



Summer 2013

Volume 2, Issue 4

Inspiring News and Events

from the Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota

Balance. Inspire. Connect. Develop. Collaborate. These words resonate as you read this Summer Issue of the Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota Newsletter.

This edition of the Newsletter will introduce you to exciting offerings proposed by the Network's Outreach and Growth Committee for the 2013-2014 school year to strengthen professional and civic understanding of the educational project from Reggio Emilia. These events are one aspect of our multi-tiered plan that offers us a chance to come together, collaborate and learn. We look forward to your participation.

Christy Spencer's reflection on a summer Community Conversation highlights the collaborative and unfolding nature of Reggio-inspired work. Joanne Esser profiles project work from a local elementary school. An article by Sandy Burwell provides an historical context to our local professional activities. Keep reading to identify new titles and local sources for borrowing Reggio-inspired literature through your public library.

Calendar of Events

Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota

By Barbara Murphy on behalf of the Outreach and Growth Committee

This year the Reggio Inspired Network of Minnesota is planning a series of Saturday Morning Gatherings, an exciting annual Spring Event, a mini-series of three environment tours*and two Reggio-inspired tracks for regional early childhood conferences that are intended not only to create deep connections to the philosophy of the educational project of the schools of Reggio Emilia, but also to allow participants to connect with each other.

It is our hope to begin to establish a greater sense of community among our members. We aspire to provide opportunities for regular dialogue, camaraderie and mutual support. These events are one aspect of our multi-tiered plan to begin offering educational, inspirational and transformational events that focus on professional development for educators, educational information for families and community members, and the role that civic engagement and social justice play in the philosophy.

A newly formed Outreach and Growth Committee has been charged with making this dream a reality. While this year's schedule of events is just a



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



Newsletter Eds.
Joanne Esser - Content
Patti Loftus - Content

beginning step in the process of fully developing our plan, we would like to invite all of our members to make a commitment to participate in as many of these events as possible. 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!

[For an overview of upcoming events, click here and then click on the link titled 2013-2014 Network Events.](#)

*Note: The mini-series of environment tours will be on January 25, February 22 and March 29. The mini-series is designed to create wisdom together by observing, reflecting, discussing and touring three schools that are in their first stages of a Reggio-inspired journey. More information about the mini-series will be posted on our website and in the next edition of the newsletter coming in November.

Outreach and Growth Committee Members

Kate Arbon, Jamie Brother, Sandy Burwell, Tina Gatsky, Dawn Lees, Barbara Murphy and Joey Schoen.

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



Community Conversation Reflection Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota

July 14, 2013

by Christy Spencer, in dialogue with Tami Eshult, Joanne Esser, Rie Gilsdorf, Patti Loftus and Lani Shapiro

The **Community Conversation** was convened around the question: *What is the 'it' that makes work Reggio-inspired?* A community of

parents, teachers and citizens gathered to think together about this intriguing question. But it would be a mistake to imagine that this was the first step in this process. The conversation was connected to and built on a series of recent events. The Network and the University of Minnesota Lab School hosted an event last March called, "**Enter, Encounter, Engage**". A reflection on that event raised some compelling questions,

Upcoming Events

Saturday, September 28th Welcoming Children and Families to Establish a Community

9:00-Noon

The Blake School

Saturday, October 26th Exploring the 100

Languages: Photography

9:00-Noon

St. Paul Childhood Center

Saturday, November 16th Exploring the 100

Languages: Self portraits

9:00-Noon

Shirley G. Moore Laboratory School

Sundays Monthly Book Study

Book study meets one Sunday a month at Open Book's entry level cafe, 3:00 - 4:30. We will continue to study the 3rd Edition of [The Hundred Languages of Children](#). New participants are welcome. Email Patti at pattiroseloftus@gmail.com for more information.

The meetings for this fall are on 10/20 and 11/17. You can also check the calendar at mnreggio.org for dates.

Job Postings

[Assistant Childcare Teacher \(Little Trender, Lakeville](#)

[MN\)](#)

The Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota does not endorse nor guarantee the postings included in the

and those questions led to the convening of this thinking group. The Community Conversation was structured for us to practice engaging in actions that are associated with Reggio thought: to *listen, participate, document and reflect*.



We posed questions that challenged our own thinking, rooted in philosophical underpinnings of Reggio practice. This community conversation was a space for us, as adults, to engage in a process that parallels the one we try to introduce to children: to structure encounters that call for further investigation; to invite collaboration; to work in different modalities, to bring a researcher's mindset; to pose high quality questions that challenge assumptions; to take risks; and to assume failure is a new opportunity.

