



Winter 2014

Volume 2, Issue 6

## Inspiring News and Events

from the Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota

The Reggio Approach is built on observation and reflection, documentation and interpretation. These processes interact in a generative spiral, each step informing the next. What does it mean for us to observe and reflect? How do we build upon our documentation? How do we make our interpretations visible so that we invite additional participation and novel points of view? In this edition of the newsletter, we have focused on modeling these practices in the context of local Network events and professional development opportunities. It is our hope that the writing offers you an entry point to a conversation (perhaps with colleagues, perhaps in a letter), even if you weren't able to participate in a particular event.

This quarter's newsletter has been exciting to assemble. We have gathered a group of reflections from the Network's annual event **Enter, Encounter, Engage**. Several different participants offered responses on Carolyn Pope Edwards' presentation considering the role of the teacher. The reflections we received represent different points of view and 'dialogue' with one another.

In "How Does One Become A Teacher?" Tom Bedard considers how reflection and collaboration have contributed to his continuing growth as an early childhood teacher. Meera Patel compares two encounters with Reggio inspired contexts to consider a common theme: *Expansion*.

As a Network, we consider the ways we can interpret the Reggio philosophy in our context and also build competence in the processes that support the Reggio approach. This edition of the newsletter also includes an article about how to think about reflection in a Reggio-inspired context. It is our hope that this edition will invite you to think about how you reflect and how you use those reflections to grow your practice and your collaborations with parents, colleagues, children and the community.

The issue concludes with a description of the Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota as an organization, along with an invitation to you for your participation.

Sincerely,

Lani Shapiro

Editor, Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota Quarterly Newsletter



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

Newsletter Eds.

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### Upcoming Events

## Reflections on Enter, Encounter, Engage The Role Of The Teacher With Carolyn Edwards



On Saturday, March 8, 2014, the Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota hosted Carolyn Pope Edwards, Willa Cather Professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and co-author/editor of several books on the Reggio Emilia experience as the featured speaker at the third annual **Enter, Encounter, Engage** event.

She addressed the dynamic and evolving role of the teacher in Reggio Emilia as their educational project continues to unfold year after year. In particular, she noted the changing demographics in the region, with the arrival of new participants from Africa and Asia, as well as other European countries and the challenge of engaging all parents as partners.

She highlighted two recent projects, "From Messages to Writing" and "Shadow Stories" to illustrate how teachers think about their practice with children, communicate those understandings to parents and colleagues, and how documentation gives us the opportunity to enter those conversations. The participants gathered in small groups and reflected on the video "Shadow Stories." Click on the following link to see a Prezi that documents the group's reflections.

[Group Reflections Shadow Stories Prezi.](#)

Eighty-seven people attended this event held at the Hennepin County Central Library in Minneapolis. Five different perspectives are represented below.



### A Reflection

By Heidi Wolf, Teacher

A big idea that I starred in my notes was "the Italians think about *community BEFORE skills*" and they pay attention to building that community. Making *connections of the heart* first are important; those ties become the foundation on which you can build. An image of an adult and child walking side by side as they experience and learn together came to my mind. I was reminded to slow down and watch and LISTEN to what the children are saying. It occurs to me that I can "*listen to the environment*" as well, and consider space, furnishing, supplies and materials more carefully.

The Italians have a high sense of trust for the children, illustrated by the story of how the children prepared the school for a child named Marco,

Saturday, April 12

Exploring the 100 Languages  
Water

9:30 - 12:30

Keewaydin Park Recreation  
Center

Thursday, April 17

Dodge Nature Preschool  
Learning Conference

8:30-4:00

Dodge Nature Preschool

Friday, April 25 - Saturday  
April 26

UW - Stout Early Childhood  
Conference

Saturday, May 10

Saturday Gathering - Leaving  
Traces, The Importance of  
Saying Goodbye

9:00-Noon

Blake's Northrup Campus

### Sundays Monthly Book Study

Book study meets one Sunday 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 spring are on 4/27 and 5/18. You can also check the calendar at [mnreggio.org](http://mnreggio.org) for dates.

### Job Postings

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](mailto:pattiroseloftus@gmail.com).

We will include the posting in our next newsletter in June.

who was blind. Being able to take another person's perspective is an important skill.

