

# Family Development

Spring 2009 – Report to New Mexico from the Family Development Program  
College of Education, The University of New Mexico



**Nothing without Joy:  
*The Delight of Learning Together***



# Nothing without Joy: *The Delight of Learning Together*

by Paula Steele

The Family Development Program has long held *Nothing without Joy* as a central philosophy of its work. It is how we approach our planning with community partners as well as how we work with each other in the department. One of our core values is the belief that everyone is strong, powerful, resourceful, and participants in their own learning. Thus, *The Delight of Learning Together* reflects our passion for working with parents and teachers to engage them in hands-on, interactive workshops.

The city of Reggio Emilia in northern Italy champions similar beliefs for young children, parents, and teachers. We have been intrigued by the approach to and support of early childhood education that the citizens of Reggio Emilia demonstrate. It inspires us to think about children, teachers, parents, and learning together in a way that provokes a new understanding of what is possible.

In 1991 *Newsweek* hailed Reggio Emilia's infant toddler and preschool centers as some of the best anywhere. Educators, directors, and policy makers from all over the world have visited and continue to visit for a first hand experience of the Reggio approach. Books have been written that try to capture the essence of their beliefs and philosophy. Many who have visited return home to adapt and implement some of the strategies witnessed in the centers, as well as some of the broader ideas and philosophies.

In May 2008 several members of the Family Development Program staff had the opportunity to participate in a week-long study delegation in Reggio Emilia. Educational leaders from five states, a total of 120, participated. We attended lectures, networked with leaders from various programs, and visited the infant-toddler and preschool centers. Teachers were available to introduce their school to us and to answer questions. We observed the children and teachers going about their usual activities. Our visit to the Reggio Emilia municipal

schools, as opposed to simply reading about them, offered a profound first person experience.

This journal is dedicated to the thoughts, ideas, and philosophies that we encountered. We recognize that Reggio Emilia has a different history and culture than does New Mexico. We also know that good practice translates. These articles are a window into our interpretations of the Reggio Emilia educational approach. Through them we hope to inspire others to reflect on their own image of children, education, and the life-long process of learning. ♥

*This account from the North American Reggio Emilia Alliance [NAREA] website, <http://www.reggioalliance.org/faq.php>, succinctly captures the long history of the schools of Reggio Emilia:*

The Reggio Emilia philosophy and approach to early childhood education has developed and continues to evolve as a result of over 40 years of experience within a system of municipal infant-toddler centers and preschools [began in 1963] in Reggio Emilia, Italy. Parents, who started the schools in the 1940s, continue to participate to ensure the schools reflect the values of the community. From the beginning, the late Loris Malaguzzi, leader, philosopher and innovator in education, who was then a young teacher, guided and directed the energies of those parents and several teachers. Through many years of work with them, he developed an education based on relationship, which has become widely known and valued. The Reggio Emilia approach is built upon a solid foundation of connected philosophical principles and extensive experience. Educators in Reggio Emilia have been inspired by many early childhood psychologists and philosophers, such as Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky, Gardner and Bruner.

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# The Image of the Child: *Strong, Resourceful, Powerful*

by Ellen Biderman

*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  
a hundred worlds  
to dream.*



This poem, written by Loris Malaguzzi (1998, p.3), founder of the Early Childhood programs in Reggio Emilia, Italy, gives a very active and exciting image of children. But what does it imply to believe that children have a hundred ways of thinking, playing, speaking, loving, understanding, and dreaming? In Reggio Emilia, Malaguzzi and others have studied this question for over 50 years and have shown how such an expansive view of children can lead to dynamic early education programs for children three months to six years of age and to a city that embraces its children as full citizens.

To understand how this image of the child has shaped the work of educators in Reggio Emilia, and what we can learn from their experience, it is useful to first think about our own image of the child, and how this image can influence the decisions we make for all our children.

### *Think about these everyday occurrences:*

- A baby smiling and an adult responding, “He’s so cute.”
- A two year-old running and her mom commenting on her energy.
- A four year-old telling the same “knock knock” joke for the 100<sup>th</sup> time and her dad groaning at the repetition.
- And a six year-old beginning to read and her grandpa marveling at what a genius he is.

These common reactions to children’s behavior can provide insights into what we think about children – they are cute, energetic, repetitive, and oh, so smart.

But there is more to think about as we try to understand who children are and how best to help them meet their full potential.

Throughout the ages, Katutani states, people have asked and studied questions about the nature of the child. Who is the child? What is childhood? Does each culture create its own image of childhood? Which is more important, nature or nurture? And how does a child learn? The answers to these questions have changed over time.

In 17<sup>th</sup> century Puritan New England, children were thought to be in need of strict discipline in order to assume adult responsibilities at a young age. This image led people to have very strong behavioral expectations for youngsters.

