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REGGIO TUTTA:
The Evolution of a Research Project

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WHAT'S INSIDE

Mara Davoli has worked as an atelierista *[studio teacher] in Pablo Neruda School, one of the municipal preschools in Reggio Emilia, since 1973. Paola Cagliari has been a* pedagogista *[education coordinator] with the Reggio municipal infant-toddler centers and preschools since 1988. The following is adapted from Mara's presentation during the February 2003 study tour to Reggio Emilia. Paola participated in the discussion session following Mara's presentation. Mara began her presentation by sharing her perspective regarding the role of the* atelier *[studio] and the* atelierista *in the Reggio municipal preschool program.*

In each of the municipal preschools, there is an *atelier*, thought of as a place of provocation, a space where the minds and hands of children can be active and engaged. The *atelier* is not the only space where the languages of expression are introduced. In fact, in our schools and infant-toddler centers, there also mini-*ateliers* in each classroom. In the mini-*ateliers*, children and teachers can encounter and experiment daily, as a part of their normal experience, with the expressive languages. The *atelier* and the mini-*atelier* are places to discover what children build and produce with their hands and with their intelligence. They are places to discover and make visible how children construct hypotheses, and how projects evolve. The presence of the *atelier* and the *atelierista,* working along with teachers, has contributed much to our work on documentation. Little by little, day-by-day, documentation strongly informs our way of being with the children and with our colleagues, and gives us a way to be closer to the children. Documentation has refined our styles of observation so that the processes of children's learning become the basis of our dialogue with families.

I would like to share with you one of the projects featured in "The Hundred Languages of Children" exhibit: "Reggio Tutta: A Guide to the City by the Children." This project involved two and three year-old children at two infant-toddler centers, and three to six year-old children at 12 municipal preschools. It was a very long-term project that spanned a period of two years. I would like to highlight the processes, strategies and choices of children and adults that led to the creation of the book, *Reggio Tutta: A Guide to the City by the Children.*

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The genesis of the project

Who chose the topic? Who decides how a project begins? We ask these questions every day when we work with children, not just during long-term projects. In this case, the idea to create a guide to the city by the children had its roots in research carried out in 1996. We wanted to investigate what images, ideas and theories the children have about their city, Reggio Emilia, and cities in general.

Why did we choose this topic for children aged two to six? We believe that the city, its identity, how it is inhabited and its destiny is a very relevant topic, especially at this time in our history. It is a vital topic that involves both adults and children, that encourages us to reflect on our own experiences and relationships but also on the idea of citizenship itself. We have parents in our schools who come from other cities in Italy, or other countries and speak different languages. These parents give us an image and a story of Reggio

Emilia of a very different kind, through different eyes. This theme of the city lent itself easily to including parents and, if possible, we always try to involve parents in the life of the school. Sometimes working with the parents and the children in parallel ways evolves naturally from the project. The conversations we had with the parents throughout the course of this investigation were one way of exchanging personal stories. They were also a way of engendering discussion about the idea of what a citizen is, what it means to be a part of a city, how a city can be lived in. This is a delicate area: this idea of what it means to be a citizen. What should a citizen be? What could a citizen be? Together, we have to determine which idea of citizenship we are building. This is a topic that encourages exchange and the sharing of perspectives. If a school is a place of life, if we want our school to be in touch with life, it has to be a place that collects different points of view and a place where those points of view can be expressed. We chose this theme of the city for these reasons.

What is a city?

Beginning with this broad question, we opened an investigation with all of the children in the 20 municipal schools in Reggio. This was an investigation built on open questions, as a way to stimulate group dialogues and reflections. We did not ask questions only to discover what the children know and don't know. We asked open questions in order to create a group context in which we could share our opinions and our points of view, a context in which we could construct new knowledge. In order to build a learning community, we must have a strong idea of the individuals who are working together. We must understand their differences and be able to relate those differences. The expression of each child must find a place.

I would like to share with you some of the questions we asked the children, as I believe they could give you an idea of our initial choices and how we approached this investigation:

The city, cities: images, ideas and theories

Do you know what a city is?

What do you think cities are for?

Why, in your opinion, were they built?

Can you tell where a city starts? And can you tell when it ends?

Do you think a city has a shape?

Are there people who don't live in the city? In that case, where do you think they live?

The results of this investigation suggested the idea of a guide to the city. While the children were asked to think about their images of cities, in general, and to discuss their possible definitions of cities, this also meant speaking implicitly about their own city, about Reggio Emilia, their experiences and their way of living in the city.

Carla Rinaldi asked me to coordinate this project of the guide, together with a colleague of mine, Gino Ferri, a teacher at Pablo Neruda School. I was initially concerned because a guide is a familiar tool for adults, and we risked imposing our images and conceptual structure on those of the children. This is a risk we often take when working with children. Even if we are not conscious of it, we face this dilemma every day because of our own pre-conceived notions and theories. I believe that we can choose to offer topics for the children's consideration as long as we are aware of this risk.

How did we begin?

Keeping in mind the results of the investigation, we asked ourselves:

What does the word "guide" evoke in the children?

What do they know, if anything, about guides?

What do they identify them with?

This is another strategy that we often use . . . trying to find out questions before having answers. We sensed that we could start from here to sketch some possible boundaries of investigation and we could begin to formulate the initial working hypotheses. For these reasons, we decided to focus the investigation on three aspects. We worked to develop open questions to stimulate the exchange of ideas, questions that we could think about and reformulate while we were with a group of children.

1) children's hypotheses on the idea of a guide

"Last year, we talked a lot about the city and cities. We also drew them and built them. This year, we would like to make a 'guide' of the city of Reggio. Do you know what a guide is? Have you ever seen them?"

2) children's hypotheses on the visitor's possible motivation for coming to Reggio

"Many people come to visit Reggio, our city. In your opinion, why do they choose to come to Reggio?"

3) children's views and suggestions about inhabiting the city

"Where would you start? What would you say to introduce our city to all those people who come and who have never been here before?"

"What kind of things can be done in Reggio that, in your opinion, could be interesting for these people?"

"What kind of suggestions would you give them in terms of things to see, to do and why?"

During a meeting with our colleagues from the infant-toddler centers and schools working on the guide, we shared these suggestions for open questions, and we also shared possible strategies in order to encourage conversations and dialogues with the children. After one month, this first part of the project was done. We collected all of the conversations from all of the schools. We often record and transcribe our experiences with the children but, in this case, we decided to transcribe all of the children's and teachers' questions and thoughts. The children participated in this investigation with a great deal of enthusiasm. This produced a large quantity of verbal materials, but also some first graphic representations by the children. These helped to give more strength and visibility to their thoughts and mental images. The collection of images is tightly woven within our way of working. This is not just part of our process of understanding what is happening. It's a way of going back to the children and giving back to the children images of what we've done together. It's a process of re-reading and re-interpreting processes that have been elaborated by adults and children together.

