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CAROLYN POPE EDWARDS
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Teacher Research in Reggio Emilia: Essence of a Dynamic, Evolving Role

Many aspects of the Reggio Emilia experience are fascinating to American educators, but perhaps none more than the role of the teacher. How do teachers (infant-toddler and preschool) support, facilitate, and guide children to the complex levels seen in classroom interactions as well as in the creative works children produce? Certainly, the teacher's role has intrigued both of us ever since we began our studies in Reggio Emilia, even before we began collaborating on the three successive editions of *The Hundred Languages of Children* (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman 1993; 1998; 2012). In each of those volumes, Carolyn contributed a chapter specifically focused on the Role of the Teacher. In preparing the third edition, we interviewed many teachers and administrative leaders, and thereby gained many new insights into the dynamic and evolving aspects of teachers' work in Reggio. In this article, we will summarize some of our thoughts about this issue, with particular focus on teachers as researchers.

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Reggio Emilia: A transforming city

Reggio Emilia is a very old city, founded by the Romans in the second century B.C. It still has many buildings of great antiquity, as well as remnants of the old walls that surrounded and protected it. However, Reggio Emilia is also a lively city undergoing rapid economic growth and population and generational change.

Indeed, the whole Po Valley area in northern Italy has experienced rapid economic development, becoming one of the most industrialized parts of Europe. Reggio Emilia has grown prosperous in the food and fashion industries,

and was recently linked to Italy's new high-speed railway system. Economic changes have also spurred social changes, which are even more notable. As stated by Piccinini and Giudici,

> [i]n the course of this evolution, the city is moving away from consolidated traditions toward those that are new and unfamiliar. It is possible to see the signs of this change in the landscape and architecture of the city, yet the social changes are of even more importance, though not as visible. (2012, 90)

Reggio Emilia is a forward-looking city, with many new inhabitants as well as new construction.

Influx of new families

Reggio Emilia today is a growing city, a young city, and a culturally and racially diverse city, experiencing an influx of new families from around Europe and the world. The most common countries of origin of the young children in the municipal infant-toddler centers and preschools are Albania, Tunisia, Morocco, Ghana, Nigeria, and China. Because of the high level of immigration, Reggio Emilia is experiencing a new level of encounter between different cultures. For this reason, the city leaders are striving to create new forms of citizen participation and involvement, as well as educational services for all children in the community. They want to ensure that the longtime residents of Reggio Emilia do not react to change with fear—of outsiders, change, or losing a familiar standard of living.

City leaders are also aware that when people feel excluded from the community, the risk of conflict arises. The former mayor, Graziano Delrio, spoke eloquently of this at the North American Reggio Emilia

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Mothers gather in the park in the center of the city.

Alliance (NAREA) Conference in Chicago in 2012:

> Today when the zeitgeist tells us that difference is a problem, our society can choose between two kinds of relationships: bonding or bridging. We can stay within the group creating bonds that knit the group together, reinforcing a sense of belonging. Or we can stimulate openness to the other, to the different, thereby gaining knowledge and stimulating curiosity toward the others along a path of enrichment and positive change. This is the bridging approach, a multi-connection, which multiplies knowledge.

Tighter financial situation

Besides the influx of newcomers, Reggio Emilia also faces a tighter financial situation, with fewer resources but more competing needs. The world economic crisis that began in 2008 also affected Italy. In Reggio Emilia, the rising cost of public early childhood education and care has become a source of concern. At the same time, there are increasing family requests for high-quality services for children under three years of age. The city leaders have acknowledged these requests, and considered the fact that community unity depends on public services embracing everyone (not just some income levels or segments of society). Thus, the elected officials and governing bodies, along with the leaders of the educational system, have worked slowly and steadily to expand the amount and types of services available to the community. One innovation to accomplish this goal is the creation of new partnerships to expand services and to better network existing relationships. For example, in 2003, a public-private system was created with the goal to provide education for all the young children in the city. Called the *"Istituzione,"* it is an umbrella organization that oversees the municipal, state-run, and mixed public-private educational services for the birth-to-6 age range.

