



## Inspiring News and Events

from the Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota

*"Good questions are more important than good answers."*

- Carla Rinaldi

This issue of the Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota Newsletter is framed around questions. Whether in homes or schools, dialogue between parents and teachers, on the one hand, and children on the other, is often comprised of questions. However, questioning is not just a strategy or a technique. Does deep and genuine curiosity reside at the core of our questions to children? Our questions reveal what is important to us; they convey what we value.

Damian Corwin poses a fundamental question about our children's place in community. Dennis Gilsdorf, explores questions and questioning in his article "Sometimes the Questions are the Answers." He asks us to "allow ourselves to rest in wonderment and curiosity," and not rush to find solutions. Dennis also offers a questioning framework that might help us all think about how to "rest in wonderment" with the children (and the adults) in our lives.

Earlier this year, the Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota partnered with the Children's Museum for the Seeing Everyday Places project. This project explored the question, "how do children connect with their communities?" Continuing on, we want to know how you have explored this question with the children you work with and we want to help you tell that unique story.

Winter is upon us. For many of us this is a busy time. Take a moment to "rest in wonderment;" slow down and consider the questions that fill your life.

Wishing you well.

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

**Scholarship Winner**



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**Upcoming Events**



We are pleased to announce Damian Corwin as the recipient of the Sandy Burwell Scholarship for Continuing Education. We are excited by his energy, focus, and where he would like to take the knowledge that he gains.

Professionally, Damian has been an actor for the last 10 years, with a heavy focus on improvisation. He has taught through The Children's Theater Company, CLIMB Theater, The Science Museum of MN, Comedy Sportz and the Gibbs Museum. He currently teaches improv to adults through the Brave New Workshop and he teaches teens through the HUGE Improv Theater. He also still performs regularly at HUGE Improv Theater.

He is currently teaching children at KidsPark in the mixed age room with plans to co-teach the Kaper's program for 4-5 year olds.

He has a BA in Theater from St. Mary's University and has actively studied improv over the last 10 years.

As the scholarship winner, Damian will be writing reflections on select Saturday Gatherings.

## Seeing Everyday Places: Connecting Children and their Communities

*A Reflection*  
By Damian Corwin

Listening to the ideas in this Saturday's session, I remembered a book by bell hooks, [All About Love](#), in which she defines love as a verb; I wrote down an analogous thought: "Community is a verb. Needs maintenance."

hooks takes her definition of love from M. Scott Peck's [The Road Less Traveled](#) as "the will to extend oneself for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth." hooks also said in an [interview](#) about her book, "love is really more of an interactive process. It's about what we do, not just what we feel. It's a verb, not a noun."

One could advocate that *community* should be considered from the same perspective. Community engagement, approached as the will to nurture what the whole community is and what the whole community wants to become, opens the door to a whole world of ideas.

It takes "coming up with plans" out of the job description of city planners. It brings to mind the common description of a Reggio-inspired approach

**Saturday, January 10, 2015**  
**Saturday Gathering -**  
**Exploring the 100 Languages**  
**of Children: Clay**  
10:00 - Noon  
Northern Clay Center

**January 30-31st**  
**MNAEYC Annual Conference**  
Saint Paul River Centre

**Saturday, February 21**  
**Saturday Gathering -**  
**Exploring the 100 Languages**  
**of Children: Poetry**  
9:00 - 12:00  
Grace Neighborhood Nursery  
School

**Saturday, March 7**  
**Enter, Encounter, Engage:**  
**Reggio-Inspired Network of**  
**Minnesota 4th Annual Spring**  
**Event**  
8:00 - 4:00  
Hennepin Country Central  
Minneapolis Library

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## 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](mailto:pattiroseloftus@gmail.com) for more information.

The meetings for this winter are 1/18, 2/15 and 3/15.

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

## Job Postings

as “Student lead, Teacher Framed” and suggests that, similarly, as a community organizer, or any other type of leader, one’s job is primarily to listen, understand and support.

Also, *community*, taken as a verb, requires time spent together, like any other loving relationship. For the network of relationships that is a healthy, working community to actually exist, you need to show up, and not just once, or once a year, as for National Night Out, but regularly, or your neighborhood is just a name. Taking habits of active love in families, marriages, etc. and applying them to communities could yield great ideas for staying connected. What are some community-scale equivalents of “dinner together at six every night,” for instance?

Considering this definition in relationship to the session, Seeing Everyday Places, I have these questions: If we hide children in our houses and in the schools and in other “kid areas,” interacting mainly with other minors until they’re eighteen, are our kids truly part of our communities? To what degree and in what ways must children be “seen in everyday places” to emerge from childhood ready for not just independence but *interdependence* in the real world?

Each time I decide to take the time to bring my daughter out and about with me as I run errands and visit friends, instead of getting a babysitter or staying home, I am choosing a community dynamic for my daughter. I choose community over convenience.

