



# Inspiring News and Events

From the Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota

Volume 7, Issue 2 | Winter 2020

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## Editor's Introduction

*Lani Shapiro*

Gratefully, I notice the days getting longer, with slightly more light each day. Though it is still cold, I can imagine the retreat of ice and snow, and the emergence of the spring garden, and all of the possibilities of the warmer season ahead.

Contributors to this edition of the newsletter include parents, teachers and administrators reflecting on materials, studio work, preschool programs and elementary schools. Change is a central concept: new programs, new schools, evolution of existing programs, individual growth and delight. Jen Johnson writes as a parent of a student at St. Paul School of Northern Lights, a Reggio-inspired elementary school in its first year of operation. Joanne Esser is the director and art studio teacher of All Seasons Preschool in Inver Grove Heights, an intergenerational preschool. She will be opening All Seasons of Eagan in September 2020. In this issue she describes this unique school model and its special gifts for all who are a part of it.

Also, this issue continues a thread that has been woven throughout this year: an exploration of material and its potential.

I was fortunate to be a part of a Reggio study tour last Spring, which led to my giving thought to the role of the atelier in schools and community. In this issue I explore the history and scope of the atelier in Reggio Emilia and my group's explorations in *The Secrets of Paper Atelier* in the Loris Malaguzzi Center.

For further thoughts on paper, Emily Benz reflects on her experience at the RINM January Gathering in the studio exploring printmaking and collage.

Notice details for registering for the March Gathering, and for ongoing, free professional development opportunities through Documentation Labs or Open Book Study.

With gratitude to authors who share their reflections and to readers for engaging with those thoughts,

Lani Shapiro  
Editor

## Upcoming Events

**March 14, 2020, 9:00 am – 12:00 pm**

**Presentation and Environment Tour: Nothing without Joy**

Finding joy in projects, community and the ongoing journey of the Reggio philosophy at Little Trenderers

**Presenters: Little Trenderers Childcare Teaching Team**

### **Location:**

Little Trenderers Child Care  
20855 Kensington Blvd.  
Lakeville, MN 55044

### **Registration**

[Presentation and Environment Tour: Nothing without Joy](#)

Current RINM Board or Committee Member – \$28.50

General – \$38.00

Group Rate – \$34.00 (for groups of 5 or more registering from the same school, a discount of 10%)

Student – \$19.00

## Continuing Professional Development

### Documentation Labs

There are documentation study groups in two regional metro areas. These gatherings are always FREE and open to anyone, whether you are new to the idea of documentation or whether it has been part of your practice for a long time.

The Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota's DOCUMENTATION LABS continue to offer educators an opportunity to study traces of children's actions - photographs, video clips, transcripts of conversations and children's own work, sketches - as a way to learn in collaboration with colleagues.

#### **North Metro Documentation Lab**

First Sunday of Each Month | October-May | 1:00-3:00 PM

NOTE Location will vary:

Contact: Stephanie Ponticas [heartsandmindsdaycare@gmail.com](mailto:heartsandmindsdaycare@gmail.com)

We have started a Facebook Study with the book, *Really Seeing Children* by Deb Curtis. Search on Facebook: “Reggio Inspired Documentation Book Study”

### **South Metro Documentation Lab**

Saturdays 9:00 am – 12:00 pm

February 22, 2020

Little Tenders, 20855 Kensington Blvd, Lakeville, MN 55044

March 21, 2020

Kinderberry Hill, 3950 W 70th St, Edina, MN 55435

April 18, 2020

The French Academie, 12301 Whitewater Drive #190, Minnetonka, MN 55343

RSVP - [smburwell@gmail.com](mailto:smburwell@gmail.com)

## **Monthly Open Book Studies**

Do you enjoy reading and thoughtful conversation?

We meet every **third** Sunday of the month from 3:00 pm – 4:30 pm.

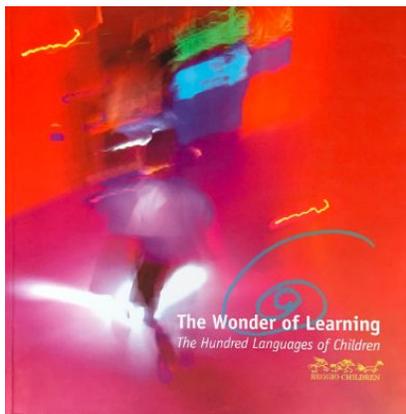
Come to Open Book for an opportunity to join others and discuss *The Wonder of Learning, the hundred languages of children*. We read slowly, never more than one chapter per month; sometimes we repeat a chapter if we don't feel finished with it. We read closely and listen carefully to one another. Each meeting, we learn together without a fixed destination, embracing uncertainty, diversity and complexity.

