



# Inspiring News and Events

From the Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota

Volume 11, Issue 1 | Fall 2024

## Inside this Issue

- Editor's Introduction
- Fundamentals: *Formazione*
- Getting to Belonging, Part 3
- Playing with Music
- Reflections from Study Tour
- First Encounters with Reggio Emilia
- Loose Parts Lab Update
- Open Book Study
- Sponsorship Opportunity
- Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota Scholarships
- Calls for Participation
- North America Reggio Emilia Alliance (NAREA)
- Public Library Resources
- Job Opportunities

## Editor's Introduction

*Lani Shapiro*

Welcome to the winter edition of the Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota newsletter, which highlights continuous collaborative adult growth and development.

As humans, we map new experiences onto existing ones; we place new ideas in relation to current understandings...this is a mechanism of the mind. Using straightforward translations to understand Reggio concepts, we risk mis-understanding. Attempts at direct translation can flatten or distort the very novelty or uniqueness that we're trying to grasp.

Increasingly aware that words and concepts do not necessarily translate across contexts and mindful of the fact that "one mis-translated word can upend decades of hard fought beliefs and practices," the most recently published book, *The Role of the Pedagogista in Reggio Emilia*, retains Italian for some vocabulary that is most frequently misunderstood.

This edition of the newsletter introduces a third Fundamentals column, where we introduce and explore central principles of the Reggio Approach for people new to Reggio-inspired work. To [Image of the Child](#) and [Teacher as Researcher](#), this Fundamentals adds *formazione*, a process of life-long learning. This continuous co-construction of knowledge can be a lens through which you read this issue.

Rie Gilsdorf and Christy Spencer turn their gaze to participation and pedagogy of listening, group construction of understandings and multiple perspectives to support dialogue about racial difference in **Getting to Belonging**,

**Part Three.** Mark Sorvari gives a glimpse into music, movement and mark-making experiences with *Segni Mossi* in **Playing with Music**. In **Reflections from a Study Tour**, Melanie Lowin considers the ways she is beginning to incorporate insights from her recent study tour experience into her teaching practice. In **First Encounters with Reggio Emilia**, Patti Loftus engaged in dialogue with folks responding to their initial encounters with Reggio ideas or the study group experience in Reggio and implications for their practice. **The Loose Parts Lab Update** recaps a December event.

Regular features identify scholarship opportunities and a call for proposals and resources. Learn more about the North American Reggio Emilia Alliance (NAREA) and Reggio-inspired job postings.

As always, we are grateful for all the volunteer time and effort, seen and unseen, that goes into the work of the Network and to all of the newsletter contributors for their generosity, time and collaboration in making their thinking visible.

## Fundamentals: *Formazione*

In order to create both a pathway for people new to Reggio-inspired work and deepen our shared thinking, we offer a regular column, Fundamentals, to introduce and explore central principles of the Reggio Approach. The Reggio Approach is a complex system of thought and practice with many dynamic entry points that interact; it is not a method, program or curriculum. ([Key Principles](#))

In the United States, we typically refer to professional development as processes that occur outside of the everyday and external to the individual, such as instruction or ‘training’ via classes, certificate and degree programs and in-service workshops or conference sessions.

While teachers in Reggio Emilia *do* engage in formal activities similar to what we call professional development, they value a deeper and more daily avenue of professional learning, which they refer to as *formazione*.

*Formazione...from Malaguzzi’s perspective, is an integral part of the everyday pedagogical work, an attitude of mind, a way of thinking and being, a part of life, an inseparable element of what it means to be an educator. Valuing uncertainty and wonder and with the concept of evolution in mind, Malaguzzi would have hoped for and welcomed surprising and unexpected consequences, the creation of thought, understandings and knowledge.*

-Peter Moss, Role of the Pedagogista, p. 10

*Formazione* is used to refer to processes of continuous collegial dialogue, engaging multiple perspectives, research based on observation, interpretation and documentation, resulting in knowledge-building and professional learning. Therefore, *formazione* is from within, with others and socially co-constructed. Inquiry into the not-yet-known-possible involves continuous exchange. We never ‘arrive.’

## Getting to Belonging, Part 3: Navigating Participation and Evolving Perspectives

*Rie Gilsdorf and Christy Spencer*

Rie Algeo Gilsdorf, MS, MA, has broad experience as a principal, arts administrator, instructional coach, teacher of science and dance and parent in many settings, including the Reggio-inspired programs of Portland’s Opal School and The Blake School in Minneapolis. Rie is a past Board Co-Chair and Civic Engagement Committee Chair of the Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota and current member of its Resource Development Committee. She now provides racial equity seminars, coaching and consulting through Embody Equity ([www.EmbodyEquity.com](http://www.EmbodyEquity.com)).

Christy Spencer, MA is inspired by children’s curiosities and perspectives, and roots her practices in relationships, deep listening, designing dynamic learning environments, observation and pedagogical documentation. Christy has worked in various Reggio-inspired

contexts, including The Blake School, Boulder Journey School and the Minnesota Children's Museum. She has been a RINM Board and committee member. Current professional interests include mindfulness practices, anti-racist theory, neuroscience around empathy and children's rights.

