



As inspired by the  
children and educators  
of Reggio Emilia

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## ONTARIO REGGIO ASSOCIATION

SPRING 2011

Inside This Issue

ARTICLE	PAGES
The Study Tour from the Perspective of ORA by Karyn Callaghan	pages 1 - 2
Moments in Reggio by Carol Anne Wien	page 3
Tea at Balducci School by Carole Raby	pages 4 - 5
A Secret Lives Under A Rainbow by Kristina Murphy	page 6
ORA NOW submissions	page 7

### ORA NOW REFLECTIONS ON THE CANADIAN STUDY TOUR IN REGGIO EMILIA, ITALY



## The Study Tour from the Perspective of ORA

By Karyn Callaghan

The impact of the Canadian Study Week in Reggio Emilia will be felt across the country for a long time. One hundred educators from coast to coast participated in this rich experience, accompanied by nine from the United States and three from Switzerland. The participants included early childhood educators, elementary teachers, program supervisors, principals, pedagogical leaders, school district superintendents, artists, authors, students, and post-secondary faculty, along with a child psychiatrist and two people who work for the Ministry of Education. It was an interesting, curious, engaged group of professionals. The beautiful spring weather in Reggio gifted us with the opportunity to gain a sense of the city, and to see how interconnected the schools are with this vibrant community.

Amelia Gambetti indicated in her opening remarks that what she recalls when she thinks back over the almost 50 year history of the infant-toddler centres and preschools in Reggio are the challenges. “Nothing was given as a gift.” It is important for us to know this, or we could easily misunderstand the schools we see there today. To recognize that reality is constructed and can be challenged and improved is a significant lesson, particularly right now in Ontario where we are seeing serious interest in emergent curriculum and the Reggio philosophy in our Ministry of Education.

We were offered many provocations to continue to consider in our own work. “How can we build a more democratic coexistence and a more global idea of citizenship?” “Epistemology and aesthetics are synonymous.” “How do we become a group, day by day?” “How do we learn how, and help children learn how, to listen to a place?” “We believe in a multitude of languages, however intelligent dialogue between materials is a stronger belief.”

So many images linger, but perhaps the strongest is the joy that was evident in both children and educators – the joy that comes from deep engagement with important ideas in a context of belief in the intelligence of all involved. We saw challenging, creative work, schools full of researchers, the delight that comes from surprises, and the astonishing combination of pride and humility. We saw beauty and meaningfulness in every aspect of life. There were more than a few tears.

An event like this could not happen without a considerable amount of work that was done by dedicated volunteers. Many thanks in particular to Lorrie Baird and Allison Barrow for their work to organize registration and finances. They were still smiling when we got to Reggio! The Ontario Reggio Association board of directors was terrifically responsive when quick decisions were needed. We are already planning our next conference. Thanks to all involved. What a team!

I know that participants in this extraordinary experience have been sharing their understandings in their own communities. As we heard in Reggio, “every choice is a responsibility”. We heard one atelierista say that they have a firm belief that daily life is not banal - the everyday activities are the bones of the day, so are carefully thought through. We have returned to the bones of our everyday activities, more thoughtful, more inspired. We look forward to hearing from you as we continue this journey together.

Ciao, Karyn Callaghan