



Inspiring News and Events

From the Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota

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Editor's Introduction

Lani Shapiro



The Reggio Emilia educational project, “to raise a new generation of critical thinkers who could take responsibility for themselves and for others” was born in response to the experiences of living under authoritarian rule and World War II. The citizens of Reggio Emilia understood that

the dispositions and capacities to operate as free and responsible adults are learned and internalized when children are young.

In “Unpacking Democracy, Part II,” I elaborate on the theme of democratic participation to highlight practical strategies that support listening, dialogue, diversity, critical thinking and participation for the common good, drawing both from local experience and work from Reggio. Sandy Burwell brings an update on the progress of the Loose Parts Laboratory project, which supports new uses for recycled and re-purposed materials. It’s an example of committed individuals working collaboratively for a creative civic initiative. From the St. Paul School of Northern Lights, Reba Batalden shares “Teachers and the Atelier,” a collaborative work of educators in the studio and the classroom. Reba’s second contribution, “Democracy in Action,” documents how “*the ordinary daily practice of democratic participation leads to advocacy by the children.*” In this edition of the newsletter you will also find an invitation to a special Network gathering, “Rekindle Relationships, Celebrate Accomplishments & Discover Resources.” Save the date, Friday May 20th.

Regular features appear at the end of each issue which identify scholarship opportunities and call for proposals. You can learn more about the North American Reggio Emilia Alliance, about how to access the public library system’s collection of Reggio Children publications, how to apply to current Reggio-inspired job postings and how to donate to the Network when you shop at Amazon through links provided at the end of the newsletter.

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 contributors for their generosity, time and collaboration in making their thinking visible.

The Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota Annual Meeting and Celebration

Rekindle Relationships, Celebrate Accomplishments & Discover Resources

Friday, May 20, 2022, 6:30-8:30 PM
Short program and introductions at 7:00 PM

Loose Parts Resource Center at Belle’s Toolbox
3400 42nd Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN 55406

[Register by May 18, 2022. \\$5.00 per person](#)

Carpooling encouraged, parking on the street, bus stop at 3400 42nd St.
Masks required indoors.

- Enjoy appetizers and beverages
- Shop at the Loose Parts Resource Center
- Learn about the program at Belle’s Toolbox
- Share your thoughts and ideas about RINM programs
- Re-new old relationships and make new ones with Network members
- Explore and discover the many resources offered by the Network
- Create a Group Art Project
- View Loose Parts documentation from area centers and schools
- Participate in the on-line Silent Auction

Latest News on Loose Parts

Sandy Burwell

Sandra’s professional career includes over 50 years in education as a teacher, director, supervisor, mentor and educational coordinator for children birth through high school but primarily early childhood. Presently, she is a consultant and presenter for professional development inspired by the philosophies of Reggio Emilia and Maria Montessori in the areas of authentic experiences, material exploration and the environment.

“We are at our best when we serve others. Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead



This quote speaks to me about the Reggio-Inspired Network in general and the Loose Parts Laboratory in particular. Our initiative is making small changes in our own small context. For many years, members of the Network have talked and dreamed and attempted to create a resource center where donated materials could be purchased for a very low cost in order to

recycle, re-purpose and reduce waste in order to re-imagine experiences for children. Through the work of our thoughtful committed members we have created an instrument for change.

Our soft opening on March 26 was a joy-filled occasion - to actually have shoppers visiting our venue and purchasing "beautiful stuff." A Grand Opening celebration is planned for Friday evening, May 20th, 6:30 to 8:30 PM. Please come for our annual end-of-the-year social gathering. There will be refreshments, a short presentation, information about the work of the Network, visiting, shopping and an auction. Look for prizes to be announced soon on our Facebook page.

Mission: 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.

Updates and Particulars

E-mail: loosepartslabmn@gmail.com

Facebook page: [Loose Parts Laboratory: Materials Center Project Minnesota](#)

Be sure to check out the video on our Facebook Page.

Instagram: [@loose_parts_laboratory](#)

Address: 3400 42nd Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN 55406

Website for our host Lucy Elliott: <http://www.belles-toolbox.org>

In an attempt to start slowly - navigating our way in this new venture, we have set up a summer plan. We are offering an introductory \$30. membership for the summer months which will entitle you to shop for materials at no additional cost, on any or all of the nine days we will be open:

June 14, 16 and 18
July 12, 14 and 16
August 16, 18, and 20

Non-members are asked to make a free-will contribution each visit. Memberships will be available for purchase on Saturday April 23 and Friday May 20th with cash or check as well as on-line at <https://www.mnreggio.org/Donate>



Wondering how you can support this initiative?