Previously in *Getting to Belonging*, we've looked at [embracing ambiguity](#) (Part 1), dispelling ideas of developmental appropriateness, and [taking on new mindsets and practices](#) (Part 2) in order to welcome negotiated curriculum, discourse, and a view of the teacher as researcher. With these in place several other Reggio-inspired principles surface, each facilitating the next: (1) participation and pedagogy of listening and (2) group construction and multiple perspectives. These, too, are tools of designing for belonging. At the end of this article, we will highlight how these interact with each other to cultivate belonging.

### **Participation & Pedagogy of Listening**

Equal Participation is a value statement that tends to float in the aspirational realm. Negotiated curriculum can actualize *equitable* participation in the here and now by facilitating and valuing participation of all stakeholders. Kelsey Blackwell (2018) argues for creating intentional 'architectures of conversation' to disrupt unequal participation perpetuated by the dominant discourse. She views this discourse as "the water in which we all swim. No one is immune. Those values dictate who speaks, how loud, when, the words we use, what we don't say, what is ignored, who is validated and who is not." By making everyone's participation visible, a negotiated curriculum opens the possibility of a new architecture of communication.

Following the design steps [Open Mind, Open Heart and Open Will](#), the next move is *Co-creating*. When co-creating we explore the future by doing, remaining open to feedback and reflecting on what's working and not. This learn-by-doing process is also called prototyping. Reggio-inspired teaching includes a similar responsiveness between provocations and dialogue, as well as observation and documentation of the unfolding process. Engaging in the documentation process provides adults with feedback and opportunities for reflection that are necessary for co-creating. "The most 'design malpractice' happens when people are acting but not reflecting," (Montoya, 2022). Reflection is an active choice that keeps us out of habitual thought and action.

The co-creating design step requires letting go of the role of the expert with a voice of certainty. In designing for belonging, it can be tempting to try to actualize idealistic value statements in one grand gesture. In reality, change is iterative and generative. Prototyping the smallest practical ideas will produce the clearest insights to inform next steps. We never 'arrive,' instead we inhabit a state of 'perpetual beta.' Certainty is a facade distracting us from acknowledging the complexity that is a constant in every context, including race and culture.

Children operate in perpetual beta. We expect conversations and encounters to be revisited as they acquire more information or experience additional interactions. Children will grapple with misconceptions and partial knowledge as they construct a coherent understanding. Our role is to hold space for children to return again and again to scaffold their learning. As adults we also must extend ourselves the same courtesy. When caught off guard by children's expressions about race we may falter in the way we respond; however, we also have the opportunity to revisit and 'repair' those conversations with children (Haulcy, 2023). Like the learning process itself, the race conversation is iterative and generative.

In addition to their ideas, children's vocabulary is in perpetual beta. They don't yet have an adult vocabulary and we may misinterpret what they are trying to express. A pedagogy of listening grants a reflective pause to consider the child's context before responding. In practice, we must choose to listen to the words and beyond the words to the emotional content and patterns of lived experience. This allows for reflective discourse, rather than projecting adult meanings onto children's words.

### **Group Construction & Multiple Perspectives**

As adults model this deep, reflective discourse, children learn to construct meaning as a group. In a climate of group construction, children feel agency and enhance their capacity to listen and weigh ideas. The standard power dynamic of adult-as-expert is disrupted and children are more inclined to express their thinking. An

atmosphere of ‘perpetual beta’ supports divergent thinking. By contrast, environments where a singular ‘correct’ way of thinking is implied engender cynicism in children. Why express ideas when there’s only one that’s right? Current societal shifts, including shifts in public discourse about race, bring us to a place of uncertainty. In *Design for Belonging*, Susie Wise highlights the example of group construction by reflecting back to constituents that “their inquiries mattered and they were indeed participating in a civic process,” (2022).

Group construction of meaning requires us to hold and value multiple perspectives. This applies to both children and adults and is embedded in the definition of the Reggio collective design process, *progettazione*. When participants have equitable but distinct roles, a rich array of results are apt to arise, honoring their individuality within the collective. As in the [folktale of the blind people and the elephant](#), no individual perspective is complete, yet all provide important insights.

Because human systems are dynamic, we now employ the final design step of *Co-evolving*. In this step, constituents create flexible infrastructure that adapts to an ever-evolving context. This requires letting go of the voice of certainty (Scharmer, 2018a). The educators of Reggio Emilia refer to their schools as an ‘an evolving educational project.’ Their infrastructure is a set of principles that are not prescriptive, but rather promote nimbleness. As a result, the educational project of Reggio has adapted in response to societal shifts as they arise, beginning at its inception in the aftermath of World War II. Leaning on the flexible infrastructure of the Reggio principles positions us to co-evolve.

### **Belonging via Broader Consciousness**

In addition to providing a flexible infrastructure, the Reggio-inspired principles that we have outlined are cumulative. While there is benefit to practicing even a single principle, the impact is multiplied by their synergy.

Further, just as understanding each of these Reggio principles helps us navigate the complexity of the whole, understanding multiple perspectives helps us navigate the complexity of human systems and leads us to develop a broader racial consciousness. A narrow consciousness may persist in both children and adults unless we become more aware of others. Broader consciousness disrupts habitual patterns of attention, increasing the capacity to notice patterns of interaction, contribution and flow. Design thinking provides a road map to belonging: when we listen deeply to all constituents, we can be confident enough to take the small next steps to prototype inclusivity, knowing that they are not the end point. We must continue to listen and adapt, both individually and programatically. In essence, to cultivate communities of belonging for adults and children “means creating a learning environment in which the learner can step into his or her highest future potential in the context of hands-on societal challenges,” (Scharmer, 2018b).

