winnetka Public Schools
- [2] Lella with Dan Scheinfeld, Erikson Institute, Lester Little, Lella’s husband/Smith College, and Jane Cecil, Chicago Commons
- [3] Lella and Vanessa Rich, Chicago Department of Human Services, at *The Wonder of Learning* exhibition
- [4] Lella and Karen preparing slides for presentation
- [5] Lella and Karen at Chicago Commons in-service



MARY
BETH
RADKE

Retired early child-
hood educator
Massachusetts

IMAGE CREDITS
Mary Beth Radke

Several years ago, I accompanied Lella to a large urban preschool. She was to give a workshop there, and I had a small part, too—probably something about my collaboration teaching with Amelia Gambetti at the University of Massachusetts Lab Preschool.

Before the workshop, the director took us on a tour of the school which ended at circle time. The director introduced Lella to the children by saying, “Boys and girls, I’d like you to meet Dr. Gandini. She is the liaison for the dissemination of information for the schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy to North America.” Of course, the children just stared blankly at what was, to them, a long string of meaningless words. But Lella looked right at each of them and said something brilliant. She said, “Hello, boys and girls. I am a grandmother.”

At the end, when the children stood to go to their next activity, three or four of them walked directly to Lella. One little boy said, “Will you tie my shoe?” Another little girl held onto Lella’s sweater and sucked her thumb, and others seemed to just want to be near her.

I think you understand where I’m going with this. Lella had many gifts but was especially gifted at making and fostering meaningful connections, whether it was with 4-year-old children from the inner city or dignitaries at a conference. And for her, this wasn’t an intellectual exercise. She *truly* believed in the potential of every person to connect, to learn, and to offer something meaningful and valuable.

I genuinely miss being in the light of her incredibly special attention, but I also remember that she wasn’t sentimental in any of this. If she were here today, I believe she would declare, “*Coraggio!*” (Courage!) and would challenge me and us all, quite directly, to carry on being that light for children and for each other.



Lella at Rocky Hill Greenway



CATHY
WEISMAN
TOPAL

Research associate and
lecturer, Smith College
Massachusetts

IMAGE CREDITS
Cathy Weisman Topal

Two stories from my work with Lella begin to capture the essence of Lella’s way of working and speak to the heart of the Reggio Emilia Approach.

I met Lella in the 3-year-old classroom at Fort Hill (the lab school at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts), where I was a visual arts teacher and Lella was doing research for her master’s degree.

Lella and I decided to explore natural materials with the 3-year-old children. Along with the children, we collected materials from the grounds and the trees around the school. It was the first exploration we were going to do together. The next day, I was laying out twigs, tree bark, seed pods, and leaves on a low table. Lella came into the room, observed for a few moments, and then came up and whispered in my ear, “Don’t say anything.”

Her words made me realize how much I talk! I found that by stepping back, I was better able to pay close attention to what the children were doing. I was able to listen to the children’s precise words and to photograph the children’s arrangements and rearrangements, which, in turn, enabled me to reflect on and document the children’s work.

Many years later, Lella and I began work on *Beautiful Stuff! Learning with Found Materials* (1999). Families in the 4-year-old classroom had collected discarded materials and brought their small bags of treasures to the classroom. The children spent time exploring, sorting, and telling stories with the materials. It seemed like a perfect time for puppet-making. I created structures from mat board strips and popsicle sticks which I thought the children could build upon to create a puppet. But something told me that Lella would not like what I was doing. So, I called Lella and described what I was about to do. After a long pause, she said, “Don’t you trust the children to figure out their own ways to begin?”

Even 40 years later, Lella’s words still resonate with me! I am filled with gratitude for all that I learned alongside Lella and for the laughter, delight, and beauty that we shared.



Collaborators and Friends



Lella with children, teachers, and Rita Harris at Fort Hill, 1998