



Chapter 17

The Atelier: A Conversation with Veà Vecchi

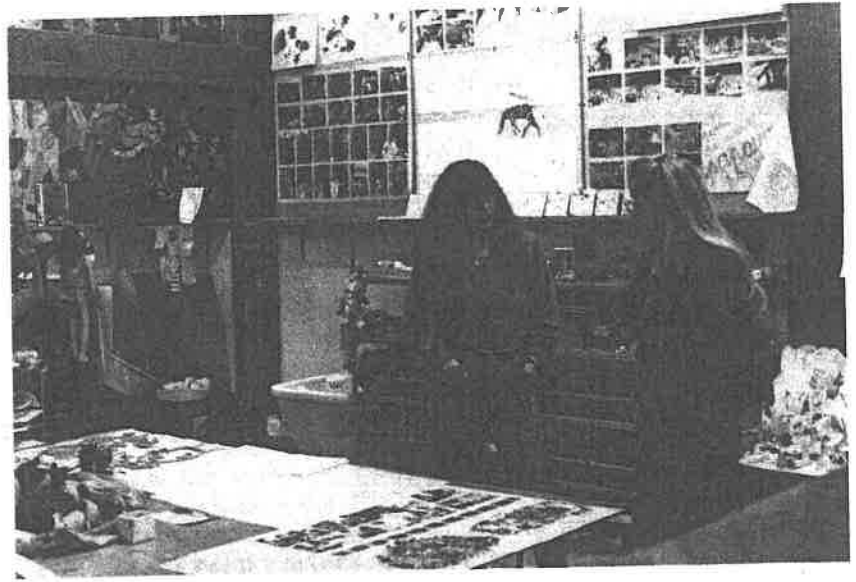
Lella Gandini

Gandini: Please tell us how the atelier began.

Vecchi: In the 1960s, Loris Malaguzzi introduced an *atelier* into every preschool in Reggio Emilia, along with a teacher with an art background. This was an unusual choice but a brave one, for then, as now, it represented a strong and tangible statement of the importance attributed to imagination, creativity, expressiveness, and aesthetics in the educational processes of development and knowledge building. As Malaguzzi said:

For us, the *atelier* had to become part of a complex design and, at the same time, an added space for searching, or better, for digging with one's own hands and one's

This chapter is based on interviews conducted with Veà Vecchi by Lella Gandini and published in the English (1993, 1998) and Italian (1995) editions of *The Hundred Languages of Children* (C. Edwards, L. Gandini, & G. Forman, Eds.); on Vecchi's essay, "Poetic Language as a Means to Counter Violence," in *Children, art, artists: The expressive languages of children, the artistic language of Alberto Burri* (pp. 137–143), edited by Claudia Giudici and Veà Vecchi, published by Reggio Children, Reggio Emilia, Italy, 2004; and on two interviews conducted with Veà Vecchi by Lella Gandini in October 2009 and 2010.



Veia Vecchi and Carlina Rinaldi talking together in the atelier of the Diana Preschool.

own mind, and for refining one's own eyes, through the practice of the visual arts. It had to be a place for sensitizing one's taste and aesthetic sense, a place for the individual exploration of projects connected with experiences planned in the different classrooms of the school. The atelier had to be a place for researching motivations and theories of children from scribbles on up, a place for exploring variations in tools, techniques, and materials with which to work. It had to be a place favoring children's logical and creative itineraries, a place for being familiar with similarities and differences of verbal and nonverbal languages. (Gandini, 2005, p. 7)

Gandini: *What is the purpose of the atelier, and how does the atelierista work in the school?*

Vecchi: The atelier serves two functions. First, it is a space that makes it possible for children to encounter interesting and attractive contexts, where they can explore many and diverse materials as well as techniques that have expressive and combinatorial possibilities. Second, it assists the adults in understanding processes of how children learn. It helps teachers understand how children invent autonomous vehicles of expressive freedom, cognitive freedom, symbolic freedom, and paths to communication. The atelier serves to shake up old-fashioned teaching ideas. Loris Malaguzzi (Chapter 2, this volume) talked about this and expressed our views.