- Volunteer to work (Sign up on May 20th or by e-mail)
- Spread the word about the opportunity to obtain unique materials at very low prices
- Make contacts/Collect materials from reupholsterers; kitchen/bathroom remodelers; wallpaper stores; framers; lumberyards...
- Send images and reflections of your work with children

Progress to Date

- Found a location
- Began advertising
- Investigated funding
- Determined a name
- Formed a dedicated Steering Committee
- Established an agreement between the Reggio-Inspired Network and Belle's Toolbox
- Began writing articles for the Newsletter
- Visited other programs, in-person and on Zoomg articles for the Newsletter

Goals for the Near Future

- Assemble a consistent and dedicated group of volunteers to help with work going forward – staff sale days, stock/replenish materials and pick-up business donations
- Make contact with fairs and festivals and investigate grant applications
- Prioritize future goals

"Children learn most readily and easily in a laboratory-type environment where they can experiment, enjoy and find out things for themselves. 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."

Simon Nicholson, Architect and Developer of The Theory of Loose Parts

Teachers and the Atelier

Reba Batalden

Rebecca Batalden is a freelance writer and editor living in St. Paul. She co-founded and currently serves as Board Chair of St. Paul School of Northern Lights, a Reggio-inspired K-8 school. Rebecca holds a Ph.D. in Ecology and during her graduate tenure developed and taught inquiry-based, interdisciplinary curriculum for elementary teachers and professional development courses for middle and high school science teachers. She serves on the board of the Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota.

Integral to the Reggio educational approach is the reciprocal collaboration between teachers and atelierista and the classroom and atelier in the school. Traditional US schools may have an art specialist but to see the atelierista as an art teacher is to fail to recognize the value and depth an atelierista brings to students' learning and teachers' guidance and instruction. As Loris Malaguzzi described, the atelierista is fundamental to and indivisible from this model of learning:

The irruption of the atelier and the atelierista intentionally disturbed the old model of schools for young children, which had already been distanced by the simultaneous presence of two teachers in each class, the collegial nature of the work and family participation through social management. Hence the genesis of the atelier was coincidental with the genesis of a new educational project - systemic, secular, modern.

At St. Paul School of Northern Lights, a Reggio-inspired K-8 school, the atelierista, Hannah Longley, is in continuous dialogue with classroom teachers, and they work reciprocally to enhance teaching and learning in both spaces. In particular, this article will describe a project exploring mealworm bodies, life cycles and habitats between a kindergarten classroom and the studio. As a founder of Northern Lights, I held many hopes and dreams for this emerging school and bear witness to the collaborative work between classrooms and the atelier as a true joy.

My son, Sam, is in kindergarten at Northern Lights, so I have an additional lens through which I can see the impact of this work. While this project started in the fall and the details I'm sharing occurred in early winter, I still get daily updates from him on the mealworms. Michele Caputo, the kindergarten teacher, also sees this same unending fascination in the classroom. Children take the mealworms out from their habitat daily to make observations and use them as models for collage-making, clay sculpting or drawing.

To facilitate their synergistic relationship, Michele and Hannah meet weekly to discuss plans and find common threads by each sharing and reflecting on photographs and videos of students'

learning. This partnership is fostered within the school model as every Friday is an early release for students, and the time is reserved for staff to engage in professional development and collaboration. Furthermore, throughout the week Michele and Hannah continue to pass photos and videos between one another via Google photos.

The genesis for a specific project usually begins with students' questions. In the classroom, they might approach the question from a scientific lens by making observations and developing hypotheses. Work in the studio allows the children to continue making observations, but the entire process is by necessity slowed down and approached differently as various art mediums are introduced. Additionally, Michele emphasizes the incredible benefit of only sending a third of the class to visit the studio at a time. This allows Hannah to focus and guide students with much more individual attention. Meanwhile, the other two-thirds of the students engage in a related story workshop in the classroom.

For this particular project, in the classroom Michele and the students had been observing the mealworms and their life cycle. Meanwhile, in the studio, Hannah introduced large-scale paintings, with all students collaborating on one giant piece of paper, and Eric Carle illustrations, collages of painted textured paper. To integrate the learning, Hannah offered kindergarteners curated colors of paint, in various shades of browns like mealworm bodies, and the students could add layers of paint to paper.