Drawing from the Reggio and design thinking concepts we’ve discussed in Parts 1, 2 and 3, in Part 4 we will continue with the idea of ‘getting to belonging’ by focusing on practice. What might ‘getting to belonging’ look or sound like in adult conversations when talking with young children about race.

### **Resources**

Blackwell, Kelsey. (2018). “Why people of color need spaces without white people.” *The Arrow Journal*.  
<https://arrow-journal.org/why-people-of-color-need-spaces-without-white-people/>

Haulcy, Diane. (2023). “White Parents Navigating Anti-Racist Parenting in Minneapolis.” *Early Risers Podcast*.  
<https://www.mpr.org/episodes/2023/03/22/white-parents-navigating-antiracist-parenting-in-minneapolis>  
Accessed 8/17/23.

Montoya, Louie, quoted in Andrea Small and Kelly Schmutte. (2022). *Navigating Ambiguity: Creating Opportunity in a World of Unknowns*. Stanford d.school guide. Ten Speed Press.

Scharmer, Otto. (2018a). *The Essentials of Theory U: Core Principles and Applications*. BK, Berrett-Koehler

Publishers, Inc., a BK Business Book.

Scharmer, Otto. (2018b). "Education is the kindling of a flame: How to reinvent the 21st-century university." *Huff Post*,  
[https://www.huffpost.com/entry/education-is-the-kindling-of-a-flame-how-to-reinvent\\_b\\_5a4ffec5e4b0ee59d41c0a9f](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/education-is-the-kindling-of-a-flame-how-to-reinvent_b_5a4ffec5e4b0ee59d41c0a9f) Accessed 8/17/23

Wise, Susie. (2022). *Design for Belonging: How to Build Inclusion and Collaboration in Your Communities*. Stanford d.school guide. Ten Speed Press.

## Movement, Music and Representation

*Mark Sorvari*

Professional musician, performer, teacher, and event curator, Mark Sorvari is the Director and Lead Instructor of Playing With Music, which began in 2015 as a vehicle to foster, teach and share inspiring and uplifting music and creative movement experiences for young children and their caregivers. Mark has worked in early childhood music education since 2010 and has experience working with children following the Reggio Approach and is certified in Orff-Schulwerk (music education pedagogy) and Music Together.

Seven years ago, I discovered the teaching duo *Segni Mossi*, meaning "Leave A Trace" in Italian, while researching music and creative movement in a Reggio-inspired setting. Their interdisciplinary approach prioritizes experimentation as a working method, emphasizing the creative process over the final outcome. The Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota Education Scholarship enabled me to attend the *Segni Mossi* Pink & Red training workshops in October 2023. These workshops explored the interaction between dance and graphic signs, using paper, oil pastels and the human body.

The *Segni Mossi* workshops not only provided illumination but also inspired answers to ongoing questions within a Reggio-inspired context. How can educators facilitate cross-domain connections and interweave different competencies within the Hundred Languages? What learning environments stimulate critical thinking and aesthetic feeling simultaneously? How can we advance Malaguzzi's vision for ateliers to embrace innovation beyond the original visual art template, specifically incorporating music/sound, movement/dance, drama, and poetry? Is the atelier a technique rather than a physical space? If teachers are to become co-creators and co-learners alongside students, is expertise in the Hundred Languages essential or does the lack of expertise open up possibilities brimming with critical thought, creativity, collaboration and communication?

*Segni Mossi*'s playful approach challenges participants to engage in art within a social setting, stimulating critical thinking and aesthetic feelings simultaneously. The workshops break barriers between language, body, and line, creating a dynamic, exciting environment. Participants explore expressive qualities of body movements and signs, interweaving competencies and viewpoints. *Segni Mossi*'s goal is to "liberate the sign from representative subordination," (<https://www.segnimossi.net/en/about.html>).

In an initial proposal, we spoke our names, added corresponding body movements and transferred that movement to leave a trace with oil pastels on a large sheet of paper affixed to a wall. The transformation from name to movement to visual representation was a very powerful experience as it broke barriers between language, body and line. Additionally, we represented a chosen sign with our bodies in space, allowing it to become three-dimensional, interweaving and making connections between the different languages. Carefully curated music accompanied each experience, creating a beautiful dance and interplay between the human body, mark-making tools, paper, space and our connections to others. The whole process was playful and exciting, and it felt like a performance or a story unfolding right before my eyes.

Fellow educators, many currently working in Reggio-inspired environments, unanimously agreed that such proposals freed them from specific expectations, empowering uninhibited play with materials; no particular



expertise or skill sets were required to participate and enjoy these proposals. The environment, materials, and provocations were the basic ingredients. The excitement of watching each participant's (or group of participants') creative and cognitive interpretations unravel was added spice! The immediacy and freedom to explore was liberating as it challenged us to move out of our comfort zones.

In another captivating proposal, we embodied the concept of expansion by moving our bodies as though we were seeds sprouting from the soil. This dynamic movement was translated onto a large piece of white paper (approximately 10' x 10') on the floor. Beginning from the center with an oil pastel, each of us expanded our body outward, leaving a distinctive trace of movement on the paper. Observing each person's unique expansion and the remnants of their movements expressed through oil pastel lines, led to fascinating reflections.