I was also struck by how powerful language can be:

- changing just a few words really affects meaning, for example, "*supporting the community of children*" instead of "*interacting with individual children*".
- using phrases like "*in my opinion*" or "*what is your opinion*" both models and helps children use this language with each other.

Being around people who value work with children, who are thoughtful about the work, and willing to share the struggles we all have left me feeling refreshed and rejuvenated. The Network has helped me keep my love for my work in focus.

### **A Reflection**

*By Victoria Snyder, Teacher*

*"Development takes place in, through, and for relationships."*

- Ruthellen Josselin 1996

The wonderful Dr. Carolyn Edwards really spoke to this quote at the Enter, Encounter, Engage conference. Although the quote is meant for *child* development, it actually speaks to adult development as well. After the conference I truly felt connected, inspired, and ready to engage my classroom in all the information I had absorbed. I was absolutely fortified from the social interaction that had transpired between Carolyn Edwards, The Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota and myself. This makes me realize just how important and *necessary* professional development can be.

The images from the videos that were shown from the preschools of Reggio Italy will eternally be engrained in my mind. The amount of social interaction that took place between the children was amazing and it really speaks to the fact that the classroom environment really does act as the third teacher. The children in the videos moved through their day with such a sense of wonder and authority. If they were interested in something, they were supported by the teacher and the teacher afforded them the time to explore their curiosities all while supporting their interests. The role of the teacher was very clear after watching the videos and listening to Carolyn's experience in those preschools. I couldn't wait to get back to my classroom and *listen* to my students in a different way than I had before!

### **A Reflection On Inclusion**

*By Eileen Galvin, Parent*

The United States is a country made up of all different kinds of people. We often struggle to figure out how to bring people together and help them feel welcome to participate. This problem of how to help people participate so we have involvement from a wide variety of people has

come up in many parts of my life lately. I think ideas on inclusion from Reggio Emilia could help us make a difference in the United States, particularly as Reggio Emilia has become a place that reflects many different kinds of people from many different cultures.

Carolyn talked about the idea of making sure that an individual feels part of a community *before* you focus on skills. She was referring to children in the classroom but I think there is a lesson for us in how we invite people different from us to participate.

My son goes to a school with all different kinds of people from all different backgrounds. I had been thinking about identifying the barriers to involvement like transportation, different language, work hours, a different view on the value of education, etc. Maybe I should change the first questions I ask.

- How can we make sure everyone feels valued and welcomed?
- How can we work together to invite all different kinds of people so they feel like they are a valuable part of a community?
- How do we do this as an individual, grassroots effort because we don't have a cultural model to drive the inclusion process?
- How do we "include" while respecting difference, being open to difference and allowing difference to bring us together to make space for something new?

### **A Reflection**

*by Dani Porter Born, Teacher*

Walking into the registration area at this conference was a bit like arriving at a reunion. I didn't know who I would encounter, but knew there would be connections, common interests, shared experiences and much to talk about. Being relatively new to teaching in the Reggio community, I was pleasantly surprised to see the familiar and friendly faces of people I've worked with and learned from over the past fifteen years in my roles as a student, parent and teacher.

Looking around, I discovered a wealth of knowledge and inspiration, both in the people who were present and in the panels and publications displayed. I also found invitations to share my own knowledge and perspective. I felt welcomed into this learning community.



As I reflect upon my morning with Reggio educators, one thing that stands out, a metaphor perhaps, is learning (both my own and that of children) through light and shadows. From the sunny open space of the registration and panel display area, to the cozy and warmly lit meeting auditorium, to the Shadow Stories

video, light and shadows played across my mind.

As a teacher of young children, I am very aware of the privilege and responsibilities that go along with my role. I want to honor a child's curiosity, journey to discovery, and sense of wonder about the world. I never want to be that object that stands in the way, casting shadows over a learning opportunity. Using this metaphor, I intend to position myself carefully, to be able to observe a child in the light and then help to create shared understandings.