Let me tell you how an atelierista, such as I, works on a daily basis with the teachers in his or her preschool. The teachers and I meet several times a day. Every morning, I do a tour of each classroom. I am particularly interested in what

is happening at the beginning of the day, both with regard to the larger ongoing projects and the smaller, independent activities. Teachers and I briefly talk about how to introduce certain things to the children and what to anticipate and then what to do about it. Sometimes, I also suggest the use of particular materials. Often, in the middle of the morning, I do another circuit, being sure to go where something of particular interest might be happening. Or sometimes, a teacher comes to ask advice or to get me to come and see. Then, at the end of every morning, I find at least 15 minutes to consult with each teacher. Often, we gather as a group to discuss something.

An important part of my role is to ensure the circulation of ideas among teachers. I am really their constant consultant. Because of my schooling and background, I can help them see the visual possibilities of themes and projects that are not apparent to them. I may even intervene directly with the children to create possibilities that have not occurred to others.

Let me offer an illustration. The school has a great deal of precious material that makes it possible to reveal and interpret our ways of observing, taking initiatives, and documenting the children's sequences of responses. Here are two small stories of the adults' provocation and the children's responses.

The adults taped a little paper bird onto the glass of a large window in the preschool, where we know the sun shines through brightly in the morning. After 2 days, a few children, aged 3, discovered the shadow of the bird on the floor. A teacher suggested that they trace it using a piece of chalk. The children then went out to play. When they came back, the shadow of the little bird had moved beyond the boundaries of the chalk outline they had drawn. Their hypothesis: the teacher made a mistake, or else the little bird wants to move.

The children now wanted to stop the bird and keep it with them. Therefore, they started a passionate study, rich in attempts to solve problems. The children first tried to build a cage on the floor out of tape, but the little shadow bird continued to move and escape their cage even while they were still constructing it. The children next tried to seduce the bird to stay, by offering it bread crumbs, but the bird didn't give up and continued to move along the floor. The children constructed a house out of bricks and blocks. They even tried putting some desirable toys into the house, but the shadow bird, instead of entering their house, climbed over the wall.

The 3-year-olds didn't know what else to do, so they went to the class of the 4-year-olds, who offered various hypotheses but no definite solution, and the problem remained suspended. The next day, as the 3-year-olds noticed that the shadow of the little bird was moving, following the same trajectory as the day before, they again discussed the problem with the 4-year-olds:

Alan (4:1): "I know why it always goes the same way."

Veronica (3:6): "Because he likes to."

Daniela (3:8): "The sun helps him to mirror himself there."

Alan: "The sun points his reflection onto the bird because the shadow of the bird knows this road, just as we know the road to go to our house. Early in the morning, the shadow is still sleeping. Then the shadow goes into the sun, and the sun points his ray, so that we can see the shadow of the bird. The next day, when the sun comes up, the ray understands that it has to go along the same road that it went before."

Daniela: "Ah, it is the sun that is driving [with] the steering wheel."

Another time, I noticed that the sun, shining behind one of the trees outside the window, cast a shadow of the leaves onto the glass. I taped a sheet of translucent white paper onto the glass. As children came in that morning, they exclaimed with surprise and pleasure at the sight of the shadows on the paper. On a later day, it happened that two girls, aged about 6 years old, stopped and looked at the glass window and said to each other:

Agnese: "It is a drawing made by little bits of sun."

Cecilia: "They seem to be tiny leaves of sun."

Agnese: "It is the shadow of the leaves that is reflected."

Cecilia: "But is it a drawing by the sun or by the shadow?"

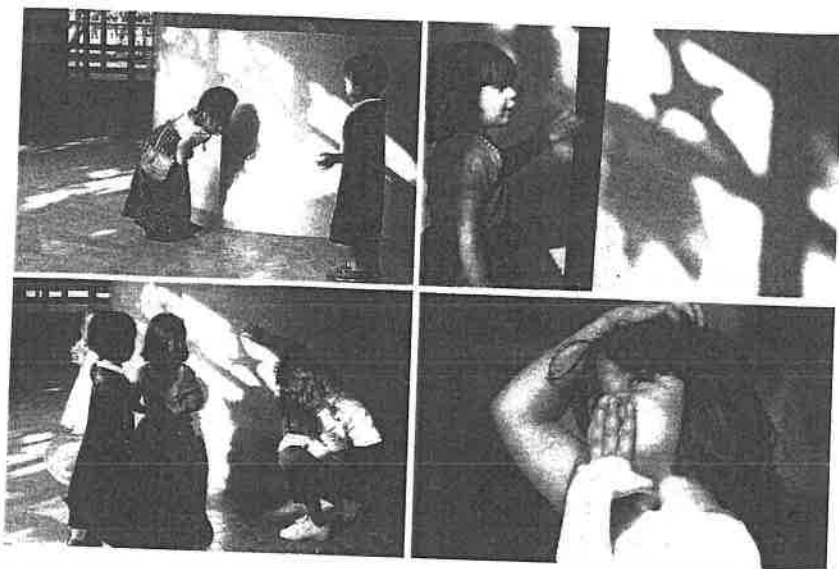
Agnese: "It is like a clock. I saw it also yesterday, and the other day; when that drawing comes up [pointing to the signs on the translucent paper], it is time to go to lunch."