Open Book

1011 S. Washington Ave.

Minneapolis, MN 55415

All are welcome; there is no charge. Join at any point in the year. We'd love to see you there!



For more information, contact: [reggioinspiredmn@gmail.com](mailto:reggioinspiredmn@gmail.com)

## The First Year at St. Paul School of Northern Lights: Reflections on the Journey

*Jennifer Johnson*

This past summer, my husband and I made the decision to transfer our seven-year-old son from his traditional public elementary school to Saint Paul School of Northern Lights (SPSNL). It was not an easy decision for us, for many reasons. For one thing, it meant separating our son from his older brother, who had expressed his wish—a wish we chose to honor—to remain at their school for his final, fifth-grade year. The boys share a close relationship, one that has grown stronger over the three years they have been going to school together, and it pained me, especially, to see that source of shared experience disappear. It was also a difficult decision because our seven-year-old did not want to leave his school, either—he liked his teacher (as did we), he liked his classmates and had a few good friends he was sad to leave, and he was understandably nervous about going somewhere unfamiliar to him. In his case, my husband and I finally decided that the potential benefits were worth some emotional discomfort, but still, it remained for us a decision filled with uncertainty and doubt. By choosing a new school that had not yet opened its doors, we were necessarily making what amounted to a leap of faith. We believed whole-heartedly in the vision the founders of SPSNL put forward—there was no question for us about that—but it was a vision that was still untested. Would the school community—the founders, teachers, administrators, families, and students of SPSNL—be able to realize the dream of the school? And would they be able to sustain it? In the months leading up to the beginning of the school year, there was no way for us to know for sure—but we were, like many other families, filled with hope about the possibilities.

*“my husband and I have had to become keen observers of the ways in which our son carries his learning home with him”*

Now, four months into SPSNL’s first year, my husband and I feel as though we are just beginning to explore what it means to be part of this learning community. Our son has made an admirable adjustment to his new school, which does not surprise us—he has always been resilient and competent—but because he is not one to share the experiences of his days in great detail, and because we are not at school with him to see those experiences ourselves, my husband and I have had to become keen observers of the ways in which our son carries his learning home with him—sometimes quite literally, as when he ferries home paper airplanes and hand drawn maps and other artifacts of his day—and how those bits and pieces are then drawn into the mix of our family’s daily life. It is in this practice of paying attention, of noticing, that we have seen the most significant changes.

At his previous school, our son’s from-school-to-home learning most often took the form of traditional homework: lists of spelling words, math worksheets, and page after page of handwriting practice. Not surprisingly, he balked at doing this kind of work, and we struggled with how to make it more relevant for him. More often than not, we failed. And although our son did well enough in school, both my husband and I were concerned about the long-term effects this more rigid approach to education would have on his enthusiasm and joy for learning. Because truly, when he was not in school—and not trudging through the

obligatory homework—he was almost constantly lit up with curiosity and ideas and imaginings. He was in the backyard, figuring out how to construct scaffolding around a tree so that he could reach the lowest branches for climbing. He was cutting and gluing together pieces of cardboard to create a knight's sword and shield. And he was assembling his own spinning toys out of Legos, designing and redesigning for ever greater speed and power. He was learning, and his learning was joyful.

Reigniting this joy for learning within a community that more closely reflected our family's values was one of our greatest motivations for changing schools. During our son's first four months at SPSNL, my husband and I have watched him take on the role of "upper buddy" to his four-year-old brother, teaching him board games, helping him craft paper airplanes "that really fly," and reading almost daily installments of *Dog Man* or *Elephant and Piggie*. He helped to build our family campfire on the North Shore using some of the skills he learned during Environmental Education. He has begun to internalize the kinds of respectful language children can use when they disagree with one another, to the point that I occasionally hear him say to his older brother, "Let's agree to disagree," when a few months ago I might only have heard shouting. And we have seen him display a problem-solving mindset in ways that both inspire and delight us.

These are only the first steps of our journey with SPSNL, but already we are encouraged by what we have seen and experienced—and more importantly, by what our son has seen and experienced. Now we look to the rest of the school year, and the years to come, with full hearts.