In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, many philosophers believed that children were born empty vessels and that adults needed to “pour” knowledge into them. This led to a particular type of education – giving information to children in very structured settings.

Artists in the late 1800s depicted children as innately pure and good – radiant creatures living in their own protected, naturalistic worlds.

By the 20<sup>th</sup> century, children were regarded as having distinct needs. Specific literature was written for children and toys began to appear (1979).

Today there are still varying views of children - views that influence how we interact with them. Some people see children as little people preparing for adulthood by going through a series of predictable stages. This can lead to testing to ensure the child is progressing “properly.”

Some see children as resilient to all that comes their way, able to learn from their experiences, positive and negative, while others see the child as very fragile, needing guidance and protection.

Based on these images, some believe the role of the adult is to prepare the child for an independent life, while others feel the opposite, hoping the child will always remain dependent on family and culture.

All these various images have held sway at different times in history and have influenced the types of family services available and especially how public education is implemented. They also influence the role of children in the community. Is the old adage that children are to be “seen and not heard,” still true?

This article is not meant to imply that there is a right or wrong image of children, but merely to help us think about the implications any image can have on our parenting and schooling decisions, and to discuss the Reggio experience.

In Reggio Emilia, in reaction to the end of WWII, Loris Malaguzzi, building on the work of many educators and

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# The Image of the Child: *Strong, Resourceful, Powerful*

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philosophers and based on careful observations of children, articulated an image of the child and developed early education programs to reflect that image.

Educators in Reggio, aside from believing in the unlimited potential of children as reflected in the “100 Languages” poem, believe that children are citizens of the present, endowed with the right to be fully engaged in the life of their school, family, and community. They are not little beings to be prepared for the next stage of life. Rather, the educators understand that from birth children have much to contribute to the culture of a city.

This attitude alone has profound implications for how the Reggio community interacts with children. If children have rights as citizens, what must the early education programs look like? The schools in Reggio are based on the notion that children have the right to make decisions about how they learn and what they learn. They are places of exploration with open-ended materials. Adults have the responsibility to provide environments that allow for exploration, questioning, problem solving, surprise, amazement, and more.

In addition, Reggians have a deep belief that all children are competent learners. Children are viewed as having their own ideas, questions, and theories about the world in which they live. They are researchers, continually trying to test theories and unravel mysteries, whether of the physical world, the written word, numeracy problems, or social systems.

Children are taken seriously. Adults carefully listen to and observe children at play in order to understand what they are questioning and thinking and how to provide experiences that will help the child further make meaning of their environment.



Teachers and parents approach children with the attitude of exchanging ideas and being partners in their discoveries.

This image has also led to children being visible in the city of Reggio Emilia. The visibility demonstrates the value placed on the young child’s learning experience and of the child as a contributor to the life of the city. This is manifest from the artwork of young children that has been transferred to tiles in the halls of the train station, to the curtain in the municipal theater, which was appliquéd from the images created by five-year olds, to the many citywide festivals that are all designed to include families and children.

The image of the child as strong, powerful, resourceful, intelligent, and a citizen of today is the basis of the Reggio experience and has greatly influenced its schools and the city. In New Mexico we can learn from their experience, which has shown how exciting it can be to embrace the idea that to teach and to parent means to learn everyday from the children. And to learn everyday from children implies creating programs and spaces where we can carefully listen to the hundred languages of marveling, loving, singing, learning, discovering and dreaming. ♥

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# Here and Now: *Laying the Foundation for the Future*

by Paula Steele

Children are creatures of the present. The moment that matters is the present moment. From a child's point of view present could be this day, this activity in which he is engaged right now that may continue for an indefinite period of time. And though he may change activities, it doesn't necessarily mean that the two, or three, are unrelated. As a child plays he is building theories; he is engaging in a series of inquiries about how and why and what if. One hypothesis may be tested in several situations.

In the infant-toddler and preschool centers of Reggio Emilia, Italy a strong philosophy prevails – babies and children are born as competent beings. While they have needs that only adults can satisfy, they are also actively engaged in their own learning. They are viewed as having infinite capacity for curiosity, as craving engagement with others, and having the desire and ability to communicate in many forms.

Left on their own in a rich environment children will learn about cause and effect and a myriad of other concepts without any intervention. If a few other children are around, they'll extend each others' learning. They'll challenge each other to go further, or may offer another idea, contradictory to the one proposed.

What then is the adult role in the education of the young child? If children are so competent and capable of managing their own learning, what do they need teachers for? Here is an answer: we make them aware that they are learning. We can help them know how to use information and how to give it structure. Teachers and parents working together with children can give new meanings, new values, and significance to the work and play at hand. It is an expansion of knowing into knowledge. We can help them develop their thinking by looking deeper with them and providing the resources they need to make the most of their explorations.