Generational turnover of educators

Finally, along with change in its population profile and organization of services, Reggio Emilia is also experiencing a generational turnover in its educators. As the founding generation of *atelieristi* (studio teachers) and *pedagogisti* (pedagogical coordinators) retires, this generation is being replaced by younger individuals with new outlooks and background experiences.

What does it mean for Reggio's high-quality approach to working in schools to experience so much change? It is not an easy matter to carry out this high level of functionality in the face of many changes: new families—many from abroad and not socialized to the Italian tradition of active parental involvement in school; new financial situations and cooperative arrangements; and a new generation of younger and less experienced educators.

Aspects of the teacher's role in Reggio Emilia

When Italian early childhood educators talk about their work, they do not break it down into elements or dimensions the way many Americans do. Instead, they might talk about philosophical themes that create goals for their

work and allow educators from different places and services to talk together, such as well-being, continuity, culture, and aesthetics (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman 2012, 10–11). But when we look closely, we can find familiar elements of the teacher's role, just rephrased somewhat differently. The rephrasing strikes a chord; it promotes interesting ways to reframe the teachers' work.

In this article, we will consider one-by-one the aspects of the teacher's role in Reggio, with comments on how these interact with the transformations taking place in Reggio Emilia today. We will consider what it might mean for teachers' practice—for their methods of teacher research oriented to innovation—to deal with so much social, economic, and generational change. We will cover parts of the teacher's role familiar to Americans, including: planning curriculum and environment; interacting with and observing children to promote learning through play and appropriate instruction; providing nurturance and guidance to children; and promoting parent engagement and involvement. In suggesting how these aspects play out in a special way in Reggio Emilia, we draw from the excellent discussion by Susan Fraser, in *Authentic Childhood: Experiencing Reggio Emilia in the Classroom* (2000, chapter 3), and for many illustrative photographs, we draw from Edwards, Gandini, and Forman (2012).

The teacher as researcher

Research is a concept that underpins all activity of Reggio Emilia educators, in a general way of working aimed at generating new ideas, thoughts, and projects closely linked to the contemporary world. It is central to the teacher's role in all of the dimensions we will describe, and is actually more closely linked to the American idea of *innovation* than to that of systematic hypothesis testing. From this perspective, research can be considered a way of thinking and approaching knowledge oriented to the future. It is a way of understanding oneself in relation to the world that can produce the kind of innovation only derived from systematic pursuit of multiple perspectives on problems and rigorous examination of evidence at hand.

Vea Vecchi and Carlina Rinaldi talking together in the atelier of the Diana Preschool, circa 1990.

In chapter 13 of Edwards, Gandini, and Forman (2012), Carlina Rinaldi focuses on the differences between the kind of research that takes place in scientific laboratories and universities, and the kind

of research or experimentation that teachers and ordinary citizens can and should do. She says that:

> When teachers make listening and documentation central to their practice, they transform themselves into researchers. (2012, 244)

Rinaldi goes on to propose the concept of normal, or everyday, research, defined as:

> . . . an attitude and an approach in everyday living—not only in schools but also outside of them—as a way of thinking for ourselves and thinking jointly with others, a way of relating with other people, with the world around us, and with life. (2012, 245)

We will show how a questioning and searching attitude, or inquiry process, pervades the work of teachers in Reggio Emilia. We believe this is "inquiry as stance," as defined by Cochran-Smith and Lytle:

> . . . a continual process of making current arrangements problematic; questioning the ways knowledge and practice are constructed, evaluated, and used; and assuming that part of the work of practitioners individually and collectively is to participate in educational and social change. (2009, 121)

The teacher as colleague within a network and organization

In Reggio Emilia, the role of the teacher as "master of the classroom" is transformed into something much more collective or collaborative. The teacher's work is defined not individually but rather as a **colleague co-acting within a network and organization**. It is normal to have two coteachers per classroom, or even three in the first two years at the infant-toddlers centers. Together, teachers are continually researching: *What does each of us know, and what have we observed and considered, that can be usefully shared in an ongoing, mutual experience?*

Certainly, teachers and staff offer one another emotional support and encouragement as well as concrete suggestions and advice. In addition, however, a method of extended mutual criticism and self-examination is very much accepted. Indeed, an important part of teacher professional development in Reggio Emilia entails a small work group—composed perhaps of teacher(s), mentor teacher, *pedagogista, atelierista*—observing and documenting a group of children together, then meeting for lengthy discussion, analysis, and comparison of perspectives. This method of collaborating has been used for many years in Reggio Emilia, with variations according to the annual plans for professional development formulated by the Pedagogical Coordinating Team (see Edwards, Gandini, & Forman 2012, chapter 8).