## Young Children and Seniors Develop Relationships at All Seasons Preschool

*Joanne Esser*

*"We believe that the quality of life is enhanced when all generations live and work together."*

All Seasons mission statement

Ten years ago, Amy Lemieux, a former elementary grades teacher, and Sarah Sivright, a longtime preschool director, had a dream to create a unique preschool that would be housed inside a residence for seniors.

Young children and elders in our culture have a lot in common. They are typically under-appreciated, often go unnoticed, and thrive on love and connection. Senior citizens light up when an energetic, imaginative child enters the room. Even older people who are mostly unresponsive smile, talk and reach out to small children. And many young children long for the undivided attention of a patient adult who is not too busy or too distracted to give it to them. What if young children and older folks could see each other routinely, every day? What if they were supported to develop intentional, mutually caring relationships?

Amy had a family connection to developers who build senior living residences, so she proposed a new model: build a preschool in the lower level of one of their senior buildings - an intergenerational living space where natural, daily interactions, both planned activities and spontaneous

bumping-into-the-neighbors, would happen between young children and older adults. It would be a real community where everyone knows everyone else's names. The new preschool would be named All Seasons, in honor of all the ages, from very young to very old, on the spectrum of human life, and the continual turning of the seasons in the natural world.

Both Amy and Sarah, who had been the director of Dodge Nature Preschool, knew firsthand the value of children spending time outdoors immersed in nature. So, they conceived of All Seasons as a preschool with a nature-based curriculum, where children would spend a large part of each day outdoors. The site selected for the building had five acres of woods, and it was right next door to a church that owns fourteen additional acres of wild land: pine trees, wildflowers, a "swamp," rocks and boulders and hills and gullies to play in and on.

Sarah's background as an artist played into their dream, too. All Seasons would have a dedicated art studio space built in, and each child would come to the studio in small groups every week to draw, paint, sculpt and create with materials, to learn skills, experiment and express her or his ideas. The preschool's three-pronged mission was born: it would be an intergenerational, nature-based and arts-infused program.



They started small, with only eleven children that first year. This was not ideal from a financial standpoint, but it allowed the founders and teachers to develop the program slowly and intentionally. It takes time to establish a new program; they were continuously debriefing and making changes. Working with small numbers of children allowed the first years' teachers to figure out the best ways to connect with the seniors: visiting the independent seniors in their apartments, singing songs and playing in a rhythm band with young and old together, doing arts and crafts projects or cooking in the Community Room, playing table games and doing puzzles in the Memory Care wings, delivering baked treats and holiday cards, or just knocking on seniors' apartment doors to show them a drawing or a favorite toy.



Each classroom also has one or more “grandmas” or “grandpas” who come downstairs regularly each week to read stories aloud to the children. The joy of simply being together in authentic relationships is more important than the activity.



The research to support the benefits of intergenerational programming is strong and consistent. Long-term studies show lasting benefits to young and old who live and work together. Children who spend a significant amount of time with senior adults demonstrate improved vocabulary and advanced social skills, particularly in the areas of inclusiveness and empathy. In the older population, spending time with children alleviates boredom, loneliness and helplessness.

According to Amy, their experience that first year was more successful than she could ever have dreamed. She says, “It is amazing to see the power the children have in bringing out the very best in our grandmas and grandpas upstairs. Women who initially wouldn’t participate in any other social activities came out of their rooms to spend time with the children...Another person is consistently in a surly mood when we arrive for music and initially refuses to participate, but can’t take her eyes off the children and is laughing

when we leave. When two of our ‘grandparents’ got sick and temporarily went into a nursing home, visits from the children boosted their spirits for days.” The director of nursing at the senior residence told Amy, “Those kids are like an antidepressant for the seniors.”

It is clear that the presence of seniors allows the children to rise to their very best as well. Children who typically move at full speed can walk quietly and cautiously upstairs so as not to hurt the grandmas and grandpas. A boy whose main interest is pretending to blow things up can play “Go Fish” for thirty minutes with his favorite grandpa. They learn to greet the seniors by shaking hands and making eye contact. A parent of one of the preschool children says, “As I watch my daughter greet various seniors in the hallway as we walk to her classroom in the morning, I notice the easy, casual manner of their brief conversations – simple and heartfelt. The building feels as though it is filled with an extended family.”



Now in its eleventh year of operation, All Seasons Preschool in Inver Grove Heights has grown to serve about forty-five children from ages two to five. Amy’s and Sarah’s original dream has become a model intergenerational program. Staff from All Seasons present workshops and speak at conferences about the benefits for both children and older adults, always hoping the mission will spread. However, there are still very few preschools that genuinely integrate young and old on a daily basis, as well as giving both groups access to exploring the natural world just outside their doors.

