

The Hundred Languages of Children



The Reggio Emilia Approach to Early Childhood Education

Editors

Carolyn Edwards
Lella Gandini
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THE HUNDRED LANGUAGES OF CHILDREN:

The Reggio Emilia Approach to Early Childhood Education

**Carolyn Edwards, Lella Gandini,
and George Forman**



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Invece il cento c'è.

*Il bambino
é fatto di cento.
Il bambino ha
cento lingue
cento mani
cento pensieri
cento modi di pensare
di giocare e di parlare
cento sempre cento
modi di ascoltare
di stupire di amare
cento allegrie
per cantare e capire
cento mondi
da scoprire
cento mondi
da inventare
cento mondi
da sognare.
Il bambino ha
cento lingue
(e poi cento cento cento)
ma gliene rubano novantanove.
La scuola e la cultura
gli separano la testa dal corpo.
Gli dicono:
di pensare senza mani
di fare senza testa
di ascoltare e di non parlare
di capire senza allegrie
di amare e di stupirsi
solo a Pasqua e a Natale.
Gli dicono:
di scoprire il mondo che già c'è
e di cento
gliene rubano novantanove.
Gli dicono:
che il gioco e il lavoro
la realtà e la fantasia
la scienza e l'immaginazione
il cielo e la terra
la ragione e il sogno
sono cose
che non stanno insieme.
Gli dicono insomma
che il cento non c'è.
Il bambino dice:
invece il cento c'è.*

—LORIS MALAGUZZI

No way. The hundred *is* there.*

The child
is made of one hundred.
The child has
a hundred languages
a hundred hands
a hundred thoughts
a hundred ways of thinking
of playing, of speaking.
A hundred always a hundred
ways of listening
of marveling of loving
a hundred joys
for singing and understanding
a hundred worlds
to discover
a hundred worlds
to invent
a hundred worlds
to dream.
The child has
a hundred languages
(and a hundred hundred hundred more)
but they steal ninety-nine.
The school and the culture
separate the head from the body.
They tell the child:
to think without hands
to do without head
to listen and not to speak
to understand without joy
to love and to marvel
only at Easter and Christmas.
They tell the child:
to discover the world already there
and of the hundred
they steal ninety-nine.
They tell the child:
that work and play
reality and fantasy
science and imagination
sky and earth
reason and dream
are things
that do not belong together.

And thus they tell the child
that the hundred is not there.
The child says:
No way. The hundred *is* there.

—LORIS MALAGUZZI

*Translated by Lella Gandini

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Foreword: Complementary Perspectives on Reggio Emilia

Howard Gardner

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In the opening pages of this book, you will read the remarkable story of how Loris Malaguzzi, an intellectually oriented young Italian teacher, became interested in the building of a new school directly after the Second World War, and how a momentary infatuation with this new construction turned into a lifelong love affair with young pupils. Without question, Malaguzzi (as he is universally called) is the guiding genius of Reggio—the thinker whose name deserves to be uttered in the same breath as his heroes Froebel, Montessori, Dewey, Piaget. But far more so than most other educational thinkers, Malaguzzi has dedicated his life to the establishment of an educational community: a remarkable group of teachers of various stripes and specialties who have worked together for years, even decades, with parents, community members, and thousands of children, to set up a system that works.

The Reggio system can be described succinctly as follows: It is a collection of schools for young children in which each child's intellectual, emotional, social, and moral potentials are carefully cultivated and guided. The principal educational vehicle involves youngsters in long-term engrossing projects, which are carried out in a beautiful, healthy, love-filled setting. Dewey wrote about progressive education for decades but his school lasted a scant four years. In sharp contrast, it is the Reggio community, more so than the philosophy or method, that constitutes Malaguzzi's central achievement. Nowhere else in the world is there such a seamless and symbiotic relationship between a school's progressive philosophy and its practices.

