

Call for Proposals

2027 Peer-Reviewed Issue

CONFRONTO AS PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE IN REGGIO-INSPIRED EDUCATION

BACKGROUND

For educators who draw inspiration from Reggio Emilia, the value placed upon collegial inquiry in the co-construction of educational experiences is often compelling; yet a disciplined form of professional dialogue called *confronto* remains largely unfamiliar to those outside the Reggio Emilia context, despite the centrality of *confronto* in the process of *progettazione*. As Giamminuti et al. (2024) describe it, “Elements of research and *progettazione* emerge from *confronto* and exchange, not as certainties, but rather as possibilities” (p. 116). In this sense, *confronto* is both genesis of and sustenance for Reggio Emilia’s educational project.

At a moment when polarization runs deep, when genuine exchange and dialogue feel increasingly fragile, when listening is not widely treasured as an essential value, *confronto* becomes a practice to hold especially dear, as it safeguards the very kinds of participation on which a flourishing democracy depends. As Rinaldi (2021) reminds us,

Listening is not easy. It requires a deep awareness and at the same time a suspension of our judgments and above all our prejudices; it requires openness to change. It demands that we have clearly in mind the value of the unknown and that we are able to overcome the sense of emptiness and precariousness that we experience whenever our certainties are questioned. (p. 39)

The desire for certainty, however compelling, diminishes our capacity to recognize the merit in others’ perspectives even as it obscures our ability to see the weaknesses in our own. In offering some assurance against these inclinations, *confronto* is a meaningful process in the perpetuation of democratic values that permeate the schools in Reggio Emilia.

While *confronto* holds incredible promise for democratic engagement, engaging in *confronto* can be marked by discomfort. Malaguzzi (as cited in Edwards et al., 2015) once said,

If conflicts don’t arise, if there are no confrontations, if there aren’t moments in which there is a losing of equilibrium, if the certainty doesn’t leave room for the uncertainty, if a child doesn’t accept the flux of insecure moments, the climbing up stops. (p. 47)

While he was speaking of the experience of children, this same sentiment applies to work among colleagues in Reggio Emilia. During the 2025 NAREA summer conference, Maddalena Tedeschi recalled a critique given by Malaguzzi when she was beginning as a pedagoga:

You have to be better capable of producing discussion and of offering and proposing discussion. And those discussions can be very heated. They may be very heated. They have to be respectful of other people’s points of view, but you have got to do better in activating the teacher’s desire for *confronto*. (M. Tedeschi, personal communication, June 25, 2025)

After recounting this memory, Tedeschi shared a further interpretation: “*Confronto* is when we look at each other and tell each other what we think of something that we’re sharing as an object of study.”

Confronto has no English equivalent that “can quite convey its cultural energy” (Giamminuti et al., 2024, p. xxiii); the term is certainly not synonymous with confrontation, a word that implies an opposition between standpoints rather than an encounter between perspectives. The practice is also irreconcilable with the edicts from above that are so familiar in many North American schools, favoring instead “on the ground” discussions among the various protagonists in an educational context. *Confronto* is not only a pedagogical technique but is also an orientation and a fundamental disposition toward genuine collaboration that is deliberately cultivated in and around schools. In *The Role of the Pedagogista in Reggio Emilia: Voices and Ideas for a Dialectic Educational Experience*, *confronto* is described as

a daily experience of practical and theoretical knowledge-sharing, dialectic exchange, and mutual support amongst educators and children. Within *confronto*, the sharing of critiques, comments, and diverse perspectives leads to reciprocal enrichment, improvements, and advancements in knowledge and actions. It is therefore a generous attitude, which refutes indifference, and has a fundamental ethical value. (Giamminuti et al., 2024, p. xxiii)

Cultivating *confronto* is neither straightforward nor uniformly comfortable. *Confronto* is about the strengthening of ideas through the meeting of different points of view. It demands a willingness to engage in substantive professional discussions that lead to generative collective knowledge and to sustain the productive tensions that such discussions generate. The significance of this distinction is underscored by a substantial body of scholarship on teacher collegiality. Hargreaves's influential work on collaborative cultures and collegiality identifies a critical divergence between forms of shared work that genuinely support professional growth and those that simulate collaboration while thwarting it in reality. While an authentic collaborative culture invites critical dialogue and reflection, contrived collegiality (whether expressed through enforced pleasantness, professional isolation, or administratively mandated cooperation) functions as a barrier to meaningful collegial inquiry; research further suggests that contrived collegiality impedes reflective practice, constrains professional development, and is associated with increased risk of work-related burnout among teachers (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990; Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018).