Is this art? Is this science? The children with great wisdom do not separate the exploration of reality into separate compartments. Observation and documentation become cultural animators, or steps toward further interpretation and deepening. This attitude of research continues to help to construct through time new types of teachers and *atelieristi*.

Certainly, I follow very closely all of our major and longer-term projects. Always I find most interesting and wonderful the project on which we are currently working, because it seems to me that with each project, we advance and learn a little more, and so we can do better work with the children. For example, we have found that shadows offer extraordinary educational possibilities. The project about the shadows was described in our book, *Everything Has a Shadow, Except Ants* (Sturloni & Vecchi, 1999), and it involves an integration of acts of visual representation with scientific hypothesis testing. It goes far beyond the emphasis on aesthetic expression and perceptual exploration with which I began my work many years ago.

Gandini: *What is the influence of the atelier on the functioning of the school?*

Vecchi: I am convinced that including an *atelier* within a school can render the educational process and the learning experience for children more whole and complete. The expressive languages are just as essential as the academic disciplines and should not be considered optional or marginal. I am further convinced that the specific structure of the expressive languages used in the *atelier* (visual, musical, and others) weaves together emotions and empathy with rationality and cognition in a natural and inseparable way. This weaving together, in turn, favors



What does a paper bird stuck onto the window have to do with a shadow bird on the floor?

the construction of the imagination and a richer approach to reality, and it can contribute to the formation of a wider and more articulate perspective on learning. I think these concepts are an essential part of the foundation for further reflection.

The connections and interweavings among different disciplines with the languages of the *atelier* often produce, in our projects, a shift in established points of view and favor a more complex approach to problems, revealing the expressive, empathic, and aesthetic elements that are inherent in any discipline or specific problem. Therefore, it is not surprising that the integration of digital technologies has had a different impact in the preschools of Reggio Emilia than in most other schools: this experience has been rich in imagination, a stimulus to socialization, and full of merriment.

I am fully aware that it seems ingenuous to suppose that it would be sufficient to introduce an *atelier* and an *atelierista* into a school and expect that everything would automatically be transformed and enriched. Such a transformation can take place, in my view, only if the entire educational program is based on rich and vital bases of learning and teaching. Furthermore, I believe that for the *atelier* to fulfill its role efficaciously today, work needs to be done deliberately in four areas.

First, we have to consider that the art world often has the function of stimulus; it suggests new concepts to explore and to elaborate, offering us poetic, nonconformist views and unconventional interpretations of reality. Therefore, I believe that it should continue to be one of the primary sources of inquiry and inspiration in schools, as long as we ensure that the children and young people remain the

protagonists of their personal itineraries. We do not want to place them in a culturally marginal position with regard to complex artistic events, emerging from sophisticated cultures and often from distant contexts. It is important not to absorb only the formal part of works of art, as often happens, but instead to work on ideas and concentrate attention on the concepts that generated the work of art.

Second, we have to render evident and visible, through observation and documentation, the vital interweaving of cognitive and imaginative ways of knowing. We must also reveal the personal as well as the social elements that are a part of every representation that is supported by vital teaching and learning. At the same time, it is necessary to render more visible the contribution the *atelier* gives through documentation to the development of projects carried out in other fields of knowledge, such as literacy, mathematics, science, and so on. Third, we have to give closer attention to the processes of learning through the digital media, a subject still little explored with children. The digital experience is much too often exhausted simply in its functional and technical form. However, in addition to its technical aspect, if it is also used in creative and imaginative ways, it reveals a high level of expressive, cognitive, and social potentials as well as great possibilities for evolution. It is necessary to reflect on and better comprehend the changes that the digital language introduces in the processes of understanding. We have to be aware of what this adds, takes away, or modifies in today's learning. The presence and the contribution of the *atelier* can be surprisingly innovative in the approach and exploration of the digital material, as some experiences that have taken place over the past several years in our schools demonstrate.