We suggested to the children that they become interpreters of their city. Being sensitive to the possible thoughts, needs and desires of others meant changing their point of view and putting themselves in someone else's shoes. When you are able to do this, you are more likely to understand and represent the perspective of others. Elaborating new ideas means making them visible and being able to discuss them. This becomes integral to the process of re-elaborating. Young children have a natural impulse to share what they know with someone else.

This is an intrinsic part of knowledge. When we generate knowledge, we want to understand that knowledge, reflect on that knowledge and share that knowledge. Everyday, it is important to offer the children the opportunity to discuss new knowledge, to look at new concepts, to exchange points of view about that knowledge. It's also important to offer children the opportunity to think on their own. Building for oneself a place where visibility is possible, to make visible what we know, to render visibility is not just a biological impulse, but also a cultural impulse. This is a precise political choice: that school is a place where culture is produced. That is why we have to work with extremely young children on how the processes evolve, how the culture is produced rather than on what is produced. Great minds, people who produce the culture of our time, do not work in isolation. Most original work is done through the opportunity of exchange with other people.

It's obvious that the children are aware of their act of participation in their world, and the process of building something meaningful and significant. A guide to the city is a very large project. It isn't necessary to do a large project in the school to leave a trace, to give back. Even in the very tiny gestures that occur in the school everyday, we see this re-launching, this giving back and participating. When you visit the preschools, you can see the signs of this desire, this need and pride that the children have in participating, in leaving traces of themselves for others.

We engaged in parallel research and exploration of the city with the children and with the parents. Teachers, *pedagogisti, atelieristi* and parents met regularly during the course of this project. We knew that everyday, the parents take the children with them wherever they go in the city. So we asked the parents to try to imagine how the children lived their experiences in the city: going shopping, to the hairdresser, to the park. We asked the parents to imagine the city from another person's point of view, to change their point of view and their way of seeing through the eyes of another person. We also shared with the parents what their children were doing in school that was related to the city. We had many conversations with the parents and we asked them many questions. We asked them to try to tell the story of the city from the perspective of people of different ages: that of a young child, an adolescent, a young couple, and as parents with a family.

How did we orient ourselves within the thoughts, images and suggestions of all the children in each school?

This is a challenge we face everyday, when we are living and working with children. How can we, as teachers, paint a portrait of our life with children? In this case, we read the materials produced by the children in each school several times, pulling out the different emerging points of view. Then we made parallel and cross readings of all the collected materials. From our first interpretations of the materials, a general map emerged: a first portrait of the city that incorporated the dimensions of time, space and everyday life.

After these parallel and cross readings, we organized our first interpretations in this way:

- thematic folders of the first locations suggested by the children that contained verbal and graphic materials
- a document that summarizes the work done by all the schools, making visible our first choices and interpretations. This is important because interpretation is subjective. We have to be aware of such subjectivity. Is the interpretation mine or that of the group I am observing? It is important to have the right materials to make our interpretations visible.

We met with our colleagues in the different schools once again, in order to share with them this first landscape, our first choices that contributed to the development of new hypotheses. These discussions became the basis on which we formulated new in-depth research and also new encounters of the children with the city. This strategy includes listening and interpreting in order to re-launch. We see through our experience in the infant-toddler centers that even very small children will propose visions of the world, which have

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various forms and various shapes. But it's very, very difficult for us, as adults, to know how to read them, to know how to see them, to know how to collect these visions. The languages of small children are so subtle and so interwoven that sometimes it can be a tiny gesture that gives us a vision of whole ideas. This is where tools for observation become essential. It is the adults' responsibility to produce interpretations. We have to be able to make interpretations that are open and broad but also interpretations that are courageous and brave. They have to be optimistic interpretations, which credit the child with ability. These interpretations with very young children . . . how we create frames of reference and how we translate these tiny gestures . . . gives us a way of sharing with parents and other colleagues a vision of children, so that they can collaborate in producing these interpretations.

Three important aspects emerged from this first part of the project:

1) the children's images of guides

What is a guide? The children suggested many concepts and images regarding guides:

- books and booklets ("It's something you hold in your hand . . . a guide tells you everything about that place.")
- maps and street maps
- the telephone directory
- postcards
- portfolios
- videotapes
- a person (The dialogue of a four year-old child: "If the Dutch people come here, you need a Dutch lady who lives here and also speaks the language.")

In the beginning of the project, the children also suggested to us that a guide is an invitation given to the others and it is beautiful. Two girls said:

"First you have to introduce yourself, then you say your first name and last name. You have to write on it: 'We invite you to Reggio'."

In fact, the children seemed to believe that a warm welcome was one of the elements that qualify the city and can motivate the visitors. This is a context that we decided to support.

2) the problem of the forms of communication

This dialogue among two children can be an example:

"We can write in English, too; otherwise, they won't understand it. Everyone speaks their own language. If I write 'biblioteca' (library) and then somebody from Rome comes, he can read it because he's Italian, so he understands it. But if a Chinese person comes, he can't!!!"

"So we can write 'biblioteca' in lots of languages or draw a book. If you make a drawing of a book, they'll understand it for sure!"

This is an indication that the children give us. They suggest to us to use different languages . . . from the written one to the iconic, made up of drawings, symbols, post cards, maps and photographs . . . in order to have universal understanding and communication, we could say the "hundred languages of children."

3) a question that strongly characterized the children's reflections in this initial phase of the work: how to orient yourself in an unknown place

I think this is an experience everyone has had and we realized that this was a major issue for the children.

In the first conversations, they often used the word "map," but what meanings do children attribute to a map? How do they construct their own mental maps? And regarding Reggio, how many different maps can it have? For the four and five year-old children, the presence of maps in a guide seems to be absolutely indispensable:

"Maps are for looking at the streets and then you go. It's the starting point."

"A map is like a street that you have to follow, and then you have to walk on it."

The children made different kinds of maps, using both words and drawings. They made general maps of the city, but also maps of thematic routes. This dialogue of four year-old children is an example:

"You need a lot of maps: one for the churches, the squares, the fountains, the bakeries and the pastry shops; a map for money, one for sleeping and one for dancing . . . "

"One for meeting people, a map of the cafés and bars, and one for the schools . . ."

"And then one whole one! You need a whole one of everything; it's no good to have just a piece, it's not enough!"

