



# Inspiring News and Events

From the Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota

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## Introduction

*“Documentation is not about what we do, but what we are searching for.” -Carla Rinaldi*

As we head into September, many of us are heading back to school, returning to children who inspire us, and to our colleagues, with whom we collaborate. Many of us became teachers to work alongside children and help them grow into their potential. We discover as we work alongside them that children help us grow into our potential. Documentation is the heart of that work. Thoughtful documentation can be the engine that drives the connection between the work, the children, their families and the community.

Documentation gives us tools to reflect on our personal perspectives and shared understandings. As we explore the cognitive knots and complexities we encounter, we extend the children’s learning, our learning, and our shared understanding of childhood and the process of learning.

Central to the Reggio Emilia experience are the ever-evolving pedagogical dispositions and skills around documentation. For the Reggio-Inspired Network, developing local understandings in documentation is crucial to the work we do. Whether it is documenting a gathering to reflect on its meaning, or exploring the larger community of children and teachers to learn about and document children’s lives today, capturing moments and reflecting on what they mean from various perspectives truly matters. Because of the tremendous value of documentation, the Network is offering a Documentation Lab to help participants form a community that values reflection and growth. It will be a place to

connect with others and share documentation in progress, encounter feedback on work and evolve our practice. This will be a valuable opportunity for teachers and parents who value the Reggio philosophy to connect meaningfully, sharing this important work that makes the learning of children so visible, and so we hope you will join us at the kickoff event, Saturday, September 23rd!

Sincerely,  
Lani Shapiro  
Editor, Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota Newsletter

## **Documentation Lab: A New Network Initiative**

### **Joanne Esser**

For many of us educators, learning about the early childhood centers in Reggio Emilia, Italy was immediately inspiring. What they were doing with children made sense and fit with our ideals about how we wanted to teach and learn. We wanted to dive in, adapt and embed their practices into our own classrooms right away.

Each of us then had to choose a place to begin incorporating Reggio-inspired practices into our own work. It is often hard to know where to start, since even an initial study of those beautiful Italian classrooms and the deeply considered philosophy that undergirds them reveals how incredibly complex it is.

Some people begin by redesigning their environments. They evaluate and make changes to their physical spaces, room layout, the materials available to children and even the colors and containers in the room. Other people begin by introducing project work, building children's interests into some deeper, bigger study of a topic, stimulating children's thinking in a way that recognizes their strong capabilities.

But one of the most basic and essential places we can begin to emulate the effective practices we see in Reggio Emilia is with documentation.

Documentation is a term that is becoming common and almost jargon-y in early childhood education. When that happens, the word can begin to lose its true meaning, becoming over-simplified or interpreted in a shallow way. There are even companies promoting products and systems to help teachers "document," often for the purpose of accountability, gathering data to prove that the children are meeting some set of predetermined standards. But in Reggio Emilia, documentation has a much deeper meaning.

At its heart, pedagogical documentation in the Reggio-inspired sense is the practice of paying close attention to what children say and do. It is a stance, a way of seeing with intention and curiosity. The practice of documenting is based on the belief that young children are innately driven to learn, that their actions and words are powerful and

purposeful, and that they are actively engaged in making meaning all the time from their daily lives.

Documentation does not mean simply taking lots of photographs, writing down quotes from children or posting panels on the walls – although those activities are often part of the documentation process. The artifacts alone are not the essence of the concept. Authentic documentation in the Reggio sense involves making intentional choices about what data to collect, reflecting on the data, interpreting and analyzing it with colleagues, communicating what you've observed with families and with the children themselves, listening to their interpretations and using what you've learned to plan for new experiences. It's a very complex cycle!

In the words of Reggio educator Lella Gandini, "When we document, we make the deliberate choice to observe and record what happens in our environment in order to reflect and communicate the surprising discoveries in children's everyday lives...Documentation is not...the collecting of data in a detached, objective, distant way. Rather, it is seen as the interpretation of close, keen observation and attentive listening, gathered with a variety of tools by educators aware of contributing their different points of view. In fact, our views about childhood and our personal theories influence what each of us sees and hears; that is why we need to compare interpretations among colleagues."

Many of us in the Network have felt the need for more reflection and collaboration with colleagues about our documentation efforts. When we closely observe a group of toddlers playing together at the water table, or a five-year-old making an original "invention" out of recycled scrap materials, we are naturally excited. We want to share our questions and our observations of what our children are doing with others who can help us understand more deeply what is really happening. Having other sets of eyes and ears to look at our assorted photos, notes and snippets of collected dialogue often brings new perspectives to our work – even when those colleagues might not know our children or be part of our program.

To meet this need, the Network is creating a new initiative: the Documentation Lab. We want to offer educators an on-going way to share traces of their work with each other, get and give feedback about documentation and generate ideas for next steps in learning based on what children have been doing. We envision the Documentation Lab as a co-facilitated, collaborative working group where participants can bring work-in-progress, critically analyze it and learn from each other, at whatever stages we are in our practice.