Just as Reggio represents the achievement of many individuals and groups, each of which brings to bear its own special gifts, so, too, the present volume is distinguished by the range of individuals who have reflected about Reggio from their own distinctive and complementary perspectives. Within the Reggio family, there are essays by individuals who represent the teaching, the architectural design and layout, the community relations, and the rich curricula of projects. From the American perspective, there are the impressions of a philosopher, a film maker, a progressive educator, and several researchers who have explored the cognitive, affective, and social dimensions of the projects carried out by the children of Reggio and their teachers. Of special note is that cohort of educator-researchers who have traveled back and forth between Reggio and Massachusetts during the 1980s, sharing experiences and developing their own transoceanic network. These individuals and others have helped to make Reggio Emilia known around the world, even as they have sought to explicate its special nature to interested audiences on both sides of the Atlantic.

Words are necessarily the prime medium in a book. The writers

have done a splendid job of recreating the special atmosphere of Reggio, and the various photos and diagrams presented here add the essential visual element to the portrait. The various exhibitions about Reggio that have been mounted have helped to convey its special flavor, and there are now several film and video treatments as well. Of course, there is no substitute for a visit to Reggio Emilia, and without a doubt, the publication of this book will increase traffic to the lush and civilized Emilia Romagna area. Yet, even for those who are quite familiar with the Reggio scene, this book provides a wealth of additional information. As one who had the privilege of visiting in Reggio several years ago, and has remained in touch ever since, I can say that I learned something on nearly every page of this gritty volume.

In reading *The Hundred Languages of Children* I was struck—or struck anew—by many messages, of which I shall mention just a few. So much has been written about progressive methods in education, but so rarely are the ideals of progressive education actually realized. Perhaps one reason why is that one needs a team that is willing to work together for decades in the service of a set of energizing ideas; the team needs to evolve procedures for attaining an education of quality while still encouraging growth for all who participate. So much has been written about the powers of the young mind, and yet so rarely can they be seen in full action. In Reggio, the teachers know how to listen to children, how to allow them to take the initiative, and yet how to guide them in productive ways. There is no fetish made about achieving adult standards, and yet the dedication exemplified by the community insures that work of quality will result. The effect comes about because of the infinite care taken with respect to every aspect of existence, whether it be the decision to constitute groups of two as compared with three children, the choice of brush or color, or the receptivity to surprises and to surprise. Reggio successfully challenges so many false dichotomies: art vs. science, individual vs. community, child vs. adult, enjoyment vs. study, nuclear family vs. extended family; by achieving a unique harmony that spans these contrasts, it reconfigures our sclerotic categorical systems.

As an American educator, I cannot help but be struck by certain paradoxes. In America we pride ourselves on being focused on children, and yet we do not pay sufficient attention to what they are actually expressing. We call for cooperative learning among children, and yet we rarely have sustained cooperation at the level of teacher and administrator. We call for artistic works, but we rarely fashion environments that can truly support and inspire them. We call for parental involvement, but are loathe to share ownership, responsibility, and credit with parents. We recognize the need for community, but we so

often crystallize immediately into interest groups. We hail the discovery method, but we do not have the confidence to allow children to follow their own noses and hunches. We call for debate, but often spurn it; we call for listening, but we prefer to talk; we are affluent, but we do not safeguard those resources that can allow us to remain so and to foster the affluence of others. Reggio is so instructive in these respects. Where we are often intent to invoke slogans, the educators in Reggio work tirelessly to solve many of these fundamental—and fundamentally difficult—issues.

It is tempting to romanticize Reggio Emilia. It looks so beautiful, it works so well. That would be a mistake. It is clear from the essays in this book that Reggio has struggled much in the past and that, indeed, conflict can never be absent from the achievements of any dynamic entity. The relationships to the Catholic Church have not been easy; the political struggles at the municipal, provincial, and national levels never cease; and even the wonderful start achieved by the youngsters is threatened and perhaps undermined by a secondary and tertiary educational system that is far less innovative. Reggio is distinguished less by the fact that it has found permanent solutions to these problems—because, of course, it has not—than by the fact that it recognizes such dilemmas unblinkingly and continues to attempt to deal with them seriously and imaginatively.

No matter how ideal an educational model or system, it is always rooted in local conditions. One could no more transport the Diana School of Reggio to New England than one could transport John Dewey's New England schoolhouse to the fields of Emilia Romagna. But just as we can now have "museums without walls," which allow us to observe art work from all over our world, so, too, we can now have "schoolhouses without walls" which allow us to observe educational practices as they have developed around the globe.

