

NEWSLETTER

Issue 2: September 2009

Reggio Emilia Aotearoa New Zealand



The Trust Members OF REANZ

In order of photos from left: Helen Aitken Glenys Waller, Lorraine Manuela, Julianne Exton, Denise Heald Wendy Larmer, Chris Bayes, Diti Hill, Lesley Pohio Therese Visser, Prue Crarer.

We are a group of eleven educators who have formed the REANZ Trust - we now have over 200 'Friends of REANZ'. We welcome new 'friends' and look forward to meeting up with you at the many professional learning opportunities we are planning. Our Trust deed states that our purpose is to share information about the educational practice of Reggio Emilia with teachers. This deed also sets out the rules of the Trust. The Trust members are in place for a five-year term. As a charitable trust, all profit will be used for the promotion of the Trusts purpose and aims.

This is the second newsletter from REANZ. We also keen to feature contributions from you too. Have you been inspired by Reggio Emilia pedagogy in your practice? Do you have a story to share from your region, centre, school, life? If so, we would love to incorporate this in our future newsletters ☺

Reggio Emilia Aotearoa New Zealand (REANZ)Website: www.reanz.org

The web site is up and running and we will be posting overviews from recent events as well as providing information about upcoming professional learning opportunities. A space for discussion is also now available. Connections to other sites of interest are also featured & we have plans for more development and information.

Would you like to receive our newsletters directly in future? If so, just log in to our website & add your email address in our newsletter section

Reggio Emilia Italy Study Tour: 9 – 16th April 2010 & beyond!

This is an exciting opportunity for you to participate in a study tour to Reggio Emilia Italy – we are nearly full for 2010 so if you are interested please contact Lorraine Manuela and secure your deposit today! Further details are on the website and you can also contact Lorraine لمانuela@ihug.co.nz for a registration form. Lorraine will be leading the group in 2010, supported by Lesley Pohio. Lorraine and her team at Tots Corner have been inspired by the pedagogy of Reggio Emilia for onwards of ten years. Lesley is a Lecturer at the University of Auckland, Faculty of Education. Lesley has a particular interest in the arts which has been fostered through her work in the early childhood sector and more recently in teacher education.

Library Update

We are in the process of establishing a library. We have been extremely fortunate to have received a very generous donation from the Menzies Family Trust. This has enabled us to purchase a number of texts, which as funds allow, we will continue to build upon. Details related to the lending process will be circulated soon. If you or your organisation would like to donate a book for the library, please contact Chris at chris.bayes@xtra.co.nz. We will acknowledge all donations on the inside cover.

Thoughts on the Waikato Seminar Day: 'Connecting with Reggio through the pedagogy of listening'

Seminar facilitated & Presented by Helen Aitken, Lesley Pohio & Glenys Waller
with guest presenters Shelley Jolly & Tracey McAllister (St James Kindergarten, AKA)



Seminar review written by John Menneer

Explorers Early Learning Centre
185 Grey St, Hamilton East
www.reggioinspired.co.nz

Marcus (5 years) *"Dad where are you going tomorrow?"*

Teacher Dad: *"To a course on listening."*

Marcus: *"Listening?"*

Teacher Dad: *"Yes, a course on learning how to listen to children."*

Marcus: *"Why aren't us kids going?"*

Teacher Dad: *"Why do you kids need to go?"*

Marcus: *"to learn how to listen to us."*

Reflective Dad: *"Oh...yeah"*

The seminar was held on Saturday 22nd August in Hamilton at the Waikato Institute of Technology (Wintec) in a stunningly modern and beautiful building and setting. This provided a relational space (to use a Reggio phrase) that acted as a very stimulating environment in which to learn and receive new information; the third teacher was well represented. Christine Coombes, who is the Team Leader of the Early Childhood Education programme at Wintec opened the day with a warm welcome, followed by a karakia and waiata.

The dialogue above with my 5 year old son occurred the night before the seminar and forced me to reflect on what my expectations of the next day might be. I decided that in fact I wasn't going to a seminar to "learn how to listen", but was looking forward to exploring the concept of listening from the perspective of gaining insight. The real learning would come later when I interacted with children and engaged in reflective practice. The seminar was brilliant and fulfilled my child-initiated expectations.