A core group of interested Network members started tossing around ideas for the Documentation Lab this summer. But we also invite input from potential participants to help decide when, where and how often we'll meet – probably one evening a month or every other month, meeting at a public site such as a library – and what our format should be. The Lab gatherings will be free and open to anyone who wants to learn more, whether you are experienced in using documentation or whether you are brand new to the idea.

The official “kick-off” of the Documentation Lab initiative will be on September 23, as part of the regular monthly Network gathering. Join us for a workshop focused on documentation: “Set Your Intention to Pay Attention,” 9:30 a.m. to noon in the Lakeview Room in the Hyland Lake Park Reserve, 10145 Bush Lake Rd., Bloomington, MN. Then add your voice to give direction to this new opportunity. More information about the Documentation Lab will be widely shared within the Network as it takes shape.

**Come and Join Us! Unisciti a Noi!**  
**2017 - 2018 Monthly Gatherings**  
**Barb Murphy**

The RINM Monthly Gathering schedule hopes to have something for everyone! It is the continuing goal of the Outreach & Growth Committee that these events not only create deep connections to the philosophy of the educational project of Reggio Emilia, but also allow participants to connect with each other. We aspire to provide opportunities for regular dialogue, camaraderie and mutual support. These events are one aspect of our multi-tiered plan to offer educational, inspirational and transformational events that focus on professional development for educators and educational information for families and community members. The cumulative benefit of regularly coming together with colleagues to dialogue and support one another can be life-changing. This is our hope for all of you who desire to go deeper with the philosophy and practices of the educational project of Reggio Emilia: that each of us can increasingly bring about positive change in our own schools and communities here in Minnesota by joining together in the supportive community that is RINM.

Unisciti a noi! Come and join us!

Members of the 2017-18 Outreach & Growth Committee  
Barb Murphy, Joey Schoen, Kellee Nelson & Joanne Esser

We are looking to grow. Email Barb Murphy at [murph028@gmail.com](mailto:murph028@gmail.com) if you would like to join our committee or host a gathering at your site.

## **2017-2018 Gatherings**

**September 23, 2017 9:30 to Noon**

### **Set an Intention to Pay Attention**

Panel presentation and discussion on documentation process on the new Documentation Lab initiative

Facilitated by Joanne Esser, Blake Pre K Teacher

Lakeview Room, Hyland Park Nature Reserve

10145 Bush Lake Rd., Bloomington

\$38, \$27 Student

**October 28, 2017 9:00 to Noon**

### **Explorations in Light and Shadow**

How can we incorporate light, shadow, reflection and transparency to create more complex experiences in our classrooms?

Held and taught by Sandy Burwell, ECE Consultant

South Metro Montessori School

10970 185th St W Lakeville, MN 55054

\$30, Please email Sandy at [smburwell@gmail.com](mailto:smburwell@gmail.com) to register

**November 11, 2017 9:00 to Noon**

### **Mapping The Terrain Of Parent Engagement From Multiple Perspectives**

How do teachers and parents come together to benefit our children?

Facilitated by Lani Shapiro, Parent Educator

Location TBA

\$38, \$19 Student

**January 28, 2018, Sunday Afternoon**

### **Exploring the Geography of Childhood**

We will explore the questions, "What was it like to be a child where you grew up? What is like to be a child there now? What are your hopes and dreams for your children's experiences growing up now?"

Facilitated by the RINM Civic Engagement Committee

Location TBA

\$38, \$19 Student

**February 24, 2018, 9:00 to Noon**

### **The Language of Clay**

In this hands-on workshop, we will explore the properties of earth clay, practice some art techniques with clay, learn ways to manage and recycle clay, and share ideas about exploring clay with children.

Led by Kim Lane, Visual Arts Specialist at the Blake School

110 Blake Rd. S. Hopkins, MN

\$38, \$19 Students

**March 8 and March 9, 2018, Various Times**

### **Support the Reggio Track at MNAEYC**

Attend Reggio presentations at the annual state conference!

River Center, 175 West Kellogg Blvd, St Paul, MN 55102

Fees Apply

### **April 14, 2018 9:00 to Noon**

#### **Fostering a Collaborative Community**

The school environment and the systems that support programming influence the relationships that form among colleagues, parents, children and community members. Join the educators of WECC as we explore the intention behind spaces and share ideas of how to apply value-driven collaborative systems within an early learning program.

Facilitated by Kellee Nelson

Westwood, 9001 Cedar Lake Road, St. Louis Park, MN 55426

\$38, \$19 Students

### **May 2018, Friday Evening**

End of Year Celebration with Documentation Lab Participants & RINM Annual Meeting

Time and Location TBA

FREE!