What resonated with me after leaving the conversation was the question that Nan Kari raised during the debrief: Were the conversations amiable or did they surface tensions? Were we able to challenge each other's assumptions, offer diverse points of view or experience conflict as useful? That left me wondering, how DO we make space to invite productive tension into our conversations? What does that look like? Tension carries a negative connotation, but in this context it can have a more constructive role. Together, we asked, "How do we re-cast tension as an asset? How might tension begin to serve as a lucrative resource, a catalyst for further growth and learning?"

Members of the planning group gathered to review the ideas that surfaced in our small group discussions, each examining the traces from a unique point of view.



We brought together all the notes, comments and reflections we had collected, looking for themes and trends.

Together the Conversation participants described, named or asked questions about the following:

- Reflective practice: being genuinely curious.
 - Observing, listening, questioning and documenting.
- Relationships: respect, participation and collaboration

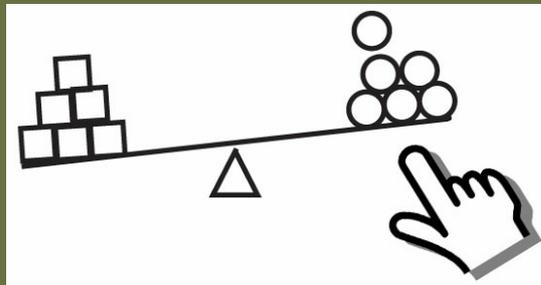
postings included in the newsletter. The job postings are included as a courtesy to local schools and organizations seeking Reggio-Inspired educators.

All correspondence regarding postings should occur independent of the Network.

If you have a job that relates to Reggio inspired work, we would like to publish a link to it in this newsletter. Email information to Patti at pattiroseloftus@gmail.com. We will include the posting in our next newsletter at the end of August.

- Image of the child, role of the teacher, role of the family
- The importance of communication
- Environment and materials as rich resources
- Projects, using 100 Languages
- Time
 - To move slowly with participants
 - To collaborate, document and reflect
- Openness
 - Question dominant narratives
 - Flexibility
- Richness in ordinary moments

We've found ourselves trying to answer the question "What is the *it*?" with a static definition, but we're reminded the 'IT' is a **dynamic process that is constantly changing.**



One of the most persistent themes that emerged was BALANCE of various kinds: between individual and group, organization and flexibility, responsiveness to children and administration, structure (control) and openness, observation and participation, listening and leading. When we welcome a bit of imbalance or dis-equilibrium, productive tensions arise which offer the possibility of new thinking. This challenges both individuals and the collective to practice balancing various interests, concerns and perspectives. The underpinnings of Reggio thought highlight the iterative, collaborative and visible nature of this process, which is both creative and public.

As you reflect on the broader question "what is the 'it' that makes work Reggio-inspired," we invite you to consider some of these more specific questions in your own context. What shifts need to occur in your environment that will allow you to welcome tension into the dialogue?

Where are you currently experiencing imbalance or disequilibrium? And further, how might these tensions and imbalances serve as a catalyst for growth within your individual and collective practice?

"The Reggio Emilia approach is possible where there is nothing, provided there is respect, listening, and time."

- The Hundred Languages of Children, p. 82

Thanks to all the folks who worked before, during and after the Community Conversation...

Planning Committee: Tami Eshult, Patti Loftus, Lani Shapiro, Christy Spencer

Facilitators and Documenters: Kate Arbon, Frances Durkin, Rie Gilsdorf, Barb Murphy, Dennis Gilsdorf, Alaina Kelly, Joanne Esser

Reflection group: Tami Eshult, Joanne Esser, Rie Gilsdorf, Nan Kari, Alaina Kelly, Patti Loftus, Lani Shapiro, Christy Spencer

Photos and graphic: Dennis Gilsdorf

Local Voices - A Hive Of Learning: A Kindergarten Project About Bees

By Joanne Esser



For Marshall Anderson, kindergarten teacher at Friends School of Minnesota in St. Paul, listening deeply to the children is the necessary first step for authentic learning. When he heard them express curiosity about bees, their interest led to an engaging long-term study that involved the entire class.