During the subsequent discussion, we delved into the role of the observer within the context of the Reggio-inspired approach. It became evident that not only teachers could play this role, but observation also emerged as a crucial aspect of the experience for the children themselves. The act of observation contributed to the visual aesthetics of the proposal, creating an intricate interplay between the lines left on the paper, the body movements, and ultimately, between each individual in the experience.

As these lines organically grew across the paper, so did the connections and relationships between the participants. We forged deep bonds with each other through our interactions with expressive languages in a shared space. In this environment that encouraged freedom of expression without judgment, we found ourselves not only learning about each other but also discovering more about ourselves.

These encounters pushed me to break free from habit, emphasizing that this space was meant for testing theories, experimenting, taking risks and gaining a deeper understanding of the world. The challenges compelled me to be more adaptable and think on my feet in order to foster ever-evolving experiences for children.

Upon returning from the workshop, I began offering *Segni Mossi*-inspired proposals to children. It became evident that this approach inspired new ways to move their bodies and to have a multi-layered sensorial experience. As they danced, the squiggles and lines left on paper overlapped, creating a beautiful fusion. Children embraced the opportunity to dance their own lines, interpret each other's circle or scribble, mirroring the collaborative dance of lines on the paper.



Intriguingly, they started imagining pictures formed by the intermingled lines, giving rise to a series of captivating stories. At one early childhood center with high vaulted ceilings, where children had shown curiosity about echoes, I introduced proposals integrating body movement and mark-making as a tool to explore concepts related to sounds, vibrations and echoes, providing an enriching experience for the young learners that deepened their understanding and gave rise to new questions.

After participating in the [\*Segni Mossi\*](#) workshops, I've gained a fresh perspective on utilizing the Hundred Languages, free from hierarchical constraints or divisions. This approach allows for a fascinating dance to unfold among various expressive languages. Excited about the insights gained, I am eagerly anticipating another series of *Segni Mossi* workshops scheduled for February 2024 in New York City. I look forward to exploring additional avenues for blending and interweaving the Hundred Languages in my work.

## Reflections about Reggio Emilia

### *Melanie Lowin*

Melanie Lowin, MEd., M.A. is a Pre-Kindergarten teacher in Blake School's Early Learning Center, which opened in the fall of 2023. Along with a number of colleagues, she participated in the spring 2023 Study Tour in Reggio Emilia. Melanie also participated in the Early Childhood Education Pedagogy graduate certificate program through the University of Colorado-Denver, in partnership with Boulder Journey School.

My first professional exposure to the Reggio approach was in 2021, during Covid, when I virtually attended the Reggio Children International Study Group. Then, in the spring of 2023, I was fortunate to be part of a group of colleagues who traveled to Italy to experience Reggio firsthand and participate in a five-day Study Tour. One thing stood out above the beauty, food and architecture: Reggio Emilia is its own unique place with different geography, government, resources, constituents and community. *I know that I cannot take exactly what Reggio Emilia has created and plop it into my school.* Still, I wondered “*How do I do this at my school?*”

We're five months into the school year, and I'm energized as I work to incorporate the Reggio Emilia approach in my work with children, parents and colleagues. I'm increasingly seeing children as capable co-constructors of their learning, part of a supportive community. Instead of requiring teacher-directed activities, I'm creating more open-ended invitations and observing to see what direction the children move.

For example, I set out Legos, not expecting that the children would create an entire Lego City. They worked cooperatively with their own ideas. I listened to their ideas and convened a group where we made a plan and map. This involved using the big blocks as a platform, Lego base plates as the ‘ground’ and then adding small

blocks and wooden train tracks to expand the city. I intended to introduce maps at some point during the year, but I incorporated the Lego city experience into map-making more organically, with the work the children had begun themselves.



I am using recycled materials, as at Remida (the center for reusable materials in Reggio Emilia), to spark resourcefulness and creativity. My experiences in Reggio inspired me to consider materials as ‘languages’ where they use elements such as light, paper, sound, mark making and clay. I increasingly see the classroom as the third teacher, making sure creative supplies are at child-level and are organized in ways to engage children. While blocks and Legos are always available, other resources are changed or reorganized to continue to spark new learning.

For example, the children chose different materials for their Lego City. They created and attached paper signs providing directions. I offered small desk lamps and the children turned them into different suns and explored light and shadows across their city. Through these explorations, they created signs and played with science, social studies and 2D and 3D math concepts.



I am making learning visible as I observe, document and display children’s processes (not just the end product). I take photographs, videos and audio recordings of the children’s collaborative work. I share documentation, not only with the families, but it also is on the walls where the children can revisit their work.

I’ll continue to challenge my own learning through collaborations with fellow educators—locally, nationally and internationally. As a school community, we are gathering to share our experiences and ideas, hoping to create collaborative connections and cross-disciplinary learning for all of our children.

Just as Reggio Emilia is building an approach to education one step at a time, so too, can I build my educational practice, one step at a time.



# Reflections on First Encounters: “If the Eye Jumps Over the Wall”

*Patti Loftus*

Patti Loftus B.A., M.A., is a retired early childhood teacher whose career included twenty-eight years in the Pre-K program at Blake School (Minnesota.) She’s been interested in the Reggio approach since 1992 and has served as a RINM Board member. She’s currently a RINM Communications Committee member.

For decades, academics, artists, architects and civic leaders from around the world have participated in study tours convened by Reggio Children. How and why does the Reggio educational project resonate with such a diverse group and what inspires folks to move beyond initial interest (even infatuation) toward a deeper understanding?