The reflection process is often simulated for visiting study groups in the large plenary sessions conducted at the Loris Malaguzzi International Center. The process typically involves an introductory phase, where those who have planned, conducted, and documented an experience with children provide others with necessary background and context and also frame the reflections to follow. Next, *the documentation is shared*. The group (sometimes divided into smaller groups with a facilitator) engages in extended reflection

Lella Gandini interviews Tiziana Filippini in the atelier of the Diana Preschool, 2009, to gain understanding of the role of the pedagogical coordinating team.

on that documentation, carefully listening to each voice, following an implicit ethical code, and affording each person the right to participate. Finally, each of the presenting educators acknowledges all the reflections *and offers final comments*, noting the many insights offered and new questions raised.

Today, this reflection process is also used in a modified form when international study groups visit the infant-toddler centers and preschools. All of the centers and schools are involved; the visits are considered important not only for visitors' learning but just as much for the educators themselves. Thus, it is intrinsic to ongoing professional development. A group of visitors (perhaps 30 in number) first receive an introduction to the school delivered by two or three "hosts" (usually a teacher or two, and an *atelierista* or *pedagogista*). Then, visitors fan out to observe and take notes for an hour or so. Finally, visitors gather again to share observations and reactions and ask questions of the host educators. Later, study group members meet on their own with others from their school or community and share what they learned that day.

Study tour discussing their day's reflections outside the Bruno Munari Preschool.

In general, the process of teachers' ongoing professional development looks somewhat different today than in the past due to the increasing complexity of the system of services. The goal remains what it always was, to sustain quality education through reflection, inquiry, and innovation. Educators hold to principles that their research should be purposeful and systematic, public and transparent, and supported through strong organization and networks. For example, Reggio leaders have introduced some innovations in their organization of professional development. There are now three cross-cutting, or "transversal," *pedagogisti*, who coordinate the pedagogical system throughout its entire complexity. These transversals are responsible for the pedagogical coordination within the city of Reggio Emilia and for the professional

development of the staff. They are also responsible for collaboration with other educational initiatives in the city and the Emilia Romagna region.

Furthermore, other changes in professional development have been introduced due to the influx of new kinds of children and families, as well as the wave of newly-hired teachers (pedagogisti and other staff) entering the Reggio Emilia early childhood system. Paola Cagliari, the new Director of the Municipal Infant-Toddler Centers and Preschools, and Claudia Giudici, President of the Istituzione Scuole e Nidi Reggio Emilia, have worked closely to conceive and lead a transformation of the professional development system that they call a "diffuse pedagogical system." This "diffuse system" of professional development is not designed for linear and top-down transmission, but instead creates many collegial zones of knowledge creation and exchange. Competences are deepened and enlarged in a forum that ideally promotes learning between older and younger generations, across job categories, and around pedagogical issues of enduring concern. This new system amplifies tendencies of past years and sharpens earlier emphases, yet also reveals the capacity of the Reggio early childhood system to evolve and adapt to new conditions and challenges.

Today, the intellectual content of professional development is sometimes focused on "conceptual knots" that can be explored in collaboration across educational roles. These "knots" are those common-yet-enduring, thorny issues of everyday teaching, such as how and what to observe; how children interact and learn; ways to encounter the zone of proximal development of children, colleagues, and parents; and how one becomes part of and contributes to educational action. These topics represent a departure from a focus on long-term projects, such as those described extensively in the many publications and exhibit themes prepared by Reggio educators (e.g., "City and the Rain," "Shadowiness," "The Long Jump," "The Importance of Looking at Ourselves," "The Amusement Park for Birds," "Reggio Tutta," and "The Theater Curtain," to name a well-known few). Yet, the heritage of those projects is not to be lost; instead it is kept alive through contemporary study and revisiting some of those past themes with children, delving back for guidance into documentation preserved in the schools and the Documentation and Educational Research Center. In a time of economic stringency, instead of producing many new publications educators can study the productions of the past, with the intention of producing novel professional development for new personnel.