## Sometimes The Questions Are The Answers



*By Dennis Gilsdorf and the Pre-K Highcroft Blake team (Patti Loftus, Perry Andrews and Joanne Esser)*

*This article was originally published on the Blake School’s website. It is being re-published here with Dennis Gilsdorf’s permission. [Click on this link](#) and click on the PDF “Questions article by D. Gilsdorf” for the original article (2<sup>nd</sup> PDF from the bottom).*

The simple act of posing a question can be a catalyst to learning and exploration. Questions can facilitate engagement, open up dialogs, and change perspectives. And more often than not, the questions themselves can be the answer if we simply allow ourselves to rest in wonderment and curiosity. In the Pre-K, questions are a central element in how and why we teach young children.

## Willow & Sprout - Part-Time Early Childhood Teacher

Willow & Sprout is a holistic early childhood community in Anthony/NE Minneapolis. They are hiring a part-time early childhood teacher for Thursdays/Fridays (8:00am-5:00pm) beginning January 2015.

### Some interests and responsibilities include:

- Work in collaboration with a small team of teachers to provoke a rich learning environment for young children.
- Be reflective in your work with the other teachers and open to project/inquiry based learning.
- Enjoy the arts and environmental learning/planning with young children ages 16 months-5 years of age.
- Have a degree in early childhood, elementary education or psychology. Some experience working with young children.

If you are interested in applying for this position, please connect with Jen Johnson at [jen@willowandsprout.com](mailto:jen@willowandsprout.com) or 612-850-2019.

If you have a job that relates to Reggio inspired work, we would like to publish a link to it in this

*"The power to question is the basis of all human progress."*

- Indira Gandhi

Any time we enter into a new situation our minds become inundated with questions. Some of those questions arise out of curiosity or excitement while others stem from fear or apprehension. Starting a new school year, or as it is for incoming Pre-K students starting a new school, is a perfect example of this. What will my new school be like? What will the classroom have in it? Will my teachers be nice? Will it be fun or hard? Will I know anyone? Will I make any friends? Why do I have to go to school anyway?

Often when engaged with young children, adults are tempted to try to answer their every question, sometimes to the point of exhaustion - who among us hasn't heard the autopilot response, "because, that's why" come out of our mouths? There is this loving desire to share our knowledge, our stories and our experiences with the next generation. And at times adults may fall into an outdated mindset that children are "empty vessels," which need filling with all the essential information that will enable them to become competent, confident and highly-developed adults. However, the best catalyst to exploration, learning and development can be the simple act of posing a question. Questions can facilitate engagement, open up dialogs and change perspectives. And more often than not, the questions themselves can be the answer if we simply allow ourselves to rest in wonderment and curiosity.



In the Blake Pre-K classrooms, questions are a central element in how and why we teach young children. We view ourselves not only as teachers, but teacher researchers, and as researchers we are just as curious about our world as are our students. As the children enter our classrooms for the very first time at the start of the year, we see each of them as already being competent and in possession of his or her own set of experiences and knowledge. There are no empty vessels coming through our doors. It is through the process of asking questions that we begin to learn about each other. It is through questions that we uncover the understandings that each child possesses. It is through questions that we unlock the ways in which we can guide a child's learning experience. And it is through questions that we develop children's

newsletter. Email information to Patti at [pattiroseloftus@gmail.com](mailto:pattiroseloftus@gmail.com). We will include the posting in our next Quarterly newsletter.

confidence to empower them to go out and seek the answers on their own.

*"Using thoughtful, well-developed, open-ended questions prompts children to explore and experiment. Children create theories about a phenomenon in the world and set off to test their theories. When they share their theories with us adults, in words or through their actions, it helps us understand how they think. Then we, in turn, can nudge them to go to the next step, experimenting further and having conversations about their ideas with others, so they can refine their thinking. It's the scientific process in action in everyday life."*

- Joanne Esser

From the very start as we are preparing the classroom environment we begin exploring this questioning protocol. "How might the children engage with this material?" "In what ways might the children explore this environment?" "How might this be challenging?" "How will every child feel safe, supported and represented here?" Throughout our classroom environments and throughout the year we might post some of our questions, not always to be read by the children, but more as reminders of what brought us to this place of inquiry.

*"Asking good questions is one of a teacher's most powerful tools. Questions are tools in planning, for prompting children's engagement and thinking, and for self-reflection about the process of teaching and learning."*

- Patti Loftus

During our group times you may likely overhear more questions coming from us than answers. Details about how we specifically use a questioning protocol with children are at the end of this article, but suffice it to say that questions are at the core of how we teach. It is the prompt that starts a dialog, draws the children's independent thinking in, and fosters continued engagement.

*"There are times when I think the most important part of our job is how we ask questions, and how we frame them for the children. And when I'm doing my best for them it often seems to be all about the questions, the balls I'm tossing their way."*

- Perry Andrews

Questions also play an important role in how we communicate with others within the learning community. You will frequently find questions posted alongside the display of children's work. These are intended to engage the audience in the learning exploration of the children, to examine the children's experience through the curious eyes of a researcher. And you

will often find embedded in our communications to you a series of questions to be used to prompt conversations with your child about their day.