While the children were having this discussion, it seemed that words alone were not enough. Children strongly need to leave traces on paper. It is as if the mark of the pencil that travels over the space of the paper helps them to feel the movement and gives visibility to their interior paths. These traces are sometimes extremely essential; other times, they are dense and intricate. We believe that the children's maps are always extraordinarily exact, with a kind of exactness that forces us to turn our adult standards upside down, that forces our thoughts to search for different points of reference. This is because the children's maps are multi-sensory and contain places of relationships, encounters, smells and noises, stories of life. These kinds of maps are composed of fragments of personal stories. The children consciously and humorously declared the difficulty of interpretation. A three year-old child said:

"Well, but if you haven't already seen it (the city), sometimes it's hard. Some people who aren't Italian, I don't know if they can understand it. Maybe we could make a map for getting lost, too!!!"

A guide to the city by the children

The work on the guide involved a large number of children, teachers, *atelieristi* and *pedagogisti* over two years. As the work progressed, we had frequent meetings to read and interpret the quantity of materials, traces, observations and documentations of the different projects that were accumulating. As our goal was to write a book, we had to face another problem: to find a form and a narrative structure for bringing these

"travel notes" in line with the images and the ideas of a guide suggested by the children that would reflect an image of childhood.

The encounter and the dialogue with the graphic artists, who know our experience very well, offered us further interpretations and points of view. Our decision-making process regarding the title and the image for the cover of the book is an example of this merging of perspectives. We were almost at the end of the graphic and page layout choices but no image, drawing, picture or word seemed to be enough to represent this kaleidoscopic portrait of the city made by the children, which was also a self-portrait. My colleague Gino and I had the responsibility to coordinate the work, to give form to a bridge that linked our colleagues of the infant-toddler centers and schools. Each school knew its own experience but not those of the others. We knew that the title of the book is important. Loris

Malaguzzi [founder of the Reggio municipal preschool program] used to say to us: "A title is sort of a very condensed thesis." When we document an experience, even very short experiences, we have to find a title that represents the identity of this experience. After looking at different materials again and again, three year-old Chiara's drawing and title seemed to us a good metaphor to represent both the complexity of the city itself and, also, the children's willingness let themselves get lost and not follow linear paths. The title *Reggio Tutta* was, in our opinion, perfect. *Reggio Tutta* doesn't mean "all about Reggio" but something like "Reggio: all of it." The choice for the color of the book, yellow (one that identifies the telephone directory) was also intentional.

Identity traits of cities

I would like to propose some common identity traits of cities suggested by the children from the different schools:

• boundaries

This offers an idea of cities as "pieces of the world" seen and thought in relation, a vision that is local and global at the same time. A five year-old child said:

"There's only one country: for example, America is outside of Italy, but it's still on the Earth."

The children also presented the idea of flexible and elastic boundaries. These images force us to reflect on the fact that daily, in the Balkans, in Africa and in many other parts of the world, drawing borders has become synonymous with violence. Fortunately the children, the utopian inhabitants of the future, remind us that "the boundary is like smoke."

• the city center

Another strong identity trait of Reggio that emerged is the concept of the city center, proposed by the children as the starting point:

"The center is like the center of the world, where everything goes around it."

But for one four year-old child, the center is also a terminal point, perhaps a place where the accumulated stories, relationships and experiences come together:

"In the city, there are two beginnings, and in the middle, right in the middle, there is the end."

• squares/*piazza*

This idea of a square or *piazza*, as we say in Italian, culturally and historically belongs to Reggio, and is explored and narrated by the children as the pulsing heart of the city:

"The big square is the world of Reggio Emilia. They built it so that lots of people could go there."

The children described the *piazza* as a space conceived and lived:

"to go on bikes with your friends"

"to take your dog for a walk"

"to read the newspaper"

"to watch the pigeons that go up on the roofs"

"to have celebrations"

"to do the shopping"

"a place also good for people who just want to be quiet"

. . . an idea of the *piazza* as a place of relationships and encounters, a welcoming place for people of all ages.

• views of ground and sky

If we follow the children's moving eyes, we discover unexpected perceptions that keep the earth in relationship with the sky:

"In the square, there are lots of little stones that all fit real close together. They make the shape of a rainbow on the ground."

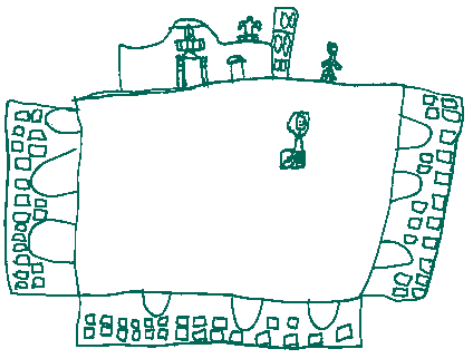
Children always find meaning in relationships:

"They made them (like a rainbow) so the children can run and play with the pigeons and scare them."

The big fountain-statue "is like a café for the birds. The water comes down. It comes down all the time and it's free!"

"In the center, the streets are narrow. You have to look up high to see the sky. When you walk in town, you don't see the sky up there."

"The mayor's building has a balcony where you can see the whole square from up high."



• multi-sensory city

The perceptive and sensory aspects - colors, lights, sounds and smells - are other elements underlined by the children as soft qualities that characterize, transform, give meaning and identity to the city:

"In the city, it smells wet."

"And in the winter, it really smells wet."

The market can also be explored and narrated through its smells and sounds:

"You can smell the perfume of the ladies that go by, the smell of pizza and cakes. You can smell fresh bread and smells from the houses, because when they cook you can smell it in town, too."

"This church is incredible. All you hear is the sound of ladies walking, lighting candles, closing the door. You hear people praying, real quiet. There's a lot of shade and just a little bit of light."

"At night, Reggio is beautiful because they turn on the streetlights that look like lots of suns, because you don't see the poles."

And in our beautiful theater:

"Because the velvet (in the theatre curtain) promises that you can hear the music."

These images tell us that if we are able to listen to the children . . . leaving them their times and ways to explore and live in the city . . . we, as adults, can gain something because the children's view of the city is optimistic and full of life, open to the future while firmly rooted in the present. Children have a sense of future that demands to be listened to and dialogued with. They have a tenacious feeling of optimism that claims the right to be part of the dialogue that gives shape and identity to the city.

I have shared with you only some aspects of this project that did not seem to have an end. It was difficult to finish it because there was always a new story, a new suggestion, a new view on the city. But we gave ourselves a deadline: February 23rd is Loris Malaguzzi's birthday. He is the guide of our experience and since he died in 1994, we have celebrated his birthday every year. So on that day in 2000, the book was presented and offered to the city in a public event with children, parents, teachers, the mayor and many other friends.