## Initial Ideas

This article is a reflection on first encounters with Reggio ideas from varied perspectives. I reached out to a group of educators from Blake School who recently participated in a five-day study tour in Reggio Emilia. In addition, I contacted others who have encountered Reggio ideas, some of whom did so decades ago. A few in this second group have never participated in a study tour while others have done so multiple times.

Some have made (or hope to make) substantial changes in their work, even upending it. As one teacher described with enthusiasm, “I’m rethinking everything!” It’s as if they glimpsed another world, one that is familiar and at the same time completely different.

“If the Eye Jumps Over the Wall” was the original title of the first Hundred Languages exhibit. Sergio Spaggiari, former Director of the Istituzione Scuole e Nidi d' Infanzia Municipality of Reggio Emilia, said, *“It is important to acquire the skill of going over walls, going beyond boundaries, seeing limits and passing through them...To be able to go over the wall means you can topple cultural paradigms that seem fixed. It means you can turn things on their head. It means you can start with fresh eyes.”*

The Reggio educational philosophy is both appealing and challenging. In part, it is appealing because the city itself offers a beautiful backdrop to uniquely designed and organized schools. Teachers, *pedagogistas* and *atelieristas* work with children to offer unusual materials and surprising experiences to prompt unexpected subjects for study. One recent visitor noticed that “in the midst of a garden, the children focused on three invasive weeds growing out of the sidewalk,” which led to extended project work.

Reggio is also challenging, because the educational project is multi-faceted and inseparably woven into the city’s historical, civic and cultural context. While the Reggiani share their stories through publications and conferences, they resist marketing their approach as a curriculum. They do not promote their approach as the only way to work with children, instead they invite visitors to enter into a dialogue about values, theory and practice, a conversation that is now over 70 years old.

The existence of this newsletter and the twenty-six-year-old [Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota](#) (RINM) is evidence of the impact of Reggio in and around Minnesota. For years, numerous Minnesotans, and others who identify with the Network, have been encountering Reggio ideas primarily through local experiences, not study tours.

## Responses and Perspectives

The first exposure to Reggio ideas for the people I contacted for this article included:

- hearing about Reggio from a colleague;
- happening upon a magazine article;
- wandering into a session at a national conference;
- visiting the classroom of a Reggio-inspired teacher;

hearing Loris Malaguzzi's classic poem "The Hundred Languages;"  
visiting one of Reggio Children's traveling exhibits;  
reading a book from Reggio;  
being the parent of a child in a Reggio-inspired program;  
participating in a parenting class with a Reggio-inspired teacher;  
viewing documentation of children's work;  
seeing photographs of the environments or of children working with materials.

There were many on-ramps.

When I asked folks about their first responses to Reggio ideas, they easily recalled the occasion—"amazed," "gobsmacked," "overwhelmed," "struck," "wonder and delight." It's not surprising that first reactions are to what's visible—the layout of the schools, the aesthetic environments, the unique materials and experiences presented to the children and the documented work of the children that makes their thinking visible. Some people noticed aspects that lie below the surface, for example, how key principles intertwine to connect and support thinking processes. "The level of deep and serious thinking that I encountered from the Italian educators about how to create schools that truly respect and support young children was like nothing I had ever experienced before."

Those who participated in a study tour looked for and posed questions that emerged from their frames of reference: a musician looked for evidence of music in the schools; a tech specialist noticed their technology equipment and the ways in which it was being used; a teacher observed the multicultural nature of the population and wondered how the schools respond in culturally responsive ways; an art specialist responded with some relief that they do some skill instruction in Reggio, for example in teaching children how to attach pieces of clay. (This refuted the notion she'd had that everything in Reggio involved unhindered exploration of materials.) Another participant reflected, "I was most struck by its beginnings as a female-led anti-fascist movement and its commitment to equity and democratic advocacy."

Each of us approach Reggio ideas with personal and particular curiosities. We come from varied contexts and, whether we're aware of it or not, have frames of reference that affect what we notice and remember. Even when we acknowledge those perspectives, this awareness can be fleeting. If priorities in our teaching practice involve, for instance, behavior management or assessment, we may not realize the ways these preoccupations influence what we notice about Reggio and, without intention, what we may miss. Again, in Malaguzzi's words: *"To be able to go over the wall means you can topple cultural paradigms that seem fixed. It means you can turn things on their head. It means you can start with fresh eyes."*

Peter Moss writes about the larger educational concerns that are typical of leaders in the U.S. and U.K.: Does it work? Is it evidence-based? How much will it cost? How can we take it to scale? Moss notes that Reggio educators ask: Where does this lead? How can we build on this? What does this experience tell us about the children and their thinking? How does this connect with our stated values? What other perspectives might be helpful?

### **What Followed**

Following their initial experiences with Reggio, folks consistently expressed their desire to talk with colleagues, to experiment with new materials and approaches, re-think their practice and examine the values behind that practice. They talked about incorporating Reggio ideas in their relationships with parents and the larger community.

As they reflected on their encounters with Reggio, they asked:

What are our (school's) values for education?

How does the environment reflect those values?  
What are the fundamental ideas and how can I use these ideas?  
What can we do, what can we change?  
How can we slow down to do richer work?  
What is the central nature of the role of the atelierista?  
What languages are we allowing children to communicate in?  
What is the role of documentation for my school? What does it look like every day and who is doing it? What's the objective in documentation – for the teachers? parents? broader audience?