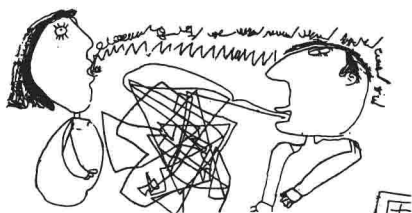
I have had the privilege of visiting centers of early childhood education in many lands, and have learned much from what I've observed in these diverse settings. Like other educational tourists, I have been impressed by the stimulating children's museums in the big cities of the United States, the noncompetitive classroom environments in Scandinavia, the supportive and sensitive training of artistic skills in China, the well-orchestrated engagement of joint problem-solving activity in Japan, and the sincere efforts now underway in many lands to develop sensitivity in young children to diverse ethnic and racial groups. In its own way each of these educational environments has to struggle with and find its own comfortable point of repose between the desires of the individual and the needs for the group; the training of skills and the cultivation of creativity; the respect for the family and

the involvement in a wider community; attention to cognitive growth and concern with matters of temperament, feelings, and spirit.

There are many ways of mediating among these human impulses and strains. To my mind, no place in the contemporary world has succeeded so splendidly as the schools of Reggio Emilia. When the American magazine *Newsweek*, in typically understated fashion, chose "The Ten Best Schools in the World" in December 1991, it was entirely fitting that Reggio Emilia was its nominee in the Early Childhood category. Reggio epitomizes for me an education that is effective and humane; its students undergo a sustained apprenticeship in humanity, one which may last a lifetime.

Thanks to the efforts of Carolyn Edwards, Lella Gandini, and George Forman, this remarkable educational enterprise can now become better known within—and more effectively emulated by—the community of concerned citizens of our troubled world.

"Difficult, zig-zagging, intricate, important discussions." Drawing by 5-year-old, Diana School.



Remarks: Malaguzzi's Story, Other Stories

David Hawkins

The extraordinary story told by Loris Malaguzzi, in his interview with Lella Gandini, has reminded me vividly of my first meeting with him. That was at the great Reggio Emilia conference of March 1990, when he spoke so incisively on the conference theme—the Potentials and Rights of Children. His story has reminded me also of other stories that have been told, or could be told, from different times and places. All speak of successful efforts to create new patterns of educational practice—patterns that can at least begin to match the manifold talents of young children. Most of these other successes have been limited in scale and often, sadly, in duration. Yet brought together, they spin a golden thread through many decades of adult neglect and preoccupation with other matters. Although education is among the oldest and

most vital parts of human praxis, the successes typically have been supported only through a minority tradition, ignored by mainstream society, even by the mainstream of scientific curiosity and research. That this should be true is a paradox. Such a brilliant exception as is the case of Reggio Emilia should, therefore, bring with it much joy.

I think it is worth reminding ourselves of a few of those other stories. Malaguzzi refers in passing to some of them, mainly to the theorists. Let me mention others. In the field of education, as in many others, good theory—I boldly say—has come mostly as a harvest, a reflection of successful practice. Harvested from past practice, theory in turn can, then, bring new practical guidance. An outstanding example of this twofold relation was the part played by John Dewey.

In Dewey's time, almost a century ago, a minority tradition of excellent practice in childhood education already existed in the United States. That tradition had evolved, in turn, from the experience of the Froebel Kindergartens. My own mother received a basic part of her education in a Froebel Kindergarten during the 1870s, when the number of such schools in the United States grew by two or three orders of magnitude. Strong women teachers had been supported by Froebel's basic insight into the learning process, but had outgrown the quaint rigidity of his pioneering "system." (Something similar was true, later, of Montessori's influence.) The pioneering teachers involved in this development were looking for new theoretical recognition and guidance. They found it in John Dewey, already a deeply perceptive philosopher and psychologist. But they had to educate him first, a pupil of profound aptitude! Dewey's own practice was that of a university lecturer, deeply reflective but dry as dust except to those who already shared something of his spirit and insight. Though many contemporaries were profoundly moved by his clarity of understanding, his influence has largely been lost in my country as part of the attrition of childhood education. I am happy that this great educational philosopher is still alive and well in Italy. I associate his vitality most with the names of Lydia Tronatore and Nando Filograsso, among several others.