Now that this project has become something tangible, we hope it is able to be, as the children said, an invitation. Whether encountering Reggio for the first time or returning, it's an invitation for those of you who might get lost in the city. But you will have with you the many maps, made of images and strong emotions that the children traced and offered us. You will also have an invitation to listen to the children and to their values. This project was an experience that required the school of knowing to find connections with the school of expressing, opening the door to the hundred languages of children. This research reflected the presence of Loris Malaguzzi and his pedagogy. I don't believe that educators can know each day where they are going and where they would like to go. It is a route that you discover as you travel. We have the obligation to think about the future because of the type of work we do. We have to be open to moving and changing because young children are always growing. The future is a necessity of the evolution of humankind.

Jane Cecil has worked in early childhood education for 26 years as a kindergarten teacher, Head Start teacher, site director and education coordinator. She is currently the Manager of Education at Chicago Commons Child Development Program. Jane participated in a study tour to Reggio Emilia in 1998. Christine Alexander has worked in early childhood education for 17 years, 11 of those with Chicago Commons. Christine is currently a Head Start Teacher in a full-day program. She was in one of the first teaching teams at Chicago Commons to explore the Reggio educational philosophy, beginning in 1993. Christine has participated in two study tours to Reggio Emilia.

THE EVOLUTION OF LEARNING THROUGH OBSERVATION, INTERPRETATION AND DOCUMENTATION

By Jane Cecil and Christine Alexander

The Chicago Commons Context

The Chicago Commons Child Development Program works with almost 1,000 children in four areas in the city of Chicago: West Humboldt Park, Near West Side, Pilsen and the New City/Back of the Yards. Our six centers include these programs: 6 Head Start, 2 subsidized infant/toddler, 6 subsidized preschool, 4 subsidized school age, 5 Chicago Public School State Prekindergarten, 2 Early Head Start and a Family Child Care Homes Network. There are 180 staff members in the Child Development Programs. Our staff's education ranges from a GED or high school diploma to a Master's degree, although only 1 of 41 head teachers has a Master's degree. About half of our staff come from within the communities we serve and, therefore, some of them are dealing with the same issues as the families in our program. Some of our staff has been with the agency for less than a year while others have been with us for more than 20 years.

Chicago Commons Child Development Program began exploring the Reggio approach very gradually. We began in 1993 with seven brave teams volunteering to explore the approach. We then grew to 10 teams, then 14, then 20, then 30 and now, all classroom teams are exploring the Reggio approach. Each team consists of a site director, classroom teachers (head teachers, assistants and aides), and a family worker along with an education and/or studio coordinator from the central office. Through Commons' explorations of the Reggio Emilia approach, a solid framework for staff development has been created. This framework includes regular meetings, in-services and outside conferences. A minimum of three and a half hours per week is dedicated to planning, gathering, interpreting, designing and displaying documentation. The regular meetings allow for dialogue, revisiting and reflection as the key ingredients for adult growth and learning. Extensive ongoing staff development time is used to reflect, share different perspectives, plan and revisit ideas. Weekly team meetings occur with the teachers, family workers, site directors, and education and studio coordinators. Monthly agency-wide meetings also occur, and there is at least one three-day in-service annually. The monthly meetings include staff and parents, and feature a tour of the site hosting the meeting, and a presentation about an experience or exploration in one of the classrooms. We also have learning tours when we invite educators around the country into our centers and staff members participate in these professional development initiatives as well. Twice a year, we have Student Open Houses for the local colleges and universities.

Exploring Reggio for our Child Development Program is about new possibilities. This approach to early childhood education has inspired teachers to think about their role as a teacher, their impact on the lives of children, and what they do with children and why. As a result, we have been able to work with teachers' potential to become more reflective thinkers and facilitators who could support and provoke children to develop and become problem solvers, decision makers, negotiators, collaborators and good communicators who express themselves in many ways. Teachers have become better listeners to the many "languages" that children use to communicate. Many of our families come from communities lacking in resources. Through our study of the Reggio approach, we believe we can offer new possibilities of developing skills, knowledge and ideas that can help children become lifelong learners as well as competent adults. Over time, we also have come to realize that this approach encourages a respect for children that is both strong and unconditional . . . a respect for children's ideas, feelings, theories and experiences . . . a respect for adults (teaching staff, administrators, family workers and parents) as collaborators, problem solvers and negotiators.

Over the last few years, we have focused on several elements of the Reggio approach including: the image of the child, the role of the environment, languages and representation, parent partnerships and, of course, documentation and emergent curriculum. We have spent much time developing an understanding of documentation. We would like to share with you our experiences, challenges and struggles using observation and documentation in a reflective process and a tool in an emergent curriculum.

Documentation as a Tool for Observation and Reflection

Documentation is used to visually stabilize the ideas, work and experiences of children and adults. In the beginning, we had to purchase equipment including: cameras, slide projectors, video cameras, overhead projectors and tape recorders. We also had to learn how to use them! Each team also had to figure out the logistics of collecting documentation. Who would do the photography? Who would take notes? Who would transcribe? Who would make copies? Who would buy film? Who would secure the equipment to protect it from theft? Who would translate? (many of our children and staff speak Spanish as their primary language), etc. We also had to think about how to use documentation as a tool to help develop understanding and meaning, and how to use documentation as a tool for planning for children, team members, coordinators and parents.

We ask all of our teams to bring documentation to the weekly meetings. This documentation can include: photos, children's work and words, dialogues (children and children, children and teachers, parents and teachers, etc.) and videos. It took some teams a while to figure out how they could bring these pieces of documentation to the meetings. In the beginning, the meeting facilitators (studio and education coordinators) were known to cancel meetings because the teams had no documentation to bring. This is because we believe that there can't be a meeting that involves planning and thinking about learning without the documentation of the experiences in the classroom. This documentation is the foundation for the planning and reflecting that should occur in every meeting. This same documentation is also collected and displayed in an ongoing progression during the exploration of a study. We often call this the "holding board" or "work in progress" board. The children re-visit this ongoing documentation with their teachers and parents can understand what's happening in the classroom through the presence of these holding boards. These displays of current work eventually contribute to a finished documentation panel.

But we faced challenges greater than the mechanics of gathering and producing documentation, and greater than coming to the realization that we must have documentation to plan. We are working very hard to understand how we can use documentation as the foundation for planning an emergent curriculum. We spend a great deal of time thinking about what and how children's learning emerges from this process of listening and observing their interests and motivations.