Lesley began with a presentation on "Exploring Cultural Contexts for Italy and Aotearoa". This was a great place to start as she addressed one of the most important questions those of us who embrace the Reggio Approach face, that is, how do we avoid duplication and find a fit for Reggio within our own cultural context in Aotearoa? An obvious response to this question is ensuring that *Te Whāriki* is still honored in our practice and early childhood environments, and is not relegated to a lower order simply because Reggio is the underpinning philosophy. Lesley probed somewhat deeper than this, highlighting the importance of thinking holistically and considering our own cultural values, lifestyles, society, and sense of community as we develop our own approach to Reggio, while still maintaining the fundamental principles that underpin the Reggio Approach. Lesley's presentation gave me much food for thought as my teachers and I progress on our own journey of discovery as we develop our philosophy at Explorers based on the Reggio Approach. I often ask myself: Will I still call our philosophy the Reggio Approach in 10 years time? Maybe it will become the Hamilton Approach, or the Explorers Approach, as we take on our own cultural context.

The "Pedagogy of Listening" was the next presentation and was given by Helen Aitken. Although ECE teachers aren't allowed favourites, this talk was the one I enjoyed the most. Helen first gave a definition of 'pedagogy' which

was helpful since the word seems to have so many enigmatic qualities: “Pedagogy: The art and science of teaching (what we’re doing and why).” Helens talk was full of inspirational art and science regarding listening to children. Some memorable “learning” phrases I particularly enjoyed with reference to listening were “Listening with all our senses”, “seeing through the child’s eyes”, and visible/visual listening – “how is the notion of visible listening being enacted by the teacher?” The notion of “visible listening” was a concept I loved and which has become more obvious to me now. This week I asked one of my teachers if she had any language for a child’s drawing I wanted to display, her response was: “No, Alisha didn’t say much when she was drawing, but she expressed herself a lot through her body language [visible listening]”. I was impressed with the teacher’s pedagogy of listening, and we documented the child’s body language, which is now part of the display. I think I like the term *visible listening* because it challenges me to listen by observation as well as by hearing. Listening with all my senses is now my pet mantra.

The morning went quickly with the sharing of Lesley’s and Helen’s knowledge and experience. After morning tea two teachers (Shelley Jolley and Tracey McAllister) from St James kindergarten addressed the seminar. Their presentation gave the practical outworking of being a listening teacher. Several of my teachers said they enjoyed this presentation immensely. I thought the opening of this presentation was innovative with Shelley giving their introduction in sign language. This was very fitting and although I exercised visible listening I still didn’t understand what was going on until Tracey translated. I thought this was a valuable lesson in showing the importance of using all the senses (eyes and ears in this case) to gain understanding, especially if you can’t understand the body language! Shelley and Tracey spoke of many interesting points relating to listening, such as: Having a responsive environment (not one that just looks good) – what resources do you have to achieve this? Thinking about your daily routine and supervision – does it support listening? Listen to your environment – what is it telling you? Lastly, different children need to be listened to in different ways. A topic of interest to me was Shelley’s discussion on schemas, and functional dependency as an example of schema. I found this to be a very useful concept to improve my pedagogy of listening as it gave me a framework to understand why children sometimes do what they do. During the discussion on schemas my thoughts were immediately drawn to a 3 year old girl (Riya) who comes to Explorers and whose schema is often revealed during water play. I’ll be less frustrated now at Riyas’ repeated water play sessions in the children’s sink in the arts area - I see her schema now.

The balance of the day (following lunch) was further presentations and some group work again led by Lesley and Helen. Lesley gave some interesting insight into making learning visible with a PowerPoint exposé of different forms of documentation displays from within early childhood settings and also within the community (on walls, fences etc). These were quite inspiring with many good examples from Reggio Emilia city and its pre-schools - maybe this talk was my favourite? This address presented several challenges for me: How can I listen without documentation? And even more challenging, how can the broader learning community listen without documentation, and how do we make learning visible to our local community?

As last speaker of the day, Glenys Waller of St Cuthbert’s school gave me some hope with their use of the Reggio inspired practice at primary school level. This I’m sure is a positive step, especially for new entrants who might come from a less prescriptive early childhood environment. I’m sure that it would help with their adjusting to the more formal setting of a school environment. In finishing this review I’ll close with the words of Tracey and Shelley: *Be brave teachers, be passionate teachers, and be teachers that go into uncertain space* (I like the last one).



REMINDER: Our up-coming events are filling up fast!