Looking further back, Froebel linked himself theoretically to Hegel; and for practice and commitment to his mentor, Johann Pestalozzi. Not far north of Reggio Emilia, but nearly two centuries ago, Pestalozzi rescued children tragically orphaned in the wake of Napoleon's armies, developing deep insights concerning the nurturance of their life and their talents.

Coming forward again in time, one sees that the fruition of this long development has been irregular. Its practical influences have grown also in Canada and in continental Europe, developing differently in

Germany and the low countries, in France and Scandinavia. In the United States it was once powerful but has largely been co-opted by the schools, in which "Kindergarten," for the most part, survives in name only. This whole international story needs to be rescued. Here I shall only add a note about England, where their major developments had a history similar in some ways to that of the United States, starting also from 19th-century small beginnings under such influences as those of Froebel and, later, of Dewey and the McMillian sisters. Whereas in the United States this evolution suffered from neglect or rejection after World War II, in England it flourished. In some regions a large proportion of the Infant Schools (ages 5–7+) were radically transformed, as were smaller proportions of Junior Schools (ages 7–11+). Visitors to some of those good classrooms could find much to delight in and reflect upon. Political idealogues, more recently, have suppressed or ignored these forward steps. But the new ways of learning and teaching have not been wholly reversed. They are successful, they persist, and one still can learn from them.

I mention this English phase of our joint history because it attracted great attention from many of us in the United States, suffering from the loss of our own best traditions. The result was a fashion, a seeking to emulate "The English Infant School." This was a kind of emulation that ignored a long history of development, a well-rooted tree that could not simply be put in an airplane and transported. We have our own very strong traditions, and we need to rescue them.

After this circuit of history I come back, finally, to the fascinating history of Reggio Emilia and the other Italian communities in which childhood education has similarly evolved and prospered. We who labor in this particular vineyard have much to learn from the history of Reggio and its still-evolving practice. An evolution with such communal support is an achievement that Americans, in particular, will carefully study. But it can be a great mistake for us, as it was in the case of our desire to emulate the English Infant Schools, to think that we can somehow just import the Reggio experience. By reputation we are prone to look for the "quick fix." Such an attitude would deprecate the very achievement it professes to admire. Among many other institutional and cultural differences, we in the United States do not know such solidarity, such sustaining communality, reshaping itself in the ways Malaguzzi describes, demanding better education for children. Our social landscape is different, so must our battles be.

Though many of us still lack acquaintance with the obvious profusion of Reggio practice, I hazard the opinion that we—we being the United States, England, and elsewhere—have contributions both to receive and to give. I shall mention particularly the practice of deve-

loping “projects” for children’s inquiry and invention. It is similar to a strategy that we saw well developed, years ago, in California. Frances Hawkins (my co-author of these remarks) taught there and contributed to that strategy, often a great advance over dreary daily “lessons.” When based in part on the interests some children revealed in play and discussion, such projects could enlist their commitment and enthusiasm. Yet fundamental questions still remained open: about the degree to which such enthusiasms might support, or merely mask, the more hidden and less-developed talents of other children. To recognize and encourage these less articulate ones, on their diverse trajectories of learning, remains a constant challenge.

Such questions and challenges, we learned, must always permeate our intellectual curiosity about the earliest years of learning. We came to see the need to evolve a style of classroom practice that would support a greater simultaneous diversity of work than our project methods, even at their best, could easily maintain. Out of this more pluralistic and richer ambience, ideas and inventions could, at times (though not often), be shared by all. Out of this sharing, projects did indeed sometimes evolve, with great vitality. But the definition and duration of these projects was always a dependent and restricted variable.

I mention this specific topic—projects—because as I read the very open and charming reflections of Loris Malaguzzi, I thought not only of the wider history of childhood education, but also about the details, the debate, the problems, that must have been involved at every step. I have tried to suggest, as an example, that the etiology and uses of the “project” may still be in that problematic state. For our own benefit, we need to know more of the debate, the retrospective valuations, the successive approximations. We need to join in the debate!

In the meantime, it is quite enough that we salute the achievement and devotion revealed in this remarkable story of a devoted teacher-theorist and a devoted community.

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