Observing and listening to know the child's feelings, interests, understandings and theories is probably one of our biggest challenges. We have had to spend time thinking about surface interests vs. core interests, about the deeper motivations in what we see children doing or saying. An example of this would be a child pushing a truck in the block area. On the surface, it could mean he is interested in trucks but it could also

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-Jane Cecil

be that he is interested in the movement and motion of the wheels. Or it could mean that he's interested in what trucks carry. Or he could have a relative who is a truck driver and want to be like that person. If teachers respond too quickly and immediately to follow a surface interest, they may lose the child's attention and engagement because they did not take the time to observe and listen for the child's core interests, ideas, motivations or intentions.

Another challenge while we observe is understanding whose agenda we are following. Is it the child's or the adult's, or both? While exploring a topic with children, it is often too easy for us to want to teach them something that we think they should know. An example is when a teacher asks a child the question: "How do you think a traffic light changes from red to green?" and the child says: "There's a person inside who pushes buttons to change it." We might want to correct that child and explain how the light really works. Or if a child wants to make a clay rocking chair for the guinea pig in the classroom, we might want to tell the child to make something else for the guinea pig because it really cannot use the rocker. At these moments, we must step back and ask ourselves: What is the child's intent? What is he or she interested in pursuing? What is our intent or agenda, as the adult? Is that interfering with our understanding of the child's intent?

In order to try to better understand the differing perspectives of children and adults, we often look at children's drawings and make hypotheses about what they were trying to represent. Then we ask the children about their drawings, which helps us to become more familiar with their thinking and intentions. This powerful exercise also helps us to make connections with what is familiar to the children.

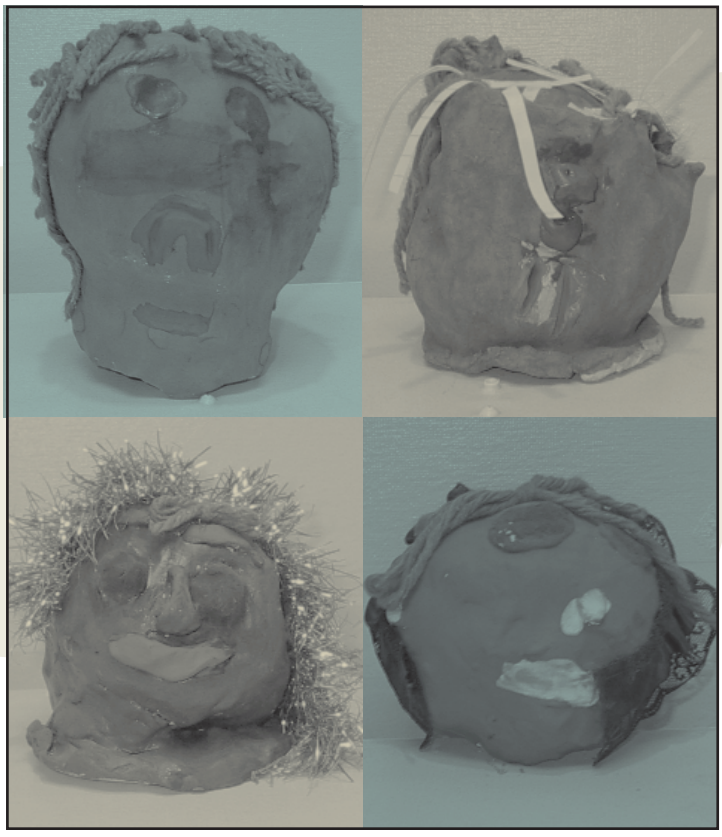
The two studio coordinators, the other two education coordinators and I have spent much time thinking about our roles and how we can support teachers as

they observe and document the activities and explorations in their classrooms and centers. We meet weekly with our director, Karen Haigh, to plan for our program. We often bring dialogues from our weekly meetings with team members to share. After considering the dialogues, we critique our facilitation of these conversations. Then we discuss possible directions for the work in the classrooms.

Team members often have difficulty understanding the meaning and intention of the children's words and work. Therefore, they have difficulty deciding on possible directions to proceed with an exploration. An example: Some teachers took a group of children to visit the "big school" (elementary school). Before the visit, the teachers imagined that the children would focus on homework, the classroom teachers, the items in the classrooms or the lunch room. However, after revisiting the children's drawings and words about this field trip, the teachers noticed that the children most often spoke of the stairs and the windows. After imagining possible ways they might proceed to extend the impact of that experience, the teachers chose to follow the children's interest in windows. Another group of children at a different center visited their "big school" and their teachers decided to follow the children's interest in growing up and being older.

Once a team chooses which direction to follow or which interest to pursue, we all are then challenged with how to support and extend the ideas, interests and theories of the children. Once we're following those interests, we also continue to ask ourselves: How do we extend or facilitate learning, and what does this mean? During planning, we spend time imagining possibilities of where to go next and we hypothesize about the children's possible responses. The coordinators' role is to be a "fresh pair of eyes," to encourage the teachers to brainstorm ways to stretch themselves and the children, as learners.

Currently, coordinators and teachers spend meetings discussing how an in-depth study develops. All of our teams have the chance to study a topic in-depth. Three years ago, in order to support teams in getting started, we began to provide actual guidelines for teams to use to study something with or about children. The first year, coordinators designed these proposed research/study topics; the second year, directors and coordinators designed them together and this year, we have included team members in the process.



Here is our rationale for developing agency-wide study topics:

- to pursue the idea of teachers as researchers.
- to provide structure and direction for staff and parents. This structure of topics to study gives the teachers a framework from which to work, a suggested place to begin their dialogue with the children.
- to offer teams the opportunity and challenge to study something that is relevant to children, staff and parents.
- to be able to track how studies develop in different ways at the various sites.
- to be able to share our action or practical research with others in the field of education through the exploration of these study topics.