In contrast to the notion that one must change their internal beliefs before their teaching practice will change, the opposite is also possible. Making a small change in teaching and *then reflecting on* it may lead to a significant shift in thinking.

### **The Network as a support**

All of the participants who shared their first encounters with Reggio acknowledged that the Reggio schools are *only* in Reggio Emilia. They realized that creating beautiful spaces and open-ended materials for children to explore can be a starting point for becoming a Reggio-inspired teacher or program. Experiences like conferences, study tours and workshops built around Reggio ideas end, and then participants return to their contexts. What happens when the eye jumps over the wall but the body remains on the other side?

The Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota doesn't provide answers but is a flexible community composed of a wide variety of people with an interest in exploring and deepening their understandings of the Reggio approach. The Network provides resources and convenes opportunities for listening and talking with others about ideas, possibilities and practice. Deep insights are possible through reflection, particularly when in dialogue with others.

The Network, a 501 c3 for which there is no membership fee, is a hub of resources available to all. Throughout the year, the Network sponsors in-person and virtual events, most of which are free:

- Monthly Gatherings – hosted in various community locations
- Monthly Book Study – meets virtually and studies Reggio-inspired publications, each over many months
- Let's Talk – virtual or in-person, open discussion
- Documentation Lab – participants share and discuss traces of their work, some virtual, some in-person
- Loose Parts Lab – which collects, curates and makes recycled materials available, housed in the Toolbox Collective in Mpls.
- RINM website – contains a wealth of information and links
- Quarterly newsletter – free to everyone on the mailing list, also available through the RINM website

The Network makes available books published by Reggio Children and other books about the Reggio approach through the Debra Fish Library, a collection of the Saint Paul Public Library. Books can be checked out through any metro library. [www.mnlinkgateway.org/](http://www.mnlinkgateway.org/)

In addition, there are two annual educational scholarships available. More information can be found [here](#).

First encounters with Reggio ideas are, for many, the catalyst to learn more about the approach and find ways to incorporate those ideas in their work with children and parents. Because the educational project in Reggio is complex and so different from U.S. educational paradigms, it requires ongoing awareness and effort to experiment, reflect, dialogue and experiment again. There are plenty of fellow travelers available as companions on that journey. The Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota is one place to find them.

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to Tom Bedard, Joe Druskin, Joanne Esser, Jen Kalika, Kim Lane, Melanie Lowin, Taylor Rose, Lisa Small, Jeanne Vergeront, Mary Watson and others for responding to my questions and to Lani Shapiro for thinking with me.

## Resources

Cameron, C. and Moss, P. (Eds.), (2020). *Transforming Early Childhood in England: Towards a Democratic Education*. UCL Press <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.9781787357167>

Edwards, C., Gandini, L., Forman, G. (Eds.), (2012). *The Hundred Languages of Children: The Reggio Emilia Experiences in Transformation* (3rd ed., p. 35). Praeger.

Giamminuti, S., Cagliari, P., Giudici, C., Strozzi, P. (Eds.), (2024). *The Role of the Pedagogista in Reggio Emilia: Voices and Ideas for a Dialectic Educational Experience*. Routledge.

Landi, L. and Pintus, A. (2022). "A Critical Approach to the Reggio Emilia Approach." *Open Access*. <https://iris.unimore.it/retrieve/1861203e-e021-42ee-b42a-d20195c206c9/216-713-1-PB.pdf>

Spaggiari, S. (2004). "The path toward knowledge: The social, political and cultural context of the Reggio municipal infant-toddler center and preschool experience." *Innovations in Early Education: The International Reggio Exchange*. <https://www.reggioalliance.org/downloads/path:spaggiari.pdf>

## Loose Parts Lab Update



The Loose Parts Laboratory is a space curated with a variety of materials donated to distribute for low or no cost.

Vision: The Loose Parts Laboratory aims to provide a growing initiative of increasing materials, patronage and volunteers. As part of this endeavor, in addition to the material offerings, we hope to make the space available to the community for gatherings of parents, senior groups, professional associations as well as professional development for educators.

Eleven early childhood educators gathered in early December at the Loose Parts Laboratory on 42nd Ave. in Mpls. They came from a variety of programs: Head Start, family home care and a newly opened school named, Jewish Beginnings. The participants were curious and arrived with a desire to explore and learn new ways to support their own journeys as educators. After introductions, the educators were invited to explore the Laboratory. They found a bountiful assortment of materials—ribbons, boxes, game pieces, scraps of paper, wood, and fabric, wood, beads, etc. During their time together they filled bags with loose parts intended for use in their classrooms.

Sandy Burwell outlined the integral relationships between loose parts and the Reggio Emilia concept of the 'hundred languages.' The group discussed how everything we do and everything that the children do with loose parts is its own language. Simon Nicholson, often credited for coining the phrase 'loose parts,' said that, "Children learn most readily and easily in an environment where they can experiment, enjoy, and discover things for themselves." He went on to say that, "In any environment, both the degree of inventiveness and creativity, and the possibility of discovery, are directly proportional to the number and kind of variables in it." So, what possibilities might educators offer the young children in their care? What kinds of loose parts might



each classroom have available to create opportunities for creativity and discovery?