The fourth and last aspect to consider is the relationship of the schools with the city. It is a relationship that the communicative structure of the *atelier* can greatly support by constructing contexts for dialogue, visibility, and knowledge about the culture of young children and school children. It is a culture that, if correctly received and recognized, can contribute more than commonly thought to a radical reconsideration of the city and to an improvement in the quality of life. Documentation has also been a democratic way to make known, to share and discuss, what happens in the schools, and it serves as a reminder of the value and importance of education.

Gandini: *And all together, do you see transformations in the climate of the life and space?*

Vecchi: Above all, the *atelier* brings the strength and joy of the unexpected and the uncommon to the process of learning. It supports a conceptual change that comes from looking through a poetic lens at everyday reality. This kind of looking is what some define as an "aesthetic project," but in fact, it is a biological process that evidently belongs to our species. This process, in its apparent levity, is capable of unhinging many commonplace events and banalities and of giving back relevance and centrality to aspects of life and thought that are often not given enough importance by the greater part of school and social culture. This is because they pertain to unpredictable processes that are not easily measurable or controllable.

However, they reveal themselves to be indispensable for the birth of cultural events that make us grow and move forward and without which our life would be less full and less interesting.

Although I am not sure that we *atelieristi* have always lived up to the expectations held for us, I am at least convinced that having the *atelier* in every preschool has made a deep impact on the emerging educational identity of our system. Certainly, the *atelier* itself has changed with the passing of time, although the basic philosophy has remained the same. And of course, the personality and style of each *atelierista* make each *atelier* a different place. Working together, accompanying the children in their projects, teachers and I have repeatedly found ourselves face to face—as if in looking in a mirror—learning one from another, and together learning from the children. This way we



Children painting in the *atelier* of the Diana Preschool.

were trying to create paths to a new educational approach, one certainly not tried before, in which the visual language was interpreted and connected to other languages, all thereby gaining in meaning.

Gandini: *Are there changes that the work of the atelier has brought to your thinking and work?*

Vecchi: Our interests have gradually shifted over time toward analysis of the processes of learning and the interconnections between children's different ideas, experiences, and representations. All of this documentation—the written descriptions, transcriptions of children's words, photographs, and videotapes—becomes an indispensable source of materials that we use everyday to be able to “read” and reflect critically—individually and collectively—on the experience we are living, the project we are exploring. This allows us to construct theories and hypotheses that are not arbitrary and artificially imposed on the children. Yet this process of work takes much time and is never easy.

Gandini: *Children, art, and artists—I know you have reflected a great deal on their interrelationships.*

Vecchi: Yes, people often ask about the relationship between child and adult artwork. The way one should examine what children do is very different from evaluating adult artwork. It often happens that some of the children's products are so original that one wants to compare them to the work of famous artists. But that

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kind of comparison becomes dangerous and fraught with ambiguity, especially if one tries insistently to make comparisons. It leads to false conclusions, such as that the behavior of children unfolds innately or that the product is more important than the process. To make comparisons that go beyond a simple and playful resemblance shows how little one has understood of either children or artists.

On the other hand, I think that artistic discoveries—conceptual breakthroughs made by artists—should circulate among the adults in our schools, because we can learn from them. For a sense of volume, all are very interesting and help us explore new paths with children.

Gandini: *What is the role of the atelier in a socioconstructivist choice in education?*

Vecchi: All this material is indispensable to make possible children's reading and rereading of individual and group exploration as they are discovering various fields of knowledge. This also allows the construction of theory and hypotheses of work that are interesting and that try to take into account the points of view and times of children without distorting them.

The presence of the *atelier* in the schools is seen as a means to safeguard the complexity of the knowledge-building processes with the aim of using the imagination as a unifying element for the different activities and of viewing the "aesthetic knowledge" (Lori Malaguzzi spoke about *aesthetic vibration*) as a drive that is rooted within us and leads us to choose among patterns of thinking and among visual images. Gregory Bateson, a great influence on my thought and work, examined closely the complexity of relationships between the things that surround us. He was reflecting on the importance of the aesthetic approach as a major and significant connector of elements of reality, and he provided a definition of *aesthetic* that is so close to my way of thinking and so beautiful that I would like to quote it verbatim. "By *aesthetic*, I mean responsive to the pattern which connects" (Bateson, 1979, p. 8). This lucid statement and this approach help us investigate and highlight the hidden patterns of reality, create new maps that can combine logical and emotional processes, and connect technique with expressiveness—an excellent background for learning as well as a goal to keep constantly alive in schools and in education.