Children experiment at the water table while constructing a fountain, as part of "The Amusement Park for Birds" Project.

The teacher, Marina Castagnetti, notices that children need help with something they are trying to do with the play. First, she points and tells.

Then she decides they need her to actually show them what she means.

The teacher's role in curriculum: Progettazione and pedagogy of listening

The familiar role of teachers in promoting learning and preparing curriculum in Reggio Emilia is discussed as **documentation and flexible planning**. The concept of flexible planning is covered by their term *progettazione*, which is roughly translated as "projecting on the basis of observed or documented action or interaction to be interpreted together." The concept applies to any aspect of curriculum or life of the school, and always involves multiple voices in decisions:

> The curriculum is at once defined and undefined, structured and unstructured, based more on flexible strategies than rigid plans. (Rinaldi 1998, 119)

We believe that there are two sides, or "faces," of *progettazione*. With both, the teacher researches these questions: *Why? What happened? What does it mean? What else could happen if . . .?*

The first side of *progettazione* involves what Americans often speak of as "emergent curriculum," with its strongest version the Project Approach—those big, long-term projects involving a whole classroom or school, or even many schools together. This is what many people think of when they hear the words "Reggio Emilia" and are reminded of projects such as "The City in the Rain," "Shadowiness," and so on from the exhibits *The Hundred Languages of Children and The Wonder of Learning*. A new example of such a long-term project is provided in the color insert "From Messages to Writing," by Laura Rubizzi and Simona Bonilauri, in Edwards, Gandini, and Forman (2012, 213–222). But long-term projects are not the whole story.

The second side of *progettazione* involves the "pedagogy of listening" (see Rinaldi's chapter 13 in Edwards, Gandini, & Forman 2012). The pedagogy of listening means helping children find meaning in what they do, what they encounter, and what they experience. In the Reggio preschools today, we see

broad inquiry on topics of child well-being, such as *food and healthy eating; relationships with nature and the outdoors;* and *technology with children.*

Regarding technology, the school environments are now full of digital technology for children and for teachers' use in preparing documentation. One example is a little booklet published by Diana School. "Micropublishing" is a way for individual schools to share the results of their research and sell small publications to school visitors. Diana School's booklet is called *The Children and the Digital Environment*; in it we see children's experimentation on the computer, transforming their digital photos of the natural world outside their school. In fact, there are printers, scanners, video monitors, and video projectors in many of the *ateliers*. The children are taught how to use this equipment to produce images on paper and images, transformations, animations, and video clips on the computer screen. (For further information, consult Forman's chapter 19 on digital media in Edwards, Gandini, & Forman 2012.)

The cover of the booklet *Children and the Digital Environment,* produced by the Diana Preschool, December, 2012. It describes children's experiments with digital technology.

Both sides of *progettazione* are alive and well in Reggio, but there has been a shift in emphasis from the first to the second. Much in-house professional development focuses on infusing quality into ordinary moments, not only in infant-toddler centers and preschools but also in laboratories, citywide events, and all sorts of learning encounters relevant to every age, from young to old. Yet the enduring research questions remain central: *Why? What happened? What does it mean? What else could happen if . . .?*

The teacher as creator of the environment

In Reggio, the familiar role of the teacher as "program planner" changes to creator of the environment as a third teacher. Providing a quality program naturally begins with preparing the space and environment, indoors and out. The quality and aesthetics of materials, furnishings, and images (their "taste" or "flavor") help the child appreciate, love, respect, and take advantage of the environment. Calm but stimulating environments promote well-being—that is, a sense of being fully at ease in the setting. This careful preparation, plus continuity of care (looping) are in our opinion what make possible financially feasible teacher/child ratios in Reggio. The teachers inquire: *How can we renew our older spaces and environments, and innovate design of new ones, to meet the learning needs of children today?*