With these questions in mind, those present were invited to explore three stations for their own hands-on explorations. The stations included:

- Multi-media materials complete with a wide assortment of paper in a variety of textures, sizes and shapes; written words and phrases cut from magazines, boards, decoupage, glue, markers, etc.
- Painting without brushes—using fingers, bubble wrap, sponges, credit cards, sticks, yarn and materials for printmaking (using loose parts to make print boards).
- Natural materials and miscellaneous parts such as pinecones and small pieces of wood. Tokens from old Monopoly sets were a big hit.

As the session ended, participants shared that they enjoyed working with loose parts. They anticipated establishing loose parts or multi-media centers in their classrooms or planned to introduce loose parts from nature. Others talked about children using loose parts for self-portraits. The enthusiasm was evident as we shared loose parts possibilities with one another.

We wish everyone much joy and success in their work with loose parts in their classrooms. We invite anyone interested in helping out at the Loose Parts Laboratory to fill out this [survey](#) or email us at: [loosepartslabmn@gmail.com](mailto:loosepartslabmn@gmail.com)

The RINM Loose Parts Lab committee members, Sandra Burwell and Heidi Wolf, presented at the ReUse Minnesota Conference held at Hennepin Technical College. The Network received a scholarship to be members of the [ReUse Program](#). This has been helpful in connecting with other groups interested in ReUse, sustainability and donating materials to the Loose Parts Lab.

## Resource

Nicholson, S. (1971). “How not to cheat children: The theory of loose parts.” *Landscape Architecture*, 62, 30–35.

## Open Book Study via Zoom

**Third Sunday of the month from 3:00 pm - 4:30 pm Central Time**  
**12/18/24, 3/17/24, 4/21/24, 5/19/24**

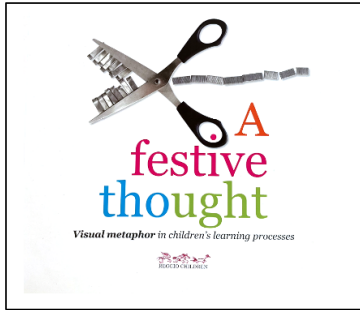
Each meeting we form a flexible learning group without a fixed destination, with the intention of cultivating a context for uncertainty, diversity and complexity. We read slowly, never more than one chapter per month. (Sometimes we repeat a chapter, if we don’t feel finished with it.) Together we strengthen the disposition for

close reading, careful listening and thoughtful conversation.

We are reading, *A Festive Thought*, published by Reggio Children, which focuses on visual metaphor. It can be accessed [here](#).

***“Creative thinking and knowledge are the first line of defense for freedom and equality, and therefore primary objectives that schools should be pursuing and diffusing.”***

-Reggio Children



<https://www.reggiochildren.it/en/un-pensiero-in-festa/>

Join us on Zoom, all are welcome!

**Register for a REPEATING Zoom link: <https://www.mnreggio.org/event-4918458>**

Participate when you can, there is no charge.

Questions? Contact [reggioinspiredmn@gmail.com](mailto:reggioinspiredmn@gmail.com) for more information.

## Sponsorship Opportunity

The Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota (RINM) is making it possible to be a year-round sponsor for a \$100.00 donation.

The Network has been providing support to early childhood programs through its many opportunities for professional development since 2007. Most of these opportunities are free of charge to participants.

Individuals and programs can take advantage of Monthly Gatherings that provide professional development hours. There are also Documentation Labs, Book Study, “Let’s Talk” monthly Zoom gatherings and a collection of titles of Reggio-related books available through the Debra S. Fish Early Childhood library which is part of the St. Paul Library system.

Network communication is maintained through monthly up-date emails, the Quarterly Newsletter and a website filled with information about the Reggio Emilia Approach. Schools and centers have the opportunity to post job openings on the Network website. There are two scholarships available through the Network – an Education Scholarship, which can support attendance at training events given by staff from Reggio Emilia, and a Scholarship to attend the Network Monthly Gatherings.

Our newest project is the Loose Parts Lab. Teachers, parents and other community members can frequent Loose

Parts and find materials that can be taken back to classrooms and homes where children can create, learn and explore new ideas with recycled and repurposed materials.

As a Sponsor of the Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota, your logo will be displayed on the Quarterly Newsletter, website and at Monthly Gatherings. Your logo will be associated with the work of RINM and will make your organization stand out and be recognized as a program associated with quality!

If you would like to become a sponsor for the 2023 - 2024 year, please [complete this linked form](#) and send it to Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota, 525 Pelham Blvd. N., Saint Paul, MN, 55104 with a payment of \$100.00. You may also donate the \$100.00 by going to the website and clicking on the donate button. If you have questions, please contact Marty Watson at [martywatson549@gmail.com](mailto:martywatson549@gmail.com).

## Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota Scholarships

### RINM Education Scholarship

The Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota's Education Scholarship is available to those interested in learning more about the Reggio Approach. Everyone is invited to apply at any time of the year (a minimum of 6 weeks before an event you plan to attend). This scholarship may be used for registration costs to local, national or international Reggio-inspired workshops and conferences. Preference will be given to professional development opportunities where educators from the schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy are presenting. Funds are limited and awards are made at the discretion of the Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota Board.

[RINM Education Scholarship Application](#)

### Monthly Gatherings Scholarship

This scholarship, established by the Network's Board, is in honor of Sandy Burwell, a founding member of the Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota. Sandy has been particularly devoted to the Saturday Gatherings. The dates for the Monthly Gatherings Scholarship cover a full calendar year, from January to December each year. Apply now!