Last fall Marshall's kindergarten class took a series of field trips connected to the themes of food, gardens and farms. They walked to the community garden down the street, they visited the senior residents of the high-rise building next door to the school to learn about their new raised garden beds, and they went to two farms. After each outing, children were invited to use materials – paper, glue, wax sticks, oil pastels, corn shucks and corn kernels, materials collected at the farms – to express their ideas about the farm and food experiences. Because Marshall's classroom is Reggio-inspired, the children are comfortable using a wide variety of materials to help them reflect and tell the story of their experiences.

It was during his morning meetings that Marshall tapped into the children's curiosity the most. He devoted specific meetings to offering rich, provocative questions. Taking the time to ask better questions and to be a better facilitator during the class meetings resulted in the children learning to ponder a single question longer and go further in their conversations. Marshall's role was to support the children's dialogue with one another and to record the conversations, listening for the "big ideas" that emerged. "I realized the children are learning how to exchange ideas, how to express opinions, have deep conversations. Practicing this regularly as part of our routine informed the bees project that emerged," Marshall said.

After the series of field trips and many opportunities to respond verbally and with materials, Marshall asked the children, “What do you want to know more about?” The dialogue skills the children had developed allowed them to frame and share many questions. After discussing dairy cows, broccoli, corn shucking and winter preparations for gardens, the conversation narrowed to the topic of *bees*, (a shared interest that emerged after the children had seen beehives at both farms).

“With young children, there are infinite possibilities and infinite directions they could go. A ‘project’ can be an afternoon or two months. You have to keep ‘reading’ the children throughout the process,” Marshall said. The choice to pursue a project is based somewhat on the intuition and experience of the teacher, who asks, “What offers the possibility for the most sustained interest, based on the dialogue the children engaged in?”

Marshall has been inspired by the schools in Reggio Emilia for over a decade. He had worked to beautify his classroom space, to organize and make rich materials available to his students and to do project work around topics that were meaningful to the children. But when he visited Opal School in Portland, Oregon, (a pre-K through 5th grade Reggio-inspired school), he got a better sense of how he might take the children’s inquiry process to the next level.

“The question I’ve been asking is not only ‘How do I sustain interest?’ but also ‘How do I create space for children to make deeper connections?’” Marshall said.

In order to support the deeper connections he wanted to foster, Marshall focused on the concept of *“playful inquiry.”* He wanted his kindergartners to enter the state of “relaxed alertness” that leads to absorption, a state of mind in which they could become creative “artist-researchers.” Playful inquiry, as articulated by the Opal School in Portland, gave Marshall a new way to use the aesthetic dimensions of his classroom with the children’s questions to support authentic inquiry. “The concept of playful inquiry, of supporting a ‘high challenge - low risk’ state of mind, has influenced me more than anything in the last two years,” Marshall said.

To create this kind of environment, Marshall said he learned to harness the power of other adults and use all the resources he could find. The mother of one of the children in the class is a beekeeper; she came in dressed in her beekeeper mask and hat and demonstrated her smoker. The sights and smells captivated the children, as did her stories of setting up the hive. “You have to be willing to open up your classroom to the world and to the people around you,” Marshall noted.

One connection led to another. The beekeeper mom sent in a honeycomb slat from her hive and Marshall noticed the children’s fascination with the hexagon shapes. He set up a table in the classroom with pattern blocks, a familiar kindergarten material, at which children could build a model of the honeycomb. Children naturally brought dramatic play to the table, too. The trapezoid blocks became “guard bees” and the triangle shapes became “queen bees.” The children searched in the room for additional representative materials, such as glass beads to represent pollen.



At the same time, Marshall, some parents and some of the children brought in nonfiction books that showed bees' roles and stages. These books were available for browsing near the

pattern blocks table, and children studied them on their own. The children's imaginative play at the model "hive" mirrored the information they were learning about bees. For example, one day "the hive activity centered on the queen and her eggs. Cries of 'Alert! Alert! Robber bees!' and 'Guard bees! Guard bees!' were followed by a flourish of activity as children acted out new learning," according to Marshall.

Reflecting back on the bee project, Marshall recognizes the importance of the collaboration that took place. The school librarian read books aloud about bees; the environmental education



coordinator helped with field trips; the art specialist worked with the children to make large-scale drawings of bees, fragrant beeswax lanterns and ink-and-watercolor paintings of bee life. The music teacher helped the children act out a "dance of the bees" and an artist in residence at the school engaged the children in acting out a story from Greek mythology about Zeus' introduction to honey.