*"I remember when my son was little and I would ask him about his day all I would get is a one word response such as, 'good,' end of conversation. I wish I knew more about what was going on in the classroom so that I could pose a specific question and engage in an actual dialog."*

- Dennis Gilsdorf

## Questioning Protocol That Might Be Useful

*By Dennis Gilsdorf*

### Questions For Directing Thinking And Discussion

Questions can help guide a child's thinking process. Usually "open-ended" questions tend to encourage more detailed responses. If you ask a "Yes or No" question you are most likely going to end up with a yes or no as a response and perhaps little else. Even a question as innocuous as, "How was your day today?" will tend to be met with a one-word reply. However, posing a more open-ended question such as, "What surprised you the most at the Farmer's Market today?" will be more likely to foster an open discussion.

There are times though when more convergent questions are more productive. For example, "What materials do you need to work on your independent animal investigation?" "What kind of shoes do you think will be the best for hiking in the forest today?" The idea is to use questions to help guide a young child toward independently processing an inquiry and taking ownership of their thinking.

### Questions To Extend The Learning

Instead of simply showing a child how to do something or the solution to a problem, you can use questions to extend his or her thinking. For example, "I see you are very frustrated trying to build that block tower. What would happen if you started with the bigger blocks on the bottom instead of the top?"

### Questions For Critical Thinking

When questions are used as part of the inquiry process, children can truly learn to think for themselves instead of blindly accepting what they are told or coming to believe that there is only one possible answer. In Pre-K we often specifically introduce the "5 Ws" (what, where, who, when, and why) as entry points into critical thinking skills.

### Questions For Creating Conversation And Empathy

As an experiment, sometimes pull back and inhabit a researcher's body while two people are engaged in a conversation. Ask yourself, "Is a

meaningful engaged conversation taking place or is it more like simultaneous monologues where instead of listening, each person is simply waiting his turn to talk?"

Simple questions such as, "How can I help?" "What are you feeling right now?" followed by engaged listening can help to deepen interpersonal.

### **Questions For Creative Problem Solving**

When a child is faced with a challenge, start asking questions. Simple questions like: "What do you know about this already?" "What is it similar to?" "Which ideas have you tried to solve this problem?" "Who do you think could help you with this?" "Where is a good place to work on your idea?" are all great entry points to kick-start the problem-solving process.

### **Questions Can Help Shift Your Perspective**

Statements such as, "Leaves turn color in the fall," tend to trigger our logical and analytical skills. Inherent in them is the conclusion. Questions, on the other hand, can open up a child's imagination and a world of possibilities - some even magical, and that is where creative new ideas and solutions emerge. "Why do you think that every year around this time the leaves begin to change from green to yellow, red, orange, and brown?"

### **Questions As A Way Of Life**

Questions don't have to be seen as a problem to be solved or a hindrance to be surmounted. Rather they are gateways to exploration and connection. And you don't have to get too bogged down by making sure your child comes up with the "right" answer. Sometimes leaving a question unanswered is the best answer, or try following up with another question. "That's a possible answer to why the leaves change color. Do you think there are any other possibilities? What other changes are happening at this time of year?"

By a simple shift of how we explore this world of ours to that of questioning and curiosity we are able to extend the learning beyond the classroom walls and build a habit of mind that is open, flexible, and highly developed. Sometimes the answer is the question.

*"Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves... Live the questions now.*

*Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it,  
Live along some distant day in the answer."*

- Rainer Maria Rilke

## **How Have You Explored Community?**

Since 2004, the Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota (RINM) has

sponsored the SEEING CHILDREN project in different forms. Educators participate by exploring with their children, documenting their process and then exhibiting their work. In this way, we make learning visible and help the community in "Seeing Children" as competent learners. We have displayed our work at conferences, colleges, libraries and more publicly at the Southdale Mall.

Recently, we collaborated with the Minnesota Children's Museum on an initiative called SEEING EVERYDAY PLACES. Educators and parents researched a particular interest of their children relating to community places to be included in a gallery which will be part of the proposed new addition to the Museum.

### **An Invitation**

This year, we are soliciting documentation of experiences in which you have explored *Community*. This could include children's explorations, vision and creation of all things relating to how we connect, relate and experience Community.

### **An Exhibition**

As a way of following up on **SEEING CHILDREN** and **SEEING EVERYDAY PLACES**, RINM is inviting educators to participate by sharing their work on Community. We will exhibit the research at the 4th annual Network Spring event - Enter, Encounter, Engage - to be held March 7, 2015.

### **Collaboration Sessions To Help**

We would like to offer support by holding collaboration sessions 2 or 3 times before the March event. We are also recommending unified methods and materials. If you are interested in participating, please e-mail Sandy Burwell: [smburwell@gmail.com](mailto:smburwell@gmail.com).

**DATES** for collaboration sessions, mornings: January 17 and January 28. Other dates, as needed.

There will be a \$10 fee for materials handed out on January 17 (Tri-fold panel, backing paper and tape).

Contact us at [reggioinspiredmn@gmail.com](mailto:reggioinspiredmn@gmail.com)  
<http://www.mnreggio.org>

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