[Monthly Gathering Scholarship Application](#)

## Calls for Participation

*“Participation, in fact, is based on the idea that reality is not objective, that culture is a constantly evolving product of society, that individual knowledge is only partial; and that in order to construct a project, especially an educational project, everyone's point of view is relevant in dialogue with those of others, within a framework of shared values. The idea of participation is founded on these concepts: and in our opinion, so, too, is democracy itself.”*

-Paola Cagliari, Angela Barozzi and Claudia Giudici

The Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota is an all-volunteer non-profit 501c(3) organization. Most of our work occurs in committees, where issues are studied, proposals developed and activities implemented. We are looking for a wide range of people with varied skill sets to join our work. Critically, we need people who are

willing to collaborate, to do some planning up front, jump in and learn as they go. We would like to hear from you. There are no fees or dues involved, just an interest in learning and growing together. Help us grow our active and vibrant collaborative.

## **Committees**

### **Resource Development**

- To develop diverse sources of financial and material support to sustain the Network
- Skills: Business budgeting, grant writing, fund raising

Contact Marty Watson [martywatson549@gmail.com](mailto:martywatson549@gmail.com)

### **Outreach & Growth**

- To plan events, promote growth in Reggio-inspired knowledge and practice and expand the Network
- Skills: Event planning, knowledge of the Reggio Emilia educational project, community organizing

Contact Heidi Wolf [hwolf@bsmschool.org](mailto:hwolf@bsmschool.org)

### **Communications**

- To make the work of the Network visible, coordinate communication, improve tools to highlight and elevate the work of the Network and build relationships
- Skills: Writing, editing, research, graphic arts, social media, information/project management

Contact Lani Shapiro [lani.shapiro@gmail.com](mailto:lani.shapiro@gmail.com)

### **Loose Parts Laboratory Materials Center**

- To develop and grow offerings of materials and workshops
- Skills: Solicit, curate, maintain and display materials

Contact the LPL committee at [loosepartslabmn@gmail.com](mailto:loosepartslabmn@gmail.com)

### **Civic Engagement (currently dormant, but could rise with interest and a leader)**

- To provide information and resources to policy makers, educators and other citizens in order to influence education policy and promote learning through inquiry
- Skills: Knowledge of early childhood and/or K-12 education policy and evidence-based research to support the Reggio approach

Contact Patti Loftus [pattiroseloftus@gmail.com](mailto:pattiroseloftus@gmail.com)

If you are interested in volunteering to support the Network, please email the chair of the relevant committee. If you have general questions or would like to contribute to the Network in another way, please contact board members at [reggioinspiredmn@gmail.com](mailto:reggioinspiredmn@gmail.com).

## **Share your knowledge or experience**



Please consider hosting or presenting a future Network event. Presentations need to include and build on Reggio principles and may include past or current work or area of study. Presentations often include a variety of approaches, including discussion, hands-on experiences and video/or Powerpoint.

This is an opportunity to lead or co-lead a Network event, in-person or via Zoom. We would like to incorporate your experiences into upcoming events.

Some questions to get you thinking:

- What have you explored and learned with your children?
- What conversations have given you insight into their theories?
- How are the Hundred Languages expressed in your setting?
- What strategies, intentions and hypotheses have you discussed as a staff?
- What have you struggled with and created solutions around?
- What other learning stories could you tell?

A stipend of up to \$200 is given for a 2-3 hour Gathering, with additional funds if your presentation has Parent Aware/Develop MN approval.

Proposals for presentations will be welcomed until June 1, 2024. We look forward to engaging with participants from anywhere in the world. Here is the link: <https://forms.gle/pHMzedRfNoxd9NTJ6>

## Public Library Resources

The Debra S. Fish Early Childhood Resource Library is located at Think Small, 10 Yorkton Court, St. Paul, Minnesota. The collection is part of the Saint Paul Public Library system catalog <http://www.sppl.org/> and is available through the statewide virtual library, MnLINK at <https://www.mnlinkgateway.org>. The Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota partners with the Debra S. Fish Early Childhood Resource Library to provide access to literature about the Reggio approach. All the resources are translated into English (even if the title is listed in Italian). All you need is a library card. Resources can be delivered and returned to ANY Minnesota public library.

Debra Fish Library resources are available by request. [This link](#) lists the collection clustered under general topics related to Reggio thought. The links (SPPL or MNLink) will take you directly to that title in the collection. Additionally, you can search by keyword “Reggio” in the library catalogue.

## NAREA

Be sure to check out the events offered by NAREA, the North American Reggio Emilia Alliance. NAREA exists to connect early childhood educators and advocates together in discovering, interpreting and promoting Reggio Emilia inspired education. If you are a member, you will receive another discount. With Zoom classes, there are many more opportunities to become involved with the Reggio Emilia educators in Italy. For more information, visit <https://www.reggioalliance.org/anarea/>.

# Job Opportunities

Click here for current job postings: [www.mnreggio.org/jobsforum](http://www.mnreggio.org/jobsforum)

**Thank you to our annual sponsors!**



**For more news and events visit us at [www.mnreggio.org](http://www.mnreggio.org) and like us on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/mnreggio)!**

**Send us an email: [reggioinspiredmn@gmail.com](mailto:reggioinspiredmn@gmail.com)**

**Newsletter Editors**

Lani Shapiro - Content

Emily Benz, Patti Loftus & Reba Batalden - Copy

Sarah Grundhoefer - Production