The *ateliers* in the municipal infant-toddler centers and preschools of Reggio Emilia have chosen the visual language not as a separate discipline, devoted to traditional activities; rather, they have focused on the visual language as a mean of inquiry and investigation of the world, to build bridges and relationships between different experiences and languages, and to keep cognitive and expressive processes in close relationship with one another, in constant dialogue with a pedagogical approach that seeks to work on the connection rather than the separation of various fields of knowledge.

My focus is always on the children. To make my reflections most clear, if space allowed, I would describe the processes adopted by the children as they produce their work, on their own or in groups, which the teachers and *atelierista*

so keenly observe and so carefully document. Indeed, I always illustrate and discuss these processes in my conference presentations, as a necessary prelude of any **kind of discussion topic**. These documentary materials never fail to surprise the **audience** for the **acuteness** the children show in dealing with the most diverse situations, and also because of equally diverse and unforeseen—and at times unimaginable—solutions that children find to overcome hurdles. It also needs to be emphasized that the cultural and social situation around us is constantly changing; furthermore, we should realize that children and their mental images—their perceptions, theories, and products—never remain frozen and unaltered in time, but live and evolve within different contexts. The visual language is conceptual and cultural before being formal.

This work of investigation and documentation makes us realize how little we know about the strategies that children use, and our knowledge of children must be constantly expanded, revised, and updated. The crucial starting point of any of our proposals should always come from the children.

We are conscious of the value of the processes that the visual language can sustain and the contribution it can make to other languages, but also of the fact that the visual language itself can be modified and enriched through a dialogue with the others. These are the links we particularly and consistently focus on in our work, and we feel this approach sets us apart from that which the school environment traditionally calls “art education.”

Our main task as teachers is to create situations within which creative processes can be experimented with, grow, and evolve. This means devising and implementing generative contexts, paying attention to procedures, and creating the right conditions to make possible the fruition of the creative process that we aim to sustain and stimulate.

Gandini: *And the children?*

Vecchi: The starting point for all these will always be the child and the group of children, with their mental images and exploratory strategies. This is what we are attempting to do as we observe and document the strategies through which they explore in an effort to improve our understanding of their knowledge-building and expressive processes, promote the creation of educational situations, and propose encounters with materials that are in tune, as much as possible, with children's way of being and, consequently, more capable of generating a high level of participation, interest, and quality. Some tell us about the impossibility of seeing these processes, but for many years, we have been aware of the precious nature of the fragments we are able to capture and document and of the extent of how these fragments bring us closer to the children, increasing our respect for their intelligences and sensibilities. This can render our proposals more well thought out, discussed, and perhaps less certain, but we hope less liable to betray the children. Joseph Brodsky (1995) wrote, “Seen from the outside, creativity is the object of fascination or envy; seen from within, it is an unending exercise in uncertainty and a tremendous school for insecurity” (p. 300).



A moment of encounter with materials.

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We hope that on the teachers' part, there will be an underlying emphasis on doing a great deal of listening to the children's strategies. Without listening, without being responsive to the ideas of others, there can be neither learning nor teaching.

Gandini: *Recently, we had a conversation about the new exhibit, "The Wonder of Learning: The Hundred Languages of Children," on tour in North America. One aspect to underscore, because it doesn't always emerge with clarity, is the contribution made by the atelier to the development of pedagogical documentation in Reggio Emilia—documentation that uses dual languages, the written language and the language of images.*

Vecchi: Documentation, such as we see in "The Wonder of Learning," is part of a particular communicative structure that is not so common in education. Carla Rinaldi and I have defined it as *visual listening*. The *atelier* generates a visual culture in schools. The process of documentation by teachers corresponds to the attention given to the aesthetic dimension in the pedagogy of Reggio, or, as Jerome Bruner likes to define it, a *poetic dimension*, which is as important in the learning of children as in the learning of adults. For infant-toddler centers and preschools, teacher documentation has always simultaneously contributed to give us a deeper look at meanings in children's work, to give us a gratifying testimonial to the work of children and adults. It has also been a democratic way to make known, to share and discuss, what happens in the schools, and it serves as a reminder of the value and importance of education.