## **The Geography of Childhood: Bringing People Together by Sharing Stories of Childhood**

**Barb Murphy**

We believe that time invested in deeply understanding the hearts and minds of the people in our communities is an essential activity which creates community in the first place, as well as what keeps it responsive to the ever-changing needs of its people.

We propose the "Geography of Childhood" as a project to build and strengthen connections across diverse communities while also helping illuminate the similarities shared among communities around the Twin Cities and, hopefully, around the globe.

PLEASE JOIN US in the first steps of our project by sharing a bit about your childhood, your child's life, or a bit about the children you work with in this anonymous survey.

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1r7-B2F76C6zf\\_mdF2Zp\\_yhijXHTDdChb7DVTLWgUYSc/edit](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1r7-B2F76C6zf_mdF2Zp_yhijXHTDdChb7DVTLWgUYSc/edit)

-Ross Thompson, Civic Engagement Committee

## **Book Study as Professional Development**

### **Marty Watson**

Do you enjoy the exchange of ideas and perspectives a good book group can provide? Have you ever used this format for professional development at your school? The Network sees the value in shared reading and the the exchange of ideas it can spark, and so we funded the purchase of multiple copies of the book, *It's Not a Bird Yet: The drama of drawing* by Ursula Kolbe. We developed a study guide that may be used alongside it. The kit contains fifteen copies of the book and is housed at the Debra Fish Library and can be checked out there. At this time, educators in two centers are holding a joint book study but the books will return to the library, available for another group, in October. *It's Not a Bird Yet: The drama of drawing* explores how young children use drawing to play with ideas. Through engaging anecdotes, Ursula Kolbe gives insight into the rich possibilities of drawing, and celebrates it as a powerful tool for thinking and imagining.

The Debra Fish Library specializes in early childhood books and is part of the Saint Paul Public Library system, though one can check out books from it with a library card from anywhere else in the state. The Network has purchased over 30 titles of books from Reggio Children and Reggio-inspired authors, available now to inspire you! Please check them out!

## **Gatherings Scholarship Winner: Brenda Jerich Marty Watson**

Congratulations to Brenda Jerich, our Gatherings Scholarship recipient. Brenda is an assistant teacher at Kaleidoscope Preschool in the Hopkins Public Schools. Kaleidoscope is a half-day preschool offered in the Hopkins Public School district inspired by the Reggio Approach. In her application Brenda states, "I had a lot of questions about Reggio Emilia techniques in the preschool classroom my first year with Kaleidoscope. It began to make more sense the second year. Now I approach Reggio-inspired learning with appreciation and my questions are more nuanced. With a better understanding of Reggio-inspired learning, I can be of more help to the teachers I work with as well as the children I help to instruct." Preschool teachers in the Hopkins District are able to have their way paid to attend the Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota's workshops, but assistants have to pay the fee themselves, so this scholarship is very beneficial to Brenda.

The Gatherings Scholarship was created to honor Sandy Burwell, a founding member of the Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota. Sandy is particularly devoted to the Saturday gatherings. Scholarship applications are available on the Network website and are accepted in May of each year.

## **Teaching With the Body in Mind - A Podcast**

In American classrooms we often require children to be quiet and have still bodies for long periods of time, but we know that children actually need movement and play as part of their healthy development. How do we reconcile our cultural tendency to value still bodies and a child's need to move? What is the role of big-body/rough-and-tumble play in our classrooms?

The idea for the podcast, "Teaching with the Body in Mind," came out of monthly conversations that early childhood educators, Joey Schoen, Mike Huber, Ross Thompson and Tom Bedard had around big-body/rough-and-tumble play and its importance in early childhood development.

In this episode, they discuss the topic of trust and how that is essential for any kind of learning to take place for children (both in schools/childcare programs as well as in the home).

Check it out here . . .

<https://itunes.apple.com/.../twtbim-0018-it-sta.../id1211456019...>

## Upcoming Events

**SEPT 23, 9:30 AM**

**Set an Intention to Pay Attention - A Kickoff to the Documentation Lab**

Facilitated By Joanne Esser, Blake School Prek Teacher

Lakeview Room, Hyland Lake Park Reserve

10145 Bush Lake Rd. Bloomington, Mn

**NOV 11, 9:00 AM**

**Mapping the Terrain of Parent Engagement from Multiple Perspectives**

Facilitated By Lani Shapiro, Parent Educator

Location TBA

## Sunday Monthly Book Study continues

Book study is the third Sunday of the month, usually at Open Book's cafe, 3:00 - 4:30.

We are continuing to read Art and Creativity in Reggio Emilia, by Veia Vecchi. New participants are always welcome. Email Patti at [pattiroseloftus@gmail.com](mailto:pattiroseloftus@gmail.com) for more information or to be added to the book study email list.

You can also check the calendar at [mnreggio.org](http://mnreggio.org) for dates.

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

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

### Newsletter Editors

Lani Shapiro, Eileen Galvin, Patti Loftus, Emily Benz