"Learning is thinking together," Marshall said. "That collaboration of seven or eight adults created a lot of energy." The experience helped Marshall learn how to continually open up a project rather than hold on to it too tightly.

"Did I hold on to the project too long?" Marshall asked himself later. One child was heard to say, "I'm kind of tired of studying bees."

But Marshall noticed all the learning that was happening among the children beyond the information they gained about bees. "Besides content, you're also giving the children learning frames, approaches toward new topics that they can carry with them. Their open stances toward learning, their ability to ask questions, their use of materials and tools to get ideas, the way they take initiative - these are all a kind of riot."

[Click here to read more about Marshall's bee project on the Friends School of Minnesota's blog.](#)

Professional Development Looking Back With Reflection, Looking Forward With Intention

By Sandy Burwell

The Minnesota Reggio Network/Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota has been offering professional development opportunities for 15 years. This effort has been a journey of connection and growth. Members of the Network have engaged in a wide range of experiences and, as individuals, have expanded their knowledge about the theory and practice of the Pre-schools and Infant-Toddler Centers in Reggio Emilia as well as the history and context of that area of Italy.

Since collaboration is a key element in this philosophy, something greater than individual growth has occurred. In my opinion, the collective knowledge of the network has also grown, changed and developed into a deeper and more complex understanding of the Reggio approach.

For many years we offered an admittedly arbitrary organization of experiences – Arbitrary in the sense that we never achieved the continuity we had in our vision, organized in the sense that we polled members, evaluated, and tried to offer new possibilities and/or re-offer more well attended experiences. There was always a desire to make a more cohesive yearly program - an elusive dream of a yearly intention that would encompass all the aspects of the network. Ideas remained on our to-do list but were never achieved – one being a Minnesota Study Tour to Reggio Emilia. That now is almost visible on the horizon, whereas years ago it seemed only a distant dream.

Sometimes, growth comes slowly and undetected and sometimes quickly in a burst. But I believe both can happen at once and that is what I see has occurred in the Network.

The journey began in 1998 at the University of Minnesota and, as in all journeys; there were many points at which new energy was infused. MacDonald Montessori was instrumental in keeping the Network work growing by hosting monthly experiences for many years. They, along with the Minnesota Children's Museum were instrumental in bringing the [Hundred Languages of Children exhibit](#) to St. Paul in 2004. The connections and relationships created by the Exhibit's presence, and the accompanying events, remained in the Twin Cities after the Exhibit departed. The energy and joy of those connections kept spreading, interacting and collaborating.

[The SEEING CHILDREN project](#), which began with the Exhibit, is an initiative that has led to ongoing collaboration among local participants. A new Network website was launched in 2009 <http://www.mnreggio.org/> and further spread news of local work. in some cases informing

newcomers to Minnesota of the presence of Reggio-inspired teachers and experiences. As a digital presence, the website also communicated far beyond Minnesota, transcending geography

The NAREA summer conference in 2005 brought Italian educators to the Twin Cities with their passion, energy and extraordinary respect for children. Since 2011, the Network's major spring event – *Enter, Encounter, Engage* – has brought new and unique points of energy each year.

The Outreach and Growth Committee of the Network's Board is launching a 2013 – 2014 year of professional development experiences, expanding upon what has gone before and evidencing the strength of the present Network board and participants.

New Books Added To Library To Honor Service

In the last edition of the newsletter we announced that Reggio-inspired resources are now available through your local public library.

Two more titles have been added to the Debra S. Fish Early Childhood Resource Library.

- **We Write Shapes That Look Like a Book**
- **Dialogues with Places**

These titles have been purchased in honor of Natalie Olsen and Joanne Esser. Their work on this newsletter has been instrumental in giving visibility to local work and moving forward the goals of the Reggio-Inspired Network of MN.

The entire collection (now 15 titles), is part of the Saint Paul Public Library system's catalog www.sppl.org and is available through the statewide virtual library, MnLink at www.mnlinkgateway.org.

Would you like to write a review of one of the books we have added to the library? We would love to hear from you. Please email Patti at pattiroseloftus@gmail.com and let her know what book you would like to review. We look forward to hearing from you.

[Click here for a complete list of books available to check out](#) (this link will take you to a What's New page at mnreggio.com. Scroll down for the list of books)

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Reggio Inspired Network of Minnesota
4431 Colfax Ave. S.
Minneapolis, MN 55419
US

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