While watching *Shadow Stories*, a video about an encounter between preschool children and shadows at the Malaguzzi International Center, I was amazed at the richness of experience and understanding teachers and children were able to create together. I thought about what the teachers' intentions might have been, what it took to prepare an environment for discovery, how the children were listened to, and how this study took shape. I was mesmerized just watching the light and movement of shadows across a room, much the way a young child might be mesmerized by any number of things in the natural world. I felt that sense of wonder in the quiet beauty of light, the art of lines and shapes, the elegance of motion against a blank backdrop.

I was reminded of the way a young child noticed shadows on the snow during a late fall hike. We were near a pasture fence and the morning sunlight cast beautiful patterns with intricate lines at our feet. His delight at these lines caused him to stop, squat down, and look more closely. I could see his wonder, see questions beginning to form in his mind as he looked from the fence to the ground. We were trying to catch up with the rest of our class and I had other things on my mind that prevented us from spending much time there. I wish now that I had engaged him in more conversation, taken him back to that spot at a different time of day or under different weather conditions, and built upon that curiosity with other shadow work. I missed that opportunity, that spark that could have ignited more deep and meaningful inquiry. Teachers have so many moments like these in our encounters with children. How do we take advantage of such opportunities when we also have the logistics of an entire class of learners to tend to? This is something that I think all teachers struggle with. Keeping moments like this in my mind and attempting to be fully present with children is a goal will I continue to work on.

Questions I ask myself as a result of this conference:

- Are you listening and observing? What is the child trying to figure out?
- Are you documenting for later reflection?
- Are you preparing an environment that is inviting a child to discovery?
- Are you in the way? Are you a barrier to a child's understanding?

I will never again look at shadows in quite the same way.

### **A Reflection**

*By Katie Oberle, Teacher*

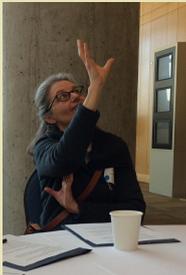
Entering the public space of Hennepin County Central Library, greeting and sharing the escalator ride up with others, gathering conference materials and a cup of coffee I was impressed with what it means to be a part of the Reggio-Inspired Network of MN and attend the annual spring conference.

The conference provided the opportunity to think and discuss more deeply not only my role as the teacher of young children but to reflect on the parallels of the changes in the population of the preschools in Reggio with the changing population in my own classroom and community.

The educators of Reggio Emilia once again are providing a contemporary, relevant and applicable model to understanding and engaging with the diverse family communities our children are coming from.

In the first part of Dr. Carolyn Pope Edwards' presentation entitled "A Dynamic and Changing Role: Teaching Young Children in Reggio Emilia, Italy" she talked of "reciprocity (mutual expectations) and participation" rather than the conventional thought of "educating and involving families." Recognizing the need to learn from and help new families coming from other cultures, there is now intentional practice to support the community rather than the individual, communicate and listen through cultural mentors so that child, educator and parent continue to be vested as the city is transformed and evolves.

Study and dialogue of the Reggio approach towards "fostering an exchange of understanding," with the new families in my school community will continue to enrich both my practice and my relationships as I work together with families to advocate for the rich early childhood experiences every child deserves.



## How Does One Become A Teacher?

*By Tom Bedard*

*"Stand aside for a while and leave room for learning. Observe carefully what children do and then, if you have understood well, perhaps teaching will be different from before."*

When I began teaching, all that was required was a Bachelor's degree. The major? I do not think it mattered. So with a Bachelor's Degree in Child Psychology, I started my career as a childcare teacher with a group of 10 children ages three to five-years-old.

What does someone with no actual teachers' training do the first day besides tremble in his boots? I got a preschool teacher's book and cobbled together a set of activities that would interest and entertain the children. Needless to say, some things worked and some things did not.

I subsequently went back to university to work on a masters degree and a pre-k teaching certificate, which involved coursework and student teaching. For me the student teaching was the most helpful portion of the training because we always had a chance to debrief after each class. For almost an hour after class, we compared notes on the children and talked about what activities worked and did not in the classroom.

When I re-entered the world of childcare, my practice continued with planning activities throughout the day around the given routines: meals, nap, etc. My goal was to create more and better activities and to manage the children better throughout the day.

Still, things were not what I expected. My room was total chaos, many more times chaotic than when I was running a class with no training. I thought the children would exist in harmony with all the great things I planned for them.