PROPOSED RESEARCH/STUDY TOPICS

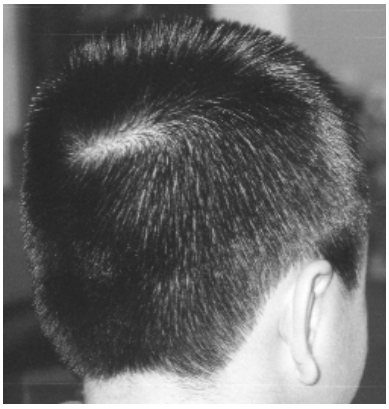
	FALL/EARLY WINTER	LATE WINTER/SPRING	SUMMER
ALL CLASSROOMS	1-Materials/Identity/Community 2-Journaling: Group and/or Individual	1-Materials/Identity/Community 2-Journaling: Group and/or Individual	1-Materials/Identity/Community 2-Journaling: Group and/or Individual
RESEARCH TOPICS *Choose one for each time block* *Adult focused*	1-Follow a child and support what he/she is trying to do 2-Study something about a child that interests you 3-Study something you wonder about children as a group 4-How to ask children questions and how to have conversations with children	1-Follow a child and support what he/she is trying to do 2-Study something about a child that interests you 3-Study something you wonder about children as a group 4-How to ask children questions and how to have conversations with children	1-Follow a child and support what he/she is trying to do 2-Study something about a child that interests you 3-Study something you wonder about children as a group 4-How to ask children questions and how to have conversations with children
STUDY TOPICS *Child focused*	1-Posing a problem to children and documenting how children make decisions 2-How do children see roles differently? 3-Senses 4-Building and construction 5-Colors 6-Studying the beginning and end of the day	1-Changes in children's environment (introducing or removing an item) and children's responses 2-Revisit a topic explored in fall/early winter to notice changes 3-How do things work? 4-Fantasy play and dramatization 5-Children's concept of time 6-Colors 7-Reflections 8-Music/sound	1-Transitions to new classroom experiences (within and outside of our program) 2-Water 3-Revisit a topic explored in fall and/or winter to notice changes 4-How do things work? 5-Fantasy play and dramatization 6-Building and construction 7-Senses 8-Music/sound

These topics reflect what we have found to be common interests of children and explorations that can strengthen the teachers' role as partners in learning with the children. There are written guidelines and suggestions for each research/study topic that elaborate possible paths for investigation and learning, as well as ways to document. For example, when studying the beginning and end of the day, teachers can investigate how children say good-bye to their parents in the morning. They can also observe and document how children work their way into a group or activity. When looking at transitions, we suggest observing the transition from toddler to preschool classrooms, and from preschool to the "big school." We also asked, "What about those not transitioning? What about those left behind in the classroom? How are they responding to their friends moving on to a new experience?" Recently, we have been conducting an agency-wide study of what children know about numbers and letters, reading and writing. The course of study for any of these topics varies widely, depending on the context of the center and classroom community. These topics are a way to help the teachers come to know the children.

When exploring identity with the children, team members have possible categories of identity to consider. Teacher provocations, such as these, elicit the children's thoughts, ideas and interests:

- How are you identified? How did you get your name? What does it mean?
- What do you look like?
- What are you like? What are your personality traits?
- With whom are you connected? What roles do you play within your family?
- What do you like and dislike? What are you afraid of?
- What can you do?
- What do you think and feel?

Christine will illustrate how the process of observation, interpretation and documentation contributed to the evolution of an exploration of materials and identity into a study of hair among children, teachers, parents and community members at New City Child Care Center.



The Hair Study

In the fall of 2001, we introduced the three to five year-old children in our class to various drawing materials. Throughout this exploration, children learned to identify drawing materials by their usage, enabling them to see the unique characteristics of each material by experiencing different techniques. These techniques included shading, thickness and thinness, and lines of various lengths and styles. These lines reminded the children of different types of hair: curly, wavy and straight. At that time, we moved into our identity study and suggested the children use the now familiar drawing materials to represent their ideas about themselves. In order to learn more about the children and their identity, we posed these questions: "Who are you?" and "Tell me about yourself?" We wondered if the children would give us a physical description of themselves, or discuss their likes and dislikes or, maybe, talk about family and friends. This is one of the ways the team comes together before initially introducing topics to children. We think of possible questions to ask the children and make hypotheses about what might happen. We also think of possible questions that the children might ask us.

The children were looking at their reflection in a mirror in the classroom for this initial discussion. During this conversation, we noticed that many of the children made reference to their hair when describing themselves:

KIERA: "Myself, this is Kiera (pointing at herself in the mirror). See my teeth and nose and hair, too."

MONICA: "Is beautiful, 'cause I like dresses and pretty clips in my hair. I like puppies, dogs and cats."

JAVIER: "Javier, my hair, my nose, my eyes, my mouth, my ears and chin. See, that's me, right there."

After considering these reflections at our weekly meeting, our team determined that hair could be an interesting topic to pursue with all the children. We decided to take individual photographs of each child, focusing on their hair. Then we had a group discussion with the children about their hair:

TEACHER: "Touch your hair and tell me how it feels."

CHRISTINA: "It feels tickles."

GERGORIO: "Nice."

MONICA: "Soft like my dad's hair. Mommy combed."

MONCERRAT: "I feel my hair soft and straight."

CRISTINA: "I feel soft and little curly."

GABRIELA: "Soft like Moncerrat's hair, straight and cold."

JACQUELINE: "Mine, it's soft."

PEDRO: "I feel my hair thin."

RICARDO: "Thin, straight, like my mom's hair."

ANGELO: "Good."

JACQUELINE: "Pretty."

ESTEFANIA: "Curly and thick."

ZENAIDA: "Curly, my mom makes my hair curly."

MARTIZA: "Beautiful."

JUAN: "The black one."

FRANCISCO: "I feel my hair tickles."

We noticed that children often mentioned their parents and families in this dialogue. We often look for the common thread in children's conversations, as an indication of their interests.

The children then made drawings from the photo of their hair. The children carefully examined their reflections in the mirror while drawing their hair. Each child was invited to draw their hair from their photograph at four different times. This allowed us time to view the children, and their changing understanding and abilities. The children used their first drawings and photograph as a revisiting tool to prepare their next drawing. We soon realized that many children also drew their face when drawing their hair. They saw both as part of who they are, as part of their identity, and could not separate their hair from their head. Some children tried to draw their face and hair in profile. Some children included details like the clips in their hair and the way their ponytail is tied. Understanding that the children needed time to reflect and revisit their ideas was an important part of this experience.

Through reflection on the children's drawings and conversations, our team noticed that the children had begun to look at the different types of hair within our classroom, the similarities and the differences. As a result, we decided to take photographs of different types of hair within our school community. Some of the children's previous comments were about hair texture, length and color. We showed the children the photographs we took of people in the school community and we asked: "What are the differences in these types of hair?"

JOCELYN: "The color makes differences in the hair. Two of these hairs are the same because they're curl. Ms. Christine and Ms. Elizabeth's hair are different. Ms. Elizabeth have a tight curl hair and Ms. Christine not."

CRISTINA: "The hairs are different because one goes up and the other goes down. The two types of hairs looks the same because when I touch it, I feel tickles."

GABRIELA: "I choose two blonde hairs and said that they're the same."

ANGELO: "These two hairs pictures are different because it's black."

ESTEFANIA: "This is different because it has braids."

FRANCISCO: "This one is blonde."

ESTEFANIA: "My hair is like yours, teacher. These are the same (looking at two photos of blonde hair)."