- ❖ Margie Carter – Evening session - Thursday 1st October, 6.15 – 9.00 pm – only 50 spaces left!
- ❖ Margie Carter – Seminar Day - Saturday 3rd October, 9.00 – 3.30pm – only 25 spaces left

KEEP THESE DATES FREE IN 2010 for REANZ Events:

- ❖ Monday 12th April – Seminar Day – Dunedin
- ❖ Fri 16th/Sat 17th April - 2 Day Conference - Auckland

Book Review

Dialogues with Places

Catalogue curated by Tiziana Filippini, Claudia Giudici and Veà Vecchi, (2008). Reggio Emilia, Italy: Reggio Children

Reviewed by Adrienne Sansom

The pictorial book or catalogue *Dialogues with Places*, saliently captures the creative occupation and experiencing of different places from a child's perspective. In the physical sense, the book is large, which attracts the eye and makes a commanding presence on your bookshelf. The book provides a provocative look into the beauty and richness of spaces through children's eyes, as they investigate their encounters with places that offer rich learning opportunities in a range of arenas. *Dialogues with Places* is dialogue in the fullest sense; visually, bodily, emotionally, spiritually, and cognitively. The text resonates with examples of "a pedagogy of listening" and the depth that complicated conversations involve and reveal.



The project *Dialogues with Places* was conceived as a workshop as part of professional development for atelieristas and teachers as a continuation of an interrelationship between artists and the city of Reggio Emilia. The spark for the project stemmed from a city wide art-initiative where chosen works carried out by five artists were commissioned for various parts of the city. Such art installations required a keen sensitivity of the surrounding environment. The empathetic relationships that artists' have with places, inspired an analogous process for the children. The purpose was to gain further understanding of how children develop their knowledge in relation to places and, in particular, with regard to the new Loris Malaguzzi International Center, which was under construction. Children chose a space, which was of interest to them on the building site, and were asked to design a work and consider a gift that they could return to the centre, which "would please them and please the place" (Trancossi 2008, 8).

The text is divided into several sections commencing with the introduction to the project and exhibition and the origin of dialogue followed by the projects of fourteen pre-schools and infant and toddler centres. Intriguing titles such as 'let's go to column land', 'a spotted compass', 'the pleasure of doing nothing', and 'the murmur of the walls' invite the reader to enter new realms of discovery, uncovering the wealth that can be found in each place.

Intimate relationships with places enable mathematics, sound or sonorous landscapes, an imaginary environment, and a space for dance. Beauty of the places is recognized through artistic and aesthetic responses using strong visual imagery; curls, spirals, twists and turns, which are represented through visual art, sculpture, soundscapes and dance making. The real and the unreal (virtual) come to life through attentive moments of exploration where a true acknowledgement of the integrity of nature is honoured through the sensitive use of natural materials. Gifts are returned to the places by the children such as the vibrantly painted armchair, or a hug between a tree and a column made possible by a road of clay imprinted by marks of nature and fabric interwoven with leaves that encircle both the tree and the column.

There is a noticeable engagement of the body and the emergence of dance making or choreography, which is influenced by the actual places being occupied. Children mark the spaces with multiple senses; physically finding different ways of walking, running, and jumping, or sitting, lying and placing their bodies in the space. They talk, laugh, touch, and match the imagery of the spaces with the shapes of their bodies or by making different body shapes to fit or complement the places. Dances are choreographed using the concept of running where "you can run in a wave because there are columns" (Gabriele, 71) or "special kinds of running, with different shapes . . . like a dance" (Chiara, 70). The choreography is gifted to the Centre.

The real value of this book is the array of different experiences offered, from the interplay with shadows and light to creating a home for ladybugs. All are notated graphically using various mediums (including the moving body). Imagination is given full reign and the possibility to imagine what could be becomes a reality for the children, citizens, and city of Reggio Emilia. Every conceivable likelihood for learning is shared from maps and labyrinths, to games and places for idleness and resting. Ultimately, the catalogue, which looks like a book, makes a conscious statement about friendship, participation and solidarity with others for the future of democracy and humanity. Gifting back to the new Loris Malaguzzi International Centre seems, to me, to be an appropriate act for such an awesome aspiration. I highly recommend this inspiring and stunningly visual publication knowing that the places we occupy everyday can provide new ways of seeing and become canvases for works of art when given the attention they deserve. This book reminds us to do just that.

For further information about becoming a friend of REANZ, please email us on reanz@Inspire.net.nz

Our members enjoy access to information about international study tours, seminars, newsletters, a library and more!