Documentation, like any topic, can be examined in different ways. We are convinced that teachers' growth and development are only possible through discussion and sharing, and documentation provides the most fertile terrain for such reflection. Certainly, so that we may reflect together, it is necessary that the documents (for example, the observational notes, images, and samples of children's work) arising from a documentary journey must also be consultable and comprehensible to those who were not present during the observations. No matter what working tools the teachers use (there is no single preestablished model), and no matter what kinds of documents they collect and prepare, the intention that underlies the structure must always allow for the work to be verified; it must allow for exchange or comparison of ideas between and among different points of view. If this intention is made clear from the beginning, then documentation will allow for important and precious re-elaboration over time.

One of most innovative parts of the exhibition "The Wonder of Learning" is the new work we have done to deepen its communicative structure. To work on the communicative structure means to recognize and deepen the meanings of the work that was originally carried out. What we have wanted to communicate convincingly in this new exhibit is a contemporary image of the child. By contemporary, I intend to convey an image that is projected toward the future. I do not want to say that it is only a "modern" image or an image that is "actual." If one considers communication today, it does not correspond only to something that is happening now but has a complexity that is projected toward the future. For example, "The Wonder of Learning" is flexible and can be adjusted according to the different places or contexts where it will be shown. It contains certain concepts that are not simple to communicate and that may be understood or interpreted differently depending on the context. For instance, there are diverse views on pedagogy in different places, and other kinds of social, political, or economic conditions that might create a need to modify how the exhibit is set up and shown. It is important for us in Reggio Emilia to allow for this flexibility; it is what we want. We wish for the exhibit to be a piazza in which ideas can be discussed in different realities far away from Reggio Emilia, maybe China, India, or Japan. We want a complex image of the child to be communicated in different realities, and then, in response, those faraway places and realities will communicate to us things that we do not know.

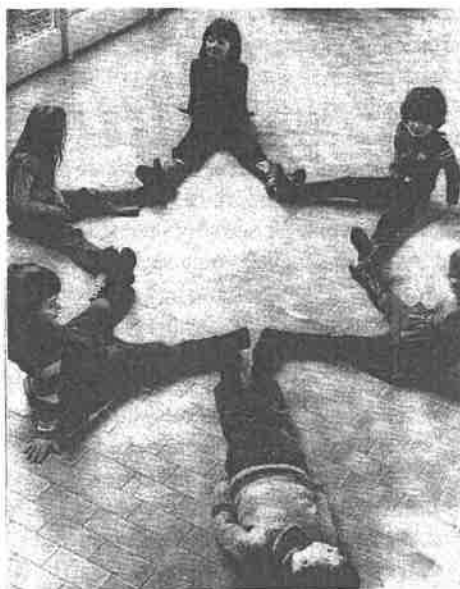
Lella: *You and I have also wandered together through the exhibit "Ariadne's Thread," a revisitation of the documentation of the Reggio infant-toddler centers and preschools from the 1981 to 2008, on display in the Malaguzzi International Center. The exhibit's name comes from the Greek myth in which the hero Theseus slays the Minotaur with the help of the princess Ariadne, who has given him a sword and a ball of red yarn so that he can find his way out of the Minotaur's labyrinth.*

Vecchi: I would like to speak about that exhibit and how it can show the development of our thoughts and experiences. It contains segments on "The Crowd" and "The City and the Rain," which were projects with children that came one after the other in the 1980s. At that time, we were already entering a way of

thinking that even a small thing contains great complexity, as if it were a large thing. One thing can have as much complexity as a city. The categories *small* and *large* do not pertain to two ends of the continuum of complication; instead, they are both complex. I remember vividly that this thought came to us as we were discussing one day in the school.

Another segment of "Ariadne's Thread" concerns the children's study of the leaf of the plane tree ("In Pursuit of a Plane Tree Leaf," Municipality of Reggio Emilia Infant-Toddler Centers and Preschools, Reggio Children, 1996, pp. 94-97). In fact, already back then, in considering the idea of exploring the plane tree leaf, it was my thinking that a leaf has inside itself a great deal of complexity (like a city), and it includes great possibilities for exploration and use of materials. Starting from that outline, and refusing to take on an academic way of thinking about drawing, I wondered how that complexity could be brought out and reinterpreted with the children. As shape, as background, as system—all of these could be explored by looking at details.