For instance, children interested in the concept of height may first explore it by building ever taller and higher structures with blocks. Eventually, they'll need something to stand on, then possibly something taller to stand on. You may assist them by providing a step stool. Or perhaps you have a loft and that is used as a support for the tall structure. The very last block may be added by climbing onto it. Suddenly, the loft has taken on a new identity. It's more than the loft – it's now part of something the children have built. And because of that, the children's perspective has shifted as well.

Building with blocks is one way to explore height. You may want to help the children discover other aspects of height. So you begin to think about other high places and things. Lying down under a tall, tall tree or a cluster of them offers another perception of height. While laying there a conversation ensues about what the trees look like, how it makes you feel, perhaps whether or not the trees are brushing the clouds. The children will have insights and ideas upon which you can build. You will have ideas upon which they can build.

What other places present the experience of height? Perhaps there is a bridge you can go to and look far, far down to a river or arroyo below. Can you take a field trip to a tall building and look out the windows on the topmost floor? Have you ever thought about distance being like height except that it's horizontal instead of vertical? Maybe you live in the plains and have a long stretch of road or field to explore this way. Take photos to capture the sights.

After these experiences you might use an artistic medium to explore height. Draw the trees, the building, the bridge. Construct them in clay. Revisit those places after the initial venture to see what new aspects might be noticed. Use the photos as reminders and to help the continued thinking and processing of the experience.

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*Natashia combines materials to build a bridge.*



*Natasha's drawing of the bridge: various representations expand a child's abilities*

Throughout these adventures you and the children are co-creating knowledge through a give-and-take that honors the children as competent learners and you as integral to their process and progression in building knowledge. Through these thoughtful and purposeful activities you are helping them to more than *know*; you are helping them add to a store of *knowledge*.

How are we to think about this as a way of teaching? The Reggio approach refers to teachers as researchers. Normally we reserve the term researcher for those in loftier positions, off in labs somewhere or out in the field, people of a certain authority. Certainly we don't think of parents and teachers as researchers. By doing so, we can radically alter our beliefs about being with children and our role with them. We can begin to reshape our ideas about learning to learn along with the children. We can begin to think about constructing knowledge together rather than being the dispensers of it. Together we can be critical thinkers and ask questions such as, "Why do you do it that way?" It's a good question to ask ourselves, as well as others so that we can consider our assumptions, and approach learning with the notion that it is incomplete. That is, that there are multiple interpretations and it is in the exploration that deep thinking and learning occur.

Being a researcher means being open to the search for the unknown and cultivating the ability to ask questions. This requires that we be situated in the present time. What's happening of interest? Notice what piques the curiosity of you and the children. Be bold and follow those leads. It might be a little distressing, for who knows where you will end up? You have the learning experience mapped out; you've made plans.

What will become of them? How will you know that your responsibilities are being fulfilled? These are questions you may have as you consider a way to teach that is not so much about imparting knowledge as finding ways to create it. One thing that I have tried is to begin with the exploration. Here's how I did it. Take note of the questions that are asked and the discoveries that are made. Reexamine parts of the investigation to remember where you began, how you progressed, and where you might go next. Then look at the standards and benchmarks. I guarantee that you will find they are covered. Let others know the harvest of information gained through your explorations. You can do that through the project itself by commenting on standards and benchmarks to put others at ease. Share the knowledge generated through your photos and the children's work.

Rather than being a curriculum to follow this is more a philosophy to live – and it's not an easy philosophy. It takes a certain strength and courage to try something new, especially when the other way worked just fine. One way to think about stepping into this is to think about children in the course of their everyday living. What drives them in this world? They are curious! Reggio folks believe their curiosity extends to really big ideas like: searching for the meaning of life, existence, and the meaning of conventions and customs. When a child questions why that bug or bird or pet died, the mind is grappling with a really important issue. Why are we alive? What does it mean to be alive? How do we manage ourselves in this world? Children contemplate these questions. It is necessary to recognize this to help us distinguish the child as having profound thoughts.

This insight truly expanded my notion of children in the world. They are more than just cute with provocative questions. They really want to know the what and how and why of things, and they like to figure it out themselves – with the help of a friendly guide. Their drive and their initiative come from the desire to understand. It's that simple and that complicated. Children are powerful agents in their own learning, and the best way for them to do that is through questioning, playing, exploring, thinking, and searching – alone and with others.

As adult partners in children's learning we contribute to their research by providing the necessary materials and guidance. They contribute by providing a fresh outlook, questions, and observations that help us ponder life and learning in the moment. When we take care of the present we are effectively providing for the future.

*School is not preparation for life; school is life.*

~J. Bruner ♥

# Beautiful Environments: Welcoming Children to Learn

by Alida Dávila-Larrichio

*en-vi-ron-ment (in vi' rən mən) the aggregate of social and cultural conditions that influence the life of an individual or community*

School environments play an important role in learning. Making them beautiful and accessible communicates a respect for the teachers and students who work and