Hannah noticed students planning their work days in advance: painting a single layer, letting it dry and coming back another day to paint a second layer in a different color. Then, on yet another day, students could carve designs with specific tools (i.e., screws, popsicle sticks, straws, or clay tools) to produce the markings they observed on the mealworm bodies in their classroom. Finally, students cut the paper they had designed into shapes resembling the body of the mealworm.



Meanwhile, the work in the classroom progressed from observing mealworms and their life cycle to thinking together about what mealworms need in their habitat. So, Hannah projected photographs of mealworm habitat onto the wall, and students played with their mealworms in the habitat.



Michele saw the students bring the work they had done in the studio back into the classroom. While students might explore mealworm bodies in the studio with paint, in the classroom they sometimes chose to sculpt a mealworm from clay. Again, this forced students to slow down their observations and look differently at the mealworms. Some noticed additional details as they were representing them in 3-D with clay as opposed to with paint. Because their studio time was in smaller groups, Hannah was able to introduce art materials and concepts and collaborate closely with each student to guide their exploration and learning. Back in the classroom, with a larger group, kindergarteners continued to use materials with more independence and confidence. Michele sees independence as a hugely important concept for kindergarteners and seeks multiple ways to facilitate this in her classroom. The gifts of this collaboration extend beyond one

particular lesson or project and impact multiple aspects of teaching and learning.

Collaboration between atelierista and classroom teacher is not limited to kindergarten. When the school's upper classroom studied systems in science (e.g., the solar system or the human body,) Hannah asked them to consider ways they could metaphorically represent ideas of self through systems. So, for those students studying human anatomy, the different parts of the body could represent important people or formative places. Hannah sees younger children move easily between "metaphor and imagination, between fantastical and realism. With older children, a lot of what I'm trying to find is the place of opening up between those realms."

Northern Lights sees inspiration in the atelierista and the atelier and fosters collaboration between the specialist teachers and the classroom.

"No one in Reggio wants to teach others how to 'do school.' What we seek to do rather is to try and deepen our understanding, together with others, of why it was possible in Reggio Emilia for an (educational) experience founded after the war, to grow and consolidate with time.... What we want to do is look together for the values we might have in common, in order to build a better tomorrow."

Amelia Gambetti

Unpacking Democracy Part II

Lani Shapiro

Now retired, Lani was an early childhood educator teaching both typical and special rights children and their adults (parents and teachers) for more than 40 years. She is a founding member of the Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota, is a current Board member, works on the Network's Communication Committee and facilitates its Book Study. She is particularly interested in the infrastructural aspects of the Reggio project.

*"Education is an opportunity for the growth and emancipation
of the individual and collective;
it is a resource for gaining knowledge and for learning to live together;
it is a meeting place where
freedom, democracy, and solidarity
are practiced
and where the value of peace is promoted."*

Reggio Children

An often overlooked aspect of the Reggio Approach is that it **animates a democratic society** through its values, structures and practices. This is evident at every level – within the schools, with families, in the management of the schools and in relationship with the city, the country and international partners, but it all starts with the youngest citizens, the children in the infant-toddler centers and preschools. This is where habits, dispositions and principles, essential for democratic life are rooted, introduced and practiced.

Some of those habits and dispositions were introduced in [Part I of Unpacking Democracy](#). They

include **deep listening, a capacity for dialogue, the ability to think critically and a desire to work collaboratively for the common good as the foundation for democratic life.**

Value Difference

Valuing difference is both acknowledging and seeking multiple identities, practices and points of view. This represents both a disposition and a constellation of pedagogical decisions.

“Accepting, respecting and valuing the differences in others is a great ethical choice, which is possible for every modern person. Differences are not a problem that we annul or eliminate. They are a resource and an opportunity.”

Sergio Spaggiari, 2004

Since diversity is an asset, it makes sense to plan for different group structures and composition – large group, small group and individual – and notice the range of perspectives that emerge. Consider how diverse abilities, age groups and home languages add richness to your setting. Select tools that will enhance exploration and provoke surprise. Provide a range of expressive media: clay, wire, digital, marker, pencil, paint, etc. to explore ideas. Reflect on how each medium impacts and challenges understanding. Offer contrasting media to deepen a common theme. In addition to the voices of the children, seek input from families, community and colleagues. Each decision can support democratic life.