I made the deliberate choice, with awareness and intentionality, to see whether my theoretical research and reflections would support me in constructing a meaningful experience for children. We had already been exploring with children parts of the body—hands, eyes, ears, and mouths as elements that could be examined in their details and complexity, using photos and drawings. Thus, we began to explore



Children using their bodies to assume the shape of the plane tree leaf.

the leaf of the plane tree. Nowadays, there is more awareness of ecology, and therefore, in looking at the leaf, it would probably also be considered in its relationship to the tree. Yet our intention in exhibiting these early documentations is not to suggest that we would do everything the same way today. Rather, the intention is to pose these traces of our history to teachers of the present time, so that we can examine them on the basis of all our layers of experiences and levels of awareness. We can pose questions: How would you explore a tree now? What would you do that is the same or different from what we did? Such discussions can include both preschool and elementary teachers.

In those days, back in the 1980s, in creating documentation,

we did not yet use quotations of the children's words. Thus, we were missing something important that we discovered later. But one very important aspect was that children made observations about the *life* of the leaf. (They entered imaginatively into the leaf as another living being.) Also, our explorations included the metaphorical basis of children's perceptions and conceptions of the leaf. We would choose the materials and set up the exploration, and then the children moved freely within our organized choices. The children reflected about the life of a leaf in ways that were nonfigurative and abstract: the life of a living entity. Similarly, they created interpretive metaphors for the leaf. We adults chose the tools, materials, and techniques children would use, and they explored through experiments with light or on the windowpane against the light, and in different contexts, such as leaves in the rain or in the sun, wet or dried out.

Today, what we do instead is provide the children more time to process these variations and more choice in which expressive media they use. We have a different trust about the choices that children are able to make about tools and techniques. This change has happened slowly, a bit at a time, and in my view, it may have been observation and documentation that brought us to this greater awareness of children's capacities. We now have much more faith and trust in the children.

What we say today about children and what we do with them has come about gradually. In my early days, I did not always know how to widen the possibilities for teachers to enter more deeply into children's processes. It was professional development that brought us forward. Malaguzzi set us down this path, but I needed his support and encouragement to go forward. Both of us were struck by how children could play and represent through metaphors. One event that occurred completely spontaneously was that six children arranged themselves on the floor of the *piazza* to create with their legs and torsos the outline of the shape of the leaf, with its five sharp points and long stem. They shouted, "We have made the leaf!" Afterward, we designed ways for them to explore more with their bodies the shape of the leaf.

The project "The City and the Rain" was explored first by the Diana Preschool ("Rain in the City," Municipality of Reggio Emilia Infant-Toddler Centers and Preschools, Reggio Children, 1996, pp. 78-87). Malaguzzi realized that this subject, like the study of the leaf, had great possibilities for sensory and perceptual exploration, including through sound, and so he suggested the same topic to the La Villetta, Neruda, and Anna Frank preschools. Some of us went to photograph at the other schools, and we tried to capture the joy of the children playing with the rain and the water in puddles. We should always include a playful exploration. Perhaps the puddle could have become an important subject of a project if we had better supported the children's expressivity!

Some things emerged in a similar or parallel way in the different schools, and this was the first time we began to examine and compare children's theories. It was very beautiful and significant to have many schools come together as if in chorus, as also happened recently in the citywide project "Reggio Tutta" (Bonilauri &

Time /

Filippini, 2000). There was at this point a strong relationship among the schools and a desire to communicate to others.

In many ways, even in those days, we were very aware of the children, but what we did not know was when and how to leave the room. We did not know how to leave enough space for the subjectivity of children, and we did not know how to document the children's subjective thinking. We prepared documentation, but we did not document the processes of learning sufficiently. However, the goal that we set for ourselves with our recent research experiences is, to paraphrase James Hillman (1999), to return color and taste, sound and structure, to the things of the world. Without an exercised imagination or a tension that allows us to "see" the things we encounter, to renew them (and renew ourselves) through a sense of wonder and the establishment of empathic relationships with the things around us, there is a risk that we may respond to the sensitive world with our senses and mind anesthetized by everyday life. To benefit fully from opportunities, we need to ensure that our senses, and our curiosity, expectations, and interests, are kept constantly alive.

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Following are child

- A place is here.
- You recognize a
- A place is a city
- statues. (Sara, age 4)
- You go inside the
- it or not. (Pietro, age 4)
- You walk around
- A place is my m
- You can listen t
- wind. (Pietro, age 4)
- To listen [to a pl
- When I make a

—Quotations from