The Villa Sesso Preschool illustrates a typical story of how space and environments are always scrutinized and revitalized in Reggio Emilia. The Villa Sesso was one of the historic preschools. It was founded at the end of World War II by a group of women, moved in 1960 and then again in 1972 when it was inaugurated as the Municipal Preschool of Villa Sesso at Botteghino (Ghirardi 2002). Because of its striking natural surroundings—beautiful fields, rich with vegetables and grapevines—in 1991 this school officially became a "green center," where children and teachers concentrated on the ecology of the countryside and taking care of the school grounds. Parents and visitors marveled at the richness of transformation of natural materi-

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Children explore the grounds of La Viletta Preschool with a map they are using to situate the amusement park for birds they are constructing.

als, especially in the *atelier* but also in the way the school kitchen became a place of participation for children and a focus of preparation and enjoyment of healthy food together in the group.

In 2010, following the donation of new land and funding for a new building, now called the Martiri di Sesso Preschool, planning started for the creation of a wide surrounding park. At the same time, the public administration of the city of Reggio Emilia established a research group of educators, parents, and technicians to reconsider and recommend improvements for the outside areas of all preschools and infant-toddler centers. The research group suggested that teachers of each preschool and infant-toddler center should carry out an inquiry, questioning parents as well. The intention was to find out how the children perceive, encounter, interpret, and live in the green areas in their courtyards and outside spaces, no matter what size. This teacher inquiry informed and helped orient atelieristi, pedagogisti, and the research group to make proposals for change.

Here are some of the questions the teachers asked in their inquiry:

- How do children of today enter into relationship with the natural green surroundings?
- How do children move within such spaces?
- Which gestures and words do they use?
- How do they make use of such spaces, and what is there?
- What mental images do they have of these places?
- Which aspects seem most attractive?
- How do they represent them?

In addition, many Reggio teachers today work in bold new spaces benefitting from the innovation of young architects. The new Giulia Maramotti Infant-Toddler Center, for example, was supported by a gift from Maramotti Foundation/Max Mara, in collaboration with Reggio Children, in a competition open to young architects and engineers under age 35. It was inspired by high-quality pedagogical and architectural criteria and values. (See Gandini's chapter 18 on space and environments, in Edwards, Gandini, & Forman 2012.) The architects, Francesca Fava and Carlo Margini, innovated a striking design open to the outdoors that included movable *ateliers* that could be placed close to the building in winter and further out toward the grounds in summer.

In sum, today we see much more emphasis on children's relationships with nature and the outdoors, and on the relation of living plants to the

emotional and physical nourishment of human beings. In the design of new buildings, we see explicit elements to bring the outside in and take the inside out. We find booklets/documentation of projects where children investigate plants, the sea, the air, and consider the future of the earth.

The teacher as guide in fostering exchange and community

The familiar role of "providing guidance" is best understood in Reggio Emilia as **fostering exchange of understandings and promoting community of children**. Teacher research focuses on this question: *How can we make our centers and schools more inclusive of all children?*

Children with special rights due to their disabilities or unique learning needs have first priority for admission to the public services of Reggio Emilia. Today, educators actively seek to strengthen relationships with community health providers to increase quantity and quality of inclusive participation. They also seek to learn about new therapies compatible with their relational approach to pedagogy, and to understand the seeming increase in certain conditions such as autistic spectrum disorders. These inquiries are well described in Soncini's chapter 11 on "the inclusive community" in Edwards, Gandini, & Forman (2012). For many years, Soncini has been the transversal *pedagogista* with expertise in special education; she works with all centers and schools to support successful inclusion. She offers this remarkable example of the Reggio approach.

© Cathleen Smith

The outdoor garden invites children of different abilities to play together.

© Cathleen Smith

Sometimes a brush with a large handle and paint of a strong color help a child do satisfying work in the inclusive community.