Be Curious

To focus your curiosity, ask yourself, “*what do I wonder*”... about the learners, their approaches to learning, the work of teaching and learning, particular areas of learning, learners at different ages or stages of life or particular interests of individuals?

Deep listening invites both speakers and listeners into unexpected terrain. Consider uncertainty, doubt and error as resources in education.

Use Language With Care

Dialogue is enriched when you are genuinely curious about others’ beliefs, assumptions, or theories and when peers share group work. Language is intertwined with deep listening, a capacity for dialogue and the ability to think critically.

Consider all the possible “think about questions” you might pose, rather than “do you know questions.” For the ‘think about’ questions to be effective, you must listen (with all your senses) and build upon what follows.

I would like to know more...

Some aspect that interests me....

This is very interesting....

You started to say....

I am wondering....

And then...?

Maybe...

Does this remind you of anything?

What do you think about this?

I wonder...?

Do you mind if I ask...?

What do you think about...?

Would you mind sharing more...?
I'm curious...?
In which way does...?
What might happen if...?
I wanted to know...
What do you suppose happens when...?
So it is...?
Why do you suppose this happens?
So what aspect impresses...?
How do you think this happens?

I see, so... ?
What are the possible consequences?
Is it...?
Do you see any patterns? Has this happened before?
Why... ?
What did you notice when...?
Can I say something?
What was it like when...?

Offer language that children can borrow to support peer exchange and genuine listening:

I think...
My idea is...
In my opinion...
Thanks for sharing your opinion. I have a different one. Here's mine...
It's ok that you don't agree with my opinion. We can have different points of view.
I respect your opinion. I have a different one that I'd like to share with you.

Think about the way your decisions about space, materials, tools and time affect conversation.



Use Documentation as an Invitation for Exchange

Pedagogical documentation is a process which makes this listening, thinking, learning and teaching visible and consequently subject to reflection, interpretation, dialogue and exchange. The point of pedagogical documentation is not to establish what the learner can do, but how the learner is thinking about what he/she is doing. As an iterative and recursive process, documentation continuously generates new questions and challenges. As educators listen, observe, inquire and relaunch, learners experience different perspectives and uncertainties,

growing in their capacity to construct knowledge and appreciate complexity.

When you collect traces, you are simultaneously documenting the learner's process, your work as a teacher and communicating what you deem important. Documentation is an interpretation of what you see; it defines, refines and reveals your values. Documentation takes many forms: daily traces, photos and transcription, video, sketches; project narratives; class/school/public exhibits; publications; presentations for study.



These elements are useful as they are shared and contested, allowing new points of view to enter and inviting others to propose avenues to extend this process. Share traces with an individual, with a small group or large group, families or other educators. Find a venue to make your ongoing work public, such as a library.

“Sharing the documentation means participation in a true act of democracy, sustaining the culture and visibility of childhood ... a product of exchange and visibility.”

Carla Rinaldi



In participation with others, documentation becomes a democratic tool.

"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 found on these concepts: and in our opinion, so, too, is democracy itself."

Paola Cagliari, Angela Barozzi and Claudia Giudici



Liberty
is like
a perfumed air...

Watch Video

Foundations for democratic life ARE BUILT upon being curious, using language carefully to promote exchange and practicing pedagogical documentation to promote transparency and participation. Since how children are treated when they are very young profoundly affects how they will live the rest of their lives, historian Timothy Snyder points out that a *"free country thrives over generations."* A free society is strengthened when its citizens think critically, compare diverse points of view, vet sources and consider the common good. These values, structures and practices are central to the Reggio Emilia project.

Democracy in Action

Reba Batalden

Rebecca Batalden is a freelance writer and editor living in St. Paul. She co-founded and currently serves as Board Chair of St. Paul School of Northern Lights, a Reggio-inspired K-8 school. Rebecca holds a Ph.D. in Ecology and during her graduate tenure developed and taught inquiry-based, interdisciplinary curriculum for elementary teachers and professional development courses for middle and high school science teachers. She serves on the board of the Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota.

Reggio-inspired education calls us to recognize students as active participants in democratic life. Within a community of learners, democratic participation is modeled and encouraged through ordinary daily practices, such as a morning meeting or a classroom discussion with an exchange of ideas and differing viewpoints. A well-functioning democratic society also depends on its citizenry being advocates for change and the betterment of the entire community. Again, for a school, those citizens include children who, by their very natures, are capable and effective advocates.