In a chapter entitled "Dialectical Encounters in Reggio Emilia," Strozzi (2024) offers two accounts of the practice of *confronto*, through which working groups of teachers, pedagogistas, and atelieristas share "the plurality of perspectives in the collective intelligence, collegiality, and *confronto* that nourish the system's educational culture" (p. 90). In the first of these accounts, Strozzi describes a working group at the Diana school that is reconsidering and redefining how children in a 3-year-old class and their families are welcomed in the new school year through a period that has come to be known as *accoglienza* in Reggio Emilia, which has "a meaning of acceptance and hospitality. . . . [and] presupposes openness to others, with their different ways of being and of presenting themselves" (p. 90). The focus of the working group's discussions is the classroom door, and Strozzi's description of the dialectic exchange among the working group through extensive conversations is enlivened by transcripts and photographs of the working group engaged in *confronto* around "their research zone – the door" (p. 97). As Strozzi (2024) describes it,

This is an important contribution offered . . . by the ethic of *confronto*. . . . to avoid rushing always and immediately to define the act, but instead giving it time, and giving ourselves time to reflect on concepts we consider important to explore as adults, on the meanings we intend to propose with children. This is where the heart of research lies. (p. 102)

In another story in the chapter, Strozzi describes a series of meetings among pedagogistas, atelieristas, and teachers to reflect on and discuss children's drawings of daisies. Their conversation transcripts are shared alongside the children's drawings, which "clearly illustrates how each person in the group feels legitimised to express doubts and opinions, raise issues and invite responses" (Strozzi, 2024, p. 122). While these examples of *confronto* among working groups of adults are edifying, documentation of children engaged in *confronto* vividly reveals how the practice deepens and widens ideas. A spectacular case appears in the iconic video from Reggio Emilia *An Amusement Park for Birds* (1994), as Simone and Giorgia discuss Giorgia's design for a fountain. The children struggle to communicate and, as the video's narrator describes it, "a heated discussion occurs driven by this confusion" (28:13). The atelierista Giovanni Piazza does not resolve the conflict for them but encourages their process of *confronto*. "Try to understand each other, children. Try to work it out," he urges, illustrating the teacher's role in *confronto* among children.

It is with this inspiration that the present call for proposals is situated. We ask you to consider the concept of *confronto*, how *confronto* has emerged in and influenced your practice, and what possibilities for teaching and learning are fostered through *confronto*. Towards this effort, we offer several questions that might guide your proposal:

- How do we interpret the meaning of *confronto* in our contexts? How might *confronto* look in North American practice?
- How is *confronto* essential for processes of interpretation?
- Describe the nature of productive intellectual exchange. What's the difference between an intellectual exchange that fractures a group of people and one that builds understanding among a group? What's the cost of a culture that prioritizes harmony and comfort over honest exchange in which different points of view emerge?
- During the 2025 NAREA winter conference, Pedagogista Moira Nicolosi described experiences that are "made possible through the constant exchanges of points of view. . . . *Confronto* is when we put different ideas and heads together and different points of view come together" (M. Nicolosi, personal communication, March 20, 2025). When have you been transformed, moved, changed in your thinking from an exchange and a dialogue where many perspectives collided?
- In your practice, how has the construction of learning between children and adults been made possible by the constant exchange of points of view in a process of *confronto*?

- In what ways does confronto incline participants toward understanding others before seeking to be understood?
- What would we hope to gain through an educational practice of confronto?
- How can schools support and encourage the development of a disposition for confronto among children and adults? How might the practice of confronto with families and the community create opportunities for deeper understandings and meaning making?
- What are you trying in your daily practice to cultivate and sustain a culture of confronto? What does your documentation of classroom dialogue reveal about how confronto is invited, nourished, or stifled in daily practice?

PROPOSALS FOR MANUSCRIPTS

Interested authors must submit a 500–700 word proposal for their proposed manuscript to NAREA (narea@reggioalliance.org) by **December 1, 2026**. Those submitting will receive responses regarding approval in early January. Authors must include a list of a minimum of four references that will be used to support the manuscript, written in APA reference style. This should include publications, both historical and contemporary, from Reggio Emilia educators and/or educators inspired by the Reggio Emilia Approach. Manuscript deadline is **mid-February, 2027**.

NAREA WEBSITE

Please see NAREA's website for additional proposal requirements and for a reference list with potential citations: www.reggioalliance.org/innovations.

REFERENCES

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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 the office for further information: narea@reggioalliance.org
Or visit the NAREA website at: www.reggioalliance.org/resources/innovations/

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