When Marco arrived at Anna Frank Preschool, he had already spent a year at the Salvador Allende Infant-Toddler Center. . . . Born without eye lobes, he wore prostheses that needed to be periodically cleaned and reset, a process that may have been somewhat difficult for him. . . . In the infant-toddler center, the decision had been to get to know Marco better by choosing spaces inside and outside the classroom that were distinctive for the sounds and resonance of their materials. For example, the teachers had made available percussion musical instruments in one area, bells attached to a climbing structure in another, construction materials involving metal and wood in a third, and a pillow made of furry material on which to sit at circle time. They also found a rug with a thick border that he could easily feel when he was crawling, and they placed it where he could play with other children. The year at Salvador Allende was like a rebirth for Marco. He started to use verbal language, above all to construct utterances (phrases) that he used to ask for help. He also started to walk around accompanied by an adult . . . [but his language and] exploration of materials with his hands was very limited.

When he entered Anna Frank Preschool, Marco showed great pleasure every day in meeting his classmates, who liked to greet him at the door when he arrived and help him take off his coat. . . . The teachers and children at Anna Frank discussed and shared the challenges of Marco to find solutions that might help him move from place to place independently . . . the bathroom, the kitchen, the piazza? [After much discussion,] the child thought of the idea to create a tactile path, using a strip made with a solid plastic rug with bumps in relief that he could feel with his feet as he walked. They experimented with different surfaces and types of carpets by walking with their eyes closed until they found the one they thought would be best. For the pathway to the kitchen, they thought about a rope with bells attached, and this was set along the wall, starting after the door of the classroom. Finally, thinking about going between classroom and piazza, his schoolmates first chose elements in the piazza and the classroom with which they saw that Marco particularly liked to interact: a rocking horse near the door in his classroom and the piano in the piazza. Their ideas were many and demonstrated great variety; and they took into account Marco's needs, which were ever-changing, and the difficulties that they gradually encountered.

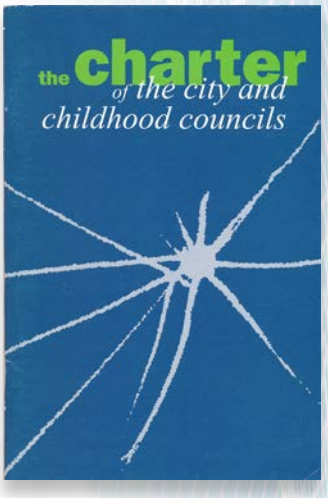
What was important to his teachers was that the children looked forward to playing with him and were trying to "think about Marco and think as Marco." They empathized with him and seriously pretended to have his limits and his possibilities. . . . Marco participated in the small group discussions, so that his opinion was involved. These discussions seemed to activate . . . Marco. . . . [He] used the piano keyboard and discovered the different tones. . . . He began to play with the sounds [with] one or two other children and . . . mov[ed] himself around at the piano, standing up to reach the keys of contrasting tonalities. He even created some games with a friend, consisting of a dialogue of sounds (stimulus and answer) and some patterns of rhythm. All of this was very encouraging in Marco's ongoing story. (Soncini 2012, 200–201)

The teacher as partner with families

The familiar role of "educating and involving families" is defined in the Reggio approach as **promoting participation and exchange**. In the United States, parent involvement commonly refers to parents becoming connected to schools. However, the term usually implies something one-sided: the parent contributes on the school's terms—the teacher is the expert and gets the parent to contribute in a helpful way. Parent involvement in the US is

often expected to produce "outcomes" (Edwards & Kutaka 2015); it results from "investments" leading to "payoffs."

In contrast, in preschools in Reggio Emilia and other Italian cities, the relationship between schools and families is generally referred to with the term **participation**. There is a formal election of parent representatives for each preschool and infant-toddler center, and from those representatives a committee of parents is elected to represent families directly with the city government. As the advisory system evolves, educators are researching this question: *How can we strengthen participation even as our community grows and develops, and the needs of children and families change?*



The Charter of the City and Childhood Councils was produced by a study group of stakeholders in Reggio Emilia in 2002.