"The child is not a citizen of the future; he (sic) is a citizen from the very first moment of life and also the most important citizen because he represents and brings the 'possible'...a bearer,

here and now of rights, of values, of culture...It is our historical responsibility not only to affirm this but to create cultural, social, political and educational contexts which are able to receive children and dialogue with their potential for constructing human rights."

Carla Rinaldi

At St. Paul School of Northern Lights, a Reggio-inspired K-8 school, students are living this in ordinary daily practices and extraordinary acts of generosity and care. Now in its third operational year, and the third school year impacted by a pandemic, the school community is close-knit, deeply caring and thriving. This past fall, a group of six students from the school's oldest classroom, organized and ran a fundraiser for the school library. According to Madeline, one of the student fundraisers, the idea came from an overheard conversation, perhaps taken out of context, where Valija Springstead, the librarian, remarked that she would soon have to stop buying books. Clearly, that is not acceptable at all when you are in middle school and love to read! So, the students hatched a plan and organized a bake sale.

Entirely on their own, the students brainstormed tasks that needed doing and various categories of baked goods to offer, taking care to accommodate those with gluten or dairy intolerances and even treats for dogs! Students assigned each other categories of baked goods to make. They generated shopping lists, made the treats in their homes and brought them to school. Valija found the effort and attention the students took to ensure that everyone in the community could participate inspiring.

The group of students, wanting the endeavor to be a surprise for the school librarian, interviewed Valija under the guise of a school project on data collection. Through this they gathered information about what the library most needed to function, and one item that bubbled up was the need for rolls of clear tape for binding books and adding barcodes. Madeline explains, "Clearly nobody wants to just donate expensive rolls of tape, so we offered them to be donated in exchange for one of the baked goods. We also let people pay with money, which was the main encouragement since that's what Valija needed."

As anyone who has managed a school bake sale knows, the sale itself was a huge undertaking as well. The fundraiser took place over the school's lunch periods, and again students managed to set up the booth, sell their goods and keep track of the proceeds over an entire week of sales. According to Madeline, "The hardest part was communicating how much food we had to offer. And on Friday, the last day, we had a whole class order of our most popular item! It was long gone at the time." Also, as this was done during school hours, the main customers were fellow students. So, this facet was also student-led as they all needed to remember to bring money from home, survey the treats, negotiate which to buy and plan ahead for more treats later in the week with their available funds. The fundraiser was organized by the community, for the community and involved the entire community.

By all accounts the bake sale was a smashing success. They raised an astounding \$2,332.95 plus donations of books...and tape! They managed to keep it a secret from Valija too. Valija wrote at the time:

When entering the office Friday afternoon to return the vacuum, I was met with

shouts of 'Don't look!' and 'Stay out!' Before I covered my eyes, I glimpsed your kids around the large table counting piles of cash. They asked me to guess how much was there. I guessed \$623.54 and they howled with delighted derision. So I was literally gobsmacked when I read the total in the newsletter! In addition to the boxes of books donated by many families, this support for the library is incredible.

Now, Valija notices that since the fundraiser, students feel more ownership and community over the library. Students regularly let her know what books they would like to see more of and what they need. This both helps Valija know what they are interested in and gives students a stake in the library. In addition, classroom libraries are popping up throughout the school, also student driven, and another class organized a fundraiser for the oceans. Democracy thrives when citizens are educated and engaged. Northern Lights seeks to do both, and its students are living these values.

And, since a free press is the fourth estate of a functioning democracy, it should come as no surprise that the latest plan from this group of students is to start a pair of rival newspapers!

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](#)

Call for Participation

The Outreach and Growth Committee has started to plan the Monthly Gatherings for the 2022-23 school year. The Network broadened during the pandemic as we met via the Zoom platform, and we are excited to continue a virtual component for all our gatherings. This means that you can participate as a host/presenter even if you are not living in the Minneapolis/ St Paul area! We look forward to engaging with participants from all over the US and the world! Here is the link: <https://forms.gle/pHMzedRfNoxd9NTJ6>

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/>.

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.

Even with COVID-19 restrictions, the Debra Fish Library resources continue to be 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.

Job Opportunities

There are a number of positions currently available. Click here for current job postings: www.mnreggio.org/jobsforum

Shop and Support

Do you shop on Amazon? Use Amazon Smile: [smile.amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com/smile) 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 network at no expense to you!



Hearts & Minds
PRESCHOOL & DAYCARE



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