So, All Seasons is creating a second preschool: *All Seasons of Eagan*. The new preschool is under construction as part of the Lexington Pointe senior residence on the corner of Lexington and Yankee Doodle Road. It is on schedule to open its doors in September. It will replicate the successful intergenerational, nature- and arts-based model of the first All Seasons, making the program accessible to more families in the Twin Cities. As the demand for quality programs for children and the demand for senior housing both continue to grow, All Seasons pairs the two groups of people who not only need some of the same things, but who can provide them for each other.

## The Evolving Ateliers or Reggio Emilia

*Lani Shapiro*

*“The Reggio Emilia approach is not a recipe. It doesn’t tell you what to do. It’s an educational approach rooted in Reggio Emilia, one that asks you to be respectful and mindful of your context and community – to be aware of*

*questions like*

*where your children come from, where they live, what their days are like, what they miss or want, to be able to welcome the children and their culture.*

*To think that it is a model to implement (that is, to do it in any other way) is to betray the approach.”*

Tiziana Fillippini

The Reggio Approach is an educational project which has evolved over decades in its particular context. Reggio has constructed itself as a learning community engaged in continuous and audacious research about the process of learning and the work of teaching. Like other aspects of the Approach, the concept and experience of the *atelier* has grown and changed over time. The *atelier* was initially conceived of as a place for thinking and research. As early as 1963, Loris Malaguzzi said,

*“a school made up of assemblies of ateliers, laboratories, of places where the children’s hands rather than being bored, can enthusiastically converse anew with their minds.”*



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Linking head and hand, the *atelier* was a context which welcomed [the 100 languages](#) to promote inquiry and investigation, strengthen relationships among children and connect various fields of knowledge. It would be

*“...a sort of guarantee that our educational experience will remain fresh and imaginative, help the experience not to be trapped in routine and habit.”*

Though the *atelier* is certainly an invitation to artful work, it is not an art studio. This *atelier* was *designed to disrupt* and to challenge indifference. The culture of the *atelier* promotes dialogue between materials, space and children. Children and teachers engage in parallel processes of representing, revisiting, communicating and reworking their theories. Not only do children work in the *atelier* to symbolically represent their ideas and make them contestable; the *atelier* is also the context for teachers and *atelieristi* to create documentation for children, families and colleagues, to discuss, debate and archive thinking.

In the 1980's, along with the *atelier* in each preschool, *mini-ateliers* in or close to each classroom were added, to challenge the boundary between the studio and the rest of school life. These small spaces privilege children and teachers working in small groups. The *mini-ateliers* offer daily experience in using various languages and more time on investigations and projects.

Today, the *atelier* and *mini-atelier* continue, with the addition of *City Ateliers* in public settings such as the Malaguzzi International Center, or in connection with exhibits. There, everyone, aged 0 – 99, is invited to explore materials or ideas with their own hands, individually or in a group. *City Ateliers* are contexts to explore materials, for instance, light, shadow, clay or paper. Other *City Ateliers* focus on processes like photography, digital media, mark-making or taste.

During a 2019 study tour, a block of time was set aside for participants to visit one of several *City Ateliers*. I chose *The Secrets of Paper Atelier* which offered an abundance of well-organized “intelligent materials” and unusual, provocative tools.





The *atelier* is a place to research materials, processes and encounter the familiar as if new. It is designed to provoke curiosity, invite thinking, challenge ideas and promote the exchange of perspectives. So, the *atelier* is both a physical space and an intellectual disposition.



*“An atelier first and foremost involves adults looking at materials – engaging our emotions – what surprises us, what annoys us, what interests us – we must feel it first of all, ourselves, as adults.”*

Marina Mori

We worked amidst traces of work from earlier visitors and rough drafts of possible exhibit panels constructed by *atelieristi*. I was intrigued by this in-between state. The drafts were no more than a masking tape outline on the floor with tentative placement of objects and draft description. In this way we witnessed work-in-progress, others' thinking made visible.



Some participants explored as individuals, exploring and selecting from the array of papers and tools and possible operations.



Others operated cooperatively, constructing new, shared understandings as a learning group.



A notable feature of the Reggio experience is its commitment to take its local context seriously: to create, reflect, discuss, compare and confront their particular experience, whether in the *atelier*, with materials, with work structures, in the design of spaces or the work of documentation. As a result, their work continues to unfold. In 2020, the *atelier* experience can be found in schools, in classrooms, and in public venues to include all ages.