MELISSA: "They're different hair colors and pony tails. It's more thick in Cristina's hair. The braids in Monique's hair makes hers different."

JUAN: "The hairs are different in the feeling when I touch them."

ZENAIDA: "My hair is curl. My mom made it curly and it's the same color as Pedro."

Children began to compare the types of hair in their own photos in a similar manner. The children's conversations suggested to us that they wanted to find out more about their families' hair. This became a perfect opportunity to ask parents help to support and participate in this study, and lead to a conversation with the children about their hair in their family. Using photographs of the families (taken during our home visits) as a tool to reflect upon, we asked children to describe the hair in their family through drawings and verbal descriptions of their images. We asked: "How does your family's hair look?"

MONICA: "My hair is beautiful. Look, see me and mommy."

ZENIADA: "My mommy fixed my hair like this (pointing to her hair and comparing it to the same style she is wearing today). See, this is my mommy's hair and my sister."

FRANCISCO: "This is my Mommy, me and my sister. We have hair black."

PEDRO: "My mommy has thick line hair. I draw my hair with thick lines."

ESTEPHANIA: "I'm going to color my hair like mommy. My poppy does not paint his hair."

CLAUDIA: "I have hair like this (pointing at her mother's picture), like Mommy."

JAVIER: "My whole family has a lot of hair. Everybody has hair."

GABRIELA: "My mommy has pretty hair. I going to have beautiful hair, too."

CRISTINA: "I wear hair like my sister. Mommy makes our hair the same. She likes to make our hair in braids like this."

GREGORIO: "I see my mommy and my daddy's hair. Here, look, me and my sister. We got hair."

ELIZABETH: "Hair on my family. Here, see we have hair."

JUAN: "See mommy, me, Jasmine. They got their hair here, see."

MONCERRAT: "My momma has a lot of hair. It is like Jacqueline hair. My dad's hair is like my color."

JACQUELINE D.: "My mommy has hair very pretty. My poppy hair is not like mine."

JOCELYN: "We have the color hair like mommy, me, Herman, Jaliene and my sister. Grandma hair goes like this (twirling her finger in a circular motion). Poppy has little hair like Herman."

JALIENE: "My hair is like that (pointing at her picture). We have hair. See, look (pointing) at the picture."

MARITZA: "See mommy and me and my puppy. We got hair. My puppy, too. He have hair, too."

JACQUELINE G.: "See, my hair looks pretty. Mommy and poppy got some hair here, too, pretty."

JAMES: "See mommy comb my hair. She comb her hair, too."

MELISSA: "Nobody has hair like grandma. Look, my hair looks like Mommy and Tina's."

We read this dialogue back to the children so they knew we were paying attention to what they said. We often ask for validation of our conversations by asking, "Is this correct? Did you want to say something else?" After this conversation, the children were asked to draw their family's hair according to their own descriptions.

The drawings, photographs and dialogues that we collected were gathered into documentation that told the story of our study of hair, so far. Using this documentation, we discussed the explorations occurring in the center during our monthly parent meeting. We saw how positively the parents responded to this experience. We asked the parents to duplicate some of the experiences their children had in the classroom with hair. The parents who volunteered were asked to draw a picture of their hair from a photograph. They were then asked to describe their hair and the hair in their families. Parents also drew the members of their family and the way their hair looks. When describing what they noticed from this experience, the parents said that they never thought very much about their hair and what it looks like. They told us that their children had shared with them some of the things they had learned about their hair in school, such as lines, textures and the way it feels to the touch. As a group, parents and teachers together, we also noticed the diversity among our own various types of hair.

We continued to extend this experience into the community by visiting a local hair salon, Gloria's Unisex Salon. Gloria is a former daycare parent who owns this local business so she was happy to have us visit. Some of the children were familiar with the beauty salon because their parents get their hair done there. Before visiting the salon, we discussed with the children what they expected to see in a hair salon:

GREGORIO: "We'll see brushes and combs, and other stuff for the hair."

RICARDO: "They use scissors, brushes and combs for the hair."

JOCELYN: "Water and something for cleaning the hair soap."

MONCERRAT: "No, shampoo for washing the hair like my mommy puts on me and Jacqueline's hair."

JOCELYN: "My Aunt Lola works in a place where they clean the hair with the shampoo and water."

ZENIADA: "They put shampoo and more shampoo. They cut my mom's hair *every day*."

MELISSA: "They comb the hair like this (touching her own hair). They put spray on it, too."

ANGELO: "Use soap and water."

The children validated their own ideas in this conversation. We took photographs of our visit to the hair salon. Gloria showed the children different hairstyles and different hair colors. The teachers volunteered to get their hair done during our visit so the children were assured of seeing a hair salon at work. The children enjoyed watching every step of the process and interacting with Gloria. Some children began to imitate Gloria while she was working with our hair.

As a result of our experience in the beauty salon, we decided to continue to involve the community where

the children live. We visited a local beauty supply/wig shop in the neighborhood. There the children were able to view different styles, colors and textures of hair, weaves and wigs. We asked the children to choose some synthetic hair to bring back to the center.

As we moved into an exploration of a new material, clay, we continued to notice the children's interest in hair. As the children became aware of the properties of clay as a material, they recognized that they would be able to create their own images in clay. We faced a big challenge in creating a form for the busts of the children's heads but we worked it out together with the children. The children surprised us when, instead of choosing the synthetic hair we had bought in the beauty supply store, the children decided to choose different types of recycled materials (garland, string, yarn, paper) to represent their hair types on their clay sculptures. The children consulted with each other regarding which type of recycled material most closely resembled their hair type.

Eventually, we realized that we might not be paying enough attention to the interests of the boys in the class. Should we go to the barber shop? Should we talk about barber shops and what we would find there? After reading a story called "The Big Bushy Mustache," children began talking about their fathers, and their mustaches and beards, and about shaving. As teachers, we realized the many different possibilities we had to explore hair in people and animals. We wondered if we should find ways to introduce these ideas to the children or see if these ideas became part of their conversation. This is a dilemma we always face. As adults, we have to be careful not to impose our adult agenda on the children. We have to discover their interests through conversations with children, by provoking children and asking them questions, and by listening to children.

Collaborative Processes of Learning

The hair study took place from late fall 2001 though April 2002. But it's hard to know when an exploration like this ends. We find it is important to display documentation of the experience as it evolves. Otherwise, the elements of the story can be misplaced and the story is lost. The documentation reminds us how an experience began and what happened next. It's vital to be able to refer to our documentation as the study continues, when a child asks a question and a provocation becomes useful. For example, in this study, one of the teachers could have said, "Do you remember when you told me how your mom puts clips in your hair? Why don't you make a drawing of how your hair looks with clips?"