I have now been in the early childhood education for over 35 years and have grown in the craft. Growth comes in the form of reflection. Reflection for me has taken on a much different meaning over the past five years. Before, reflection was an individual endeavor. I was happily tinkering in my room reflecting solo on what I did and saw. Reflection now is a collaborative effort. I willingly reach out now to others to gain another perspective and to test my own thoughts and reflections.

Through this renewed collaborative dialogue, I have started to construct a different idea of what it means to be a teacher. When I started, my job was to plan activities that would teach, motivate and entertain the children; it was my job to *manage* the children. My job now is to create time, space and materials for the children to pursue their own interests and pose their own questions. In that way, I become a partner in their learning. One of my jobs as partner is to document that learning. In many ways this new definition is more complex because I am constantly making decisions in real time about my role in any given moment during the flow of classroom life. That means I am constantly open to what will happen next, or in other words, uncertainty. That is uncomfortable, but I know that the children and the other adults in the room will create meaning in this uncertain process.

How does one become a teacher? He never does. Rather he is always in the process of becoming a teacher---and a learner.

Tom Bedard or "Teacher Tom" is an Early Childhood Family Education teacher in the Saint Paul Public school system.

He is especially known for his work with sensory tables. His blog is [tomsensori.blogspot.com](http://tomsensori.blogspot.com)



## Expansion, A Reflection

By Meera Patel

This winter I had the opportunity to attend, and reflect on, two local gatherings investigating Reggio inspirations: experience at Dodge Nature Center Preschool, Exploring the 100 Languages: Snow and Ice, and a conference hosted by MacDonald Montessori School featuring Amelia Gambetti, long-time educator from Reggio Emilia, focused on complexity and collaboration. The theme of expansion resonated as I considered my visits to each of these sites.



Throughout my visit to Dodge Nature Center Preschool, I noticed how the teachers were able to extend the student's interest from the outdoors to indoors. The teachers spoke of creating opportunities for provocations, such as exploring with ice and snow using different elements (salt, warm water, paint, magnifiers), inviting children to learn about what animals do in the winter and how their tracks tell a story, or the scientific aspect of exploring the changes that come with snow and ice over time (ex. throwing a water balloon full of color out into the snow) all while keeping an open

mind for the children's varying reactions. As educators, we cannot predict where the children's next questions will take us.

At MacDonald Montessori, Gambetti introduced herself with a quote from Loris Malaguzzi, *"we value space, to create a handsome environment and its potential to inspire social, affective and cognitive learning. The space is an aquarium that mirrors the ideas and values of the people who live in it."* She spoke of a shift in thinking for teachers: it should be the "teacher's responsibility that by doing and bringing in complexity, children will learn about the concepts in math, science, and they will learn creative thinking in how it supports their development of thinking. Don't be satisfied with the end, keep being involved and think about parent involvement, group learning, keep expanding on knowledge and don't ever be content with an end, keep questioning."

Many of the educators at MacDonald Montessori described how their collaborative projects helped them reflect on their teaching, expand on children's interests and trust that as mistakes occur along the way, they can support children to solve their problems as a group rather than fix problems for them.

My visit to Dodge reminded me of the "magic" of exploring snow and ice, be it inside or outside, like an empty, endless white canvas, where you can use your imagination in ways which may seem impossible within the confines of a white piece of paper. As a participant reflected at the end of the visit, "instead of being solemn, be excited and get down in the snow with the children. Challenge yourself and the variety that comes along, get excited and embrace the long winter months." As teachers and parents we must constantly remember the winter transformation and use it to expand our perspectives and expand our children's learning.



At Macdonald Montessori, Gambetti addressed this challenge of expansion. She spoke about how we must value the child's interest and foster a learning



environment and we must create a connection between the classroom and what the children are learning. Gambetti understood that these are challenges educators are facing everyday: how do we make a connection between what is required of us in teaching and what the children want to learn and are interested in? How can you bridge this gap? The



process of questioning should never end in educating our students, in that you never really stop learning. Jerome Bruner said, "every story begins with a premise," yet the end result may be just questioning further.