*“...to preserve, also in adults, some of the features you can find in children - curiosity, attention to research, courage, empathy, creativity, vital energy - that we keep until the end of our lives and help us to live better.”*

Vea Vecchi

For if adults do not know, experience or recognize the possibilities of the materials we offer, how can we welcome a “hundred languages” to children in the school context?

### **Further Reading**

*Vea Vecchi (2010) Art and Creativity in Reggio Emilia: Exploring the Role and Potential of Ateliers in Early Childhood Education.*

*Lella Gandini, Lynn Hill, Louise Boyd Cadwell, Charles Schwall eds. (2015) In the Spirit of the Studio.*

*Vea Vecchi*

<https://theartofeducation.edu/content/uploads/2015/05/Chapter-7-Role-of-Alt..pdf>

*David Oh, Atelier as a revolution.*

<http://teacherdavidoh.com/2018/04/30/atelier-as-a-revolution-study-tour-2018/>

## **RINM Gathering**

*Emily Benz*

This January’s “Collage and Printmaking with Young Children” gathering was a hands-on textural feast in the art studio at The Blake School. Kim Lane, Blake’s Lower School art teacher at the Hopkins Campus, led the group through a joyful three-hour exploration of collage and printmaking techniques. As an adult often busy with the responsibilities of life, I was thrilled to have the opportunity to be a student in the studio and became so thoroughly immersed in the process, I could have happily gone on for a couple of hours more.

We began the morning with tempera paint soaked in felt and simple tools; a textured wheel from a toy, ridged cardboard triangle, a wooden block with string tied around the middle were some examples, and we used these simple tools to create patterns on brightly colored sheets of paper. Some made simple and clean patterns, others made highly complex prints with layered colors.



Colors and tools moved from table to table, and people did, too, when they felt moved to try another hue. The process was simple and the results were bright and surprising. I felt bathed in color and light as I saw our prints on the drying rack. It was easy to see how very young children could delight in this kind of printmaking

Then it was time to cut out shapes to create printing plates. We used white card stock and cut it up and glued it onto cardboard plates to create our plates. Some were experts with the scissors and created intricate patterns inspired from nature, others made bold and abstract work with thicker pieces.



I myself cut many different small lines and then let my image show itself to me as I played with the tactile lines on the cardboard. It turned out to be a stick house, inspired by the many similar structures my children built and played in at Dodge Nature Center and Blake.

Kim then offered trays full of colorful piles of paper individually painted to use for collage. In her studio, children mix these complex colors and paint them onto paper during one class period. Then, at their next session, these same painted papers are offered for collage, giving the work a different depth.



Again, scissors in hand, we quietly snipped the satisfyingly textured paper and ideas emerged both abstract and realistic as we lost ourselves in the process.



After finishing our own collages, we took the time to see some of the Kindergarteners' collages in the hall; my favorite was an elaborate collage of an exploding ice cream shop, with many tiny red and orange

pieces intricately arranged to fashion the explosion dramatically on black paper. Ms. Lane pointed out that pieces don't even have to be cut to make collages like this, they can be torn instead.

We ended the morning seeing some examples of cardboard collage puppet animals, (a lemur in a beret was a standout) and then creating our final print plates by drawing firmly into Styrofoam plates and then rolling them with black ink and pressing them into bright sheets of paper. The process was crisp and satisfying.

I was struck again and again by the simple materials offered and the visually arresting results that came out of our guided exploration with them. As a parent of Blake fourth and first graders, I've long admired the projects that my children bring home from Ms. Lane's studio. But to be a student in the studio myself opened up a whole new appreciation for all of the subtle magic that happens for the children there. To go through that process as an adult, whether as a parent or an educator, is invaluable. It allows us to see the potential for making art with ordinary objects, to savor the gift of slowing down time, and to experience the knowledge through exploration of materials. The time and space and materials to make art – whether in an art studio, a dedicated space in the classroom or on a kitchen table – encourages quiet meditation, critical thinking, collaboration and playfulness. And as Ms. Lane reminded us very importantly, we don't need much in the way of materials to create these rich and empowering opportunities for the children in our care.

## Shop and Support

Do you shop on Amazon? Use Amazon Smile: [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com) when shopping at Amazon and designate the Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota to accept their donation. Amazon will donate .5% of your shopping total directly to the Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota with no expense to you!

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