We have come to value the role of collaboration and reflection within our learning community. Throughout the process of a study, the coordinators help the teachers consider alternatives for the next steps they take with the children. The coordinators often rely on each other and on our director to help reflect on how a study may proceed. The coordinators are then better able to help the teachers anticipate the possibilities for learning in their classrooms.

Our parents are another resource that we have come to value when considering the course of an exploration with the children. At our monthly meetings, teachers and parents examine the children's work and words from our ongoing experiences. We have asked the parents, "What are your goals for your children?" Their responses contribute to our approach for supporting the children and their learning. We have also asked ourselves, as teachers, about our goals for the children and we have asked the children about their goals for themselves. The responses to these questions are then a part of the documentation that is visible in our school. These respectful and reciprocal relationships result in a richer and more dynamic experience for all the members of our community at Chicago Commons.

North American Reggio Emilia Alliance

NAREA SURVEYS MEMBERSHIP

by Lori Geismar-Ryan
*Clayton Schools' Family Center, Clayton MO • NAREA Guiding Board /*Innovations *Editorial Board*

June 2003 marked the six-month anniversary of the establishment of the North American Reggio Emilia Alliance as an organization. At that time, NAREA surveyed its 360 members by e-mail with the intent of gathering member input on topics related to NAREA's activities and initiatives. The NAREA guiding board wanted to hear from the membership in advance of its August board meeting in Seattle, Washington. The member responses received would inform decisions regarding the upcoming annual meeting, web site design and opportunities for member participation. NAREA members were asked to respond to the following questions:

1. What are *your thoughts about topics for future NAREA columns in* Innovations*?*
2. *What did you find on the web site that is useful to you?*
3. *What suggestions do you have for ways that we can improve the web site?*
4. *We are planning NAREA's first annual meeting during the NAEYC conference in Chicago in November 2003. What ideas do you have for the format and content of this meeting to ensure the meeting is a significant and relevant experience for you?*
5. *Please share any additional thoughts or ideas about strategies, initiatives or projects that might help NAREA advance as a responsive and inclusive organization in pursuit of our mission and goals.*

Member responses

Responses to questions are organized into five broad categories: networking, professional development, advocacy, information and NAREA as an organization. We share the thoughtful suggestions of our members below.

Networking. Members feel that NAREA can play an important role as a networking forum where experiences with children, families and other educators can be shared. NAREA members desire opportunities to hear about the work of colleagues, learn from one another, dialogue, collaborate and brainstorm about classroom experiences. Specific suggestions for networking via the NAREA web site include a question and answer/advice site hosted by experienced educators monthly, sharing of membership lists, an on-line bulletin board for posting of items of interest, a "classified section" for job-listings, an on-line chat room and a schools section. NAREA members want to feel a connection to what others are doing, not in a superficial way, but in a way that can inspire.

"It's interesting and nourishing to share experiences with others who are inspired by Reggio Emilia. Perhaps other [NAREA] columns could include interviews with other professionals sharing this similar pathway."

"I think . . . we could make visible how [North American] schools inspired by Reggio are in dialogue and collaborate together. We could write about the experience of collaborating together, presenting together, and how our different contexts and identities support our own experiences. This way, we could make visible how NAREA could become a link for all schools and educators."

Professional development. The responses we received collectively speak to our members' desire to see NAREA evolve into an organization that can actively support the professional development of teachers, studio teachers and pre-service educators. Specific suggestions include the study of documentation, ideas for the development of studio spaces, working within unique contexts with limitations, and pedagogical support for connecting observations and curricular experiences.

"Since our school is new at . . . integrating principles and the philosophy of Reggio, there are a lot of questions. Through this organization, future educational programs, workshops and readings, we hope to continue our journey. It is very exciting!"

Advocacy. Our membership suggests that NAREA, a strong and growing organization of over 400 members, is in a unique position to speak on behalf of young children. NAREA can be a forum for advocacy and can also support advocacy skill development in our members. Within these comments, it is clear that the decision to join NAREA is, in part, a commitment to a particular philosophy and a shared vision of children and society. What we do on behalf of our NAREA membership can be perceived broadly as advocacy beyond educational systems to political and cultural systems.

"I would be glad to participate in thinking about how to be advocates. . . What are the major challenges we face in implementing Reggio-inspired practices in [North America] today? What could be the strategic importance of advocacy within NAREA?"

" . . . now that there are more than 400 members, what will NAREA do with this amazing group of individuals?"

Information. Members seek information in the form of speeches, interviews, web-based communication, *Innovations* articles, articles from other publications, research reports, bibliographies and links to other resources. NAREA is seen by our membership as an important source of information on issues, ideas and initiatives related to the Reggio approach in North America, Italy and in other parts of the world.

"What I would like from NAREA is new information - summaries of ideas and projects from the Reggio schools, transcripts of speeches, interviews, etc. I hope you can provide this soon."

NAREA as an organization. Members articulated how NAREA can continue to develop, involve our membership, connect members to one another, respond to member interests, and further advance its mission and goals. Members are calling for responsiveness on the part of this professional organization as it relates specifically to issues and questions about the Reggio approach.

"So many members are coming from different backgrounds . . . teachers, administrators, professors. Is there any way to identify ourselves within the small groups and still be part of the identity of the large group?"

"[Keep us informed of the] progress that has been made, plans for the future, how NAREA is working with other organizations and groups."

Emerging plans and ongoing dialogue.

This important feedback provided by members will inform the future direction of NAREA. Suggestions were incorporated into the August guiding board discussions and will continue to contribute to plans for upcoming initiatives including NAREA web site development, *Innovations* articles, and the NAREA annual meeting on Friday evening, November 7 in Chicago during the NAEYC Annual Conference. Check the NAEYC program for exact time and place. Members will receive a meeting invitation by mail in early October.

The ongoing contribution of ideas and opinions of members will support NAREA as a growing organization. We must move forward both systematically and responsively, and work in the spirit of the member who said, "Getting back to NAREA membership about what you have discovered about the interests of the NAREA members will be helpful. How can the results of this survey be used for thinking about and promoting dialogue among NAREA membership?"

If you did not receive the original e-mail questions and would like to respond to the survey, please send your thoughts to NAREA's administrative coordinator, Cheryl Rapaport, by e-mail at: inspiredpractices@mindspring.com or by mail: c/o Inspired Practices, Inc., 2040 Wilson Ridge Court, Roswell, Georgia 30075.

NAREA is dependent on the exchange of ideas among members. We look forward to seeing you at the NAREA annual meeting in Chicago.

Drawings courtesy of Reggio Children. Photographs courtesy of Chicago Commons Child Development Program.

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