## Thinking About Reflection In A Reggio-inspired Context

By Lani Shapiro

*"The documents we produce are partial findings, subjective interpretations, which in turn, must be re-interpreted and discussed with others, in particular, among colleagues."*

- Carlina Rinaldi

In Dialogue with Reggio Emilia: Listening, Researching and Learning, p. 43

Most of us are not familiar and feel uncertain writing in 'subjective interpretation.' Here are some possible prompts that might help fuel reflective writing. Select questions that evoke a response for you, to help you "think about your own thinking".

Select some small, specific aspect of the experience to explore more deeply. Write in your own voice: "I", as if inviting others into a conversation.

What has changed for you, having participated in this (event/gathering/book study/conversation)?

What new connections tie together with your (background/work experience/home life)?

What surprises you about these insights?

What new possibilities are (illuminated/offered/invited)?

- What (invisible) assumptions inform this experience? (or your interpretation)?
- What new alternative interpretations emerge?

How and where might you direct your new knowledge and competencies?

When you 'step back' from this experience, in what ways does it look different?

What questions now preoccupy you, having (heard/read/conversed)?

- What do you wonder?
- What confused you?

What other information do you need (ideas, knowledge, opinion etc)?

Are there other people, or the views of others who might be relevant to this matter – and in what way?

## The Network – How You Can Help

The Reggio-Inspired Network of Minnesota is a group of people from Minnesota and nearby regions, who care about issues of education and democracy. We are citizens, educators, parents, artists, administrators, and others working on these issues in diverse settings – public and private. Inspired by the innovative preschools and infant-toddler centers in Reggio Emilia, Italy, Network participants seek to use that inspiration to guide work with children and communities.

We are an all-volunteer, non-profit organization that has 501c(3) status.

Our Board of Directors is charged with building a supporting infrastructure and determining the Network's strategic direction. The Board raises funds and decides how to allocate resources. Most Board work occurs in committees, where issues are studied, proposals developed and activities implemented.

### Our Plans Over The Next Few Years

- build on the current infrastructure of the Network - improved database, archive, board development etc.,
- continuously improve resources - website, newsletter, events etc.
- grow our civic involvement - collect evidence based research to support the Reggio approach, determine how we can better support reggio-inspired practices trying to get accredited through state sponsored programs (i.e. Parent Aware) etc.

### How You Can Help

We have five different committees. If you are interested in volunteering to help the Network, please email the committee chair of the committee you are interested in. If you have general questions, or would like to contribute to the Network in another way, please contact Rie Algeo Gilsdorf at [rgilsdorf2@comcast.net](mailto:rgilsdorf2@comcast.net) or Dan Morlock at [daniel.morlock@isd623.org](mailto:daniel.morlock@isd623.org) Board Co-Chairs

### **Skills Sets We Are Looking For**

We are looking for a wide range of skills sets to round out our committees.

- Fundraising/grant writing, business, budgeting, data management
- Social media, graphic arts, writing/editing, community organizing,
- Project management, event planning, experience with skills assessment
- Knowledge of early childhood and/or K-12 education policy, web research skills, public advocacy, networking & lobbying skills

If you don't feel like your skills match the skills above, we would still like to hear from you. The most important skills we need are people who are willing to collaborate, to do some planning up front, jump in and learn as they go.

### **Committees**

#### **Resource Development**

To develop the diverse sources of finance and material support to sustain the Network

Contact Marty Watson [mwatson@dodgenaturecenter.org](mailto:mwatson@dodgenaturecenter.org)

#### **Communications**

To build relationships, plan communication and continually improve tools to highlight and elevate the work of the Network.

Contact Lani Shapiro [lanishapiro@gmail.com](mailto:lanishapiro@gmail.com)

#### **Board Development**

To keep awareness of and nurture the general health, effectiveness, and continuity of the Board

Contact Joshua Koepp [fiddlehouse@gmail.com](mailto:fiddlehouse@gmail.com)

#### **Growth & Outreach**

To expand the Network and to promote the growth of Reggio-inspired knowledge and practice.

Contact Barb Murphy [murph028@umn.edu](mailto:murph028@umn.edu)

#### **Civic Engagement**

To advance learning through inquiry and influence education policy by providing information and resources to policy makers, educators and other citizens

Contact Rie Algeo Gilsdorf [rgilsdorf2@comcast](mailto:rgilsdorf2@comcast)

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

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