In all writing on Italian early childhood education, the term "participation" recurs over and over, incorporating the whole spectrum of meanings covered by the English terms involvement, engagement, and partnership. "Participation" is broad, implying that not only parents and teachers but also other members of the community participate. It covers all forms and levels of participation and contribution, without distinction, and frames issues connected to diversity in terms of multiple perspectives and invitations to dialogue. The following three quotations from parents in Reggio Emilia suggest the emotional value that parents derive from participating on the advisory council of their children's preschool:

> For me it's a looking for growth through times of shared reflection, through opportunities for exchange, comparing points of view, taking our reflections further, so that I am closer to my child as a parent, so that we grow together as people.

> It's a personal development, sharing points of view, friendship, wanting to help do things, telling our stories; because if we parents talk about ourselves a bit then that helps the teachers in their work with our children, which is of primary importance to all of us. It shows us that not everything is necessarily owed to us, and if we can learn that we can pass it on to our children for their growth and future.

> I understand participation in the City and Childhood Council to be an assumption of responsibility . . . which comes from the civic sense of belonging and contributing to a civilized community—collective—society. (Documentation and Educational Research Centre 2002, 9, 25, 34)

Thus, the reasons and motives that stimulate parents to participate are what have changed most from former decades. It is clear that nowadays people participate and become involved not so much out of idealistic fervor or political conviction, but rather out of a desire to seek opportunities for personal growth or for their children's growth. They seek meaningful experiences and to both give and receive enrichment and help.

As an example of how this affects the role of the teacher, consider how in recent years the increasing diversity of children and families in the schools has presented a focus of concern. Some members of the pedagogical team have demonstrated leadership in helping teachers cultivate sensitivity toward other cultures and increasing intercultural appreciation and respect in the schools. For example, Deanna Margini, a *pedagogista* with rich pre-

vious cultural background, describes how the city government has hired cultural mediators for each foreign language group (2010). She also explains the importance for infant-toddler and preschool staff of weekly meetings with their *pedagogisti,* who can encourage the teachers to talk openly (see also chapter 8 on the Pedagogical Coordinating Team, in Edwards, Gandini, & Forman 2012). The *pedagogisti* can ask the teachers about progress with particular families' participation. They can support teachers in describing the experiences of the children and sharing how relationships with families are developing. Any teacher naturally feels deeply affected when a misunderstanding arises or when it seems that trust is not growing with a family. The *pedagogisti* can encourage the teachers to talk about an episode that was not positive, that was uncomfortable for a teacher or in which she did not understand the intercultural nuances. At times, teachers may misinterpret a family member's behavior because that person is from a different nationality or culture. In counteracting this, it can be helpful for educators to reflect together in staff meetings in order to better understand and consider how to pay better attention to aspects of communication teaching staff might underestimate or overlook.

As a result of their intercultural experiences, all the educators—teachers, aides, members of the pedagogical team, and cultural mediators—attain a better sense of the points of view of immigrant parents, and thus are better able to partner with them. The teachers, for instance, realize how much insight they experience when families begin to emerge in their individuality, offering their personal and cultural resources and speaking about their lives. Families voice their particular paths as immigrants; their personal questions and worries about whether or not to create a family here; problems they may have in relation with families of their native country; or difficulties that the Italian laws and legal system continue to pose in the daily life of immigrants. The *pedagogisti* and cultural mediators play a facilitating role in creating a truly shared educational experience.

Conclusion

In sum, teacher practice (with a strong value placed on active inquiry) is constantly evolving in Reggio Emilia through experimentation and iterative, cumulative changes. These changes are visible in how Reggio teachers co-act within a network and organization of colleagues and design and use space and environments. The changes are also seen in how they inquire about promoting child learning and project curriculum through documentation and foster communication and community in an inclusive community. Finally, the dynamic and evolving role of teachers is visible in response to family diversity to strengthen participation and partnership with parents. In all of these aspects, the teachers flourish as researchers, seeking to do the best work possible by continually asking deep questions about their work

and reflecting with others on what has happened, what it means, and how to go forward. This kind of research requires much courage in the face of uncertainty, and confidence that everyone together has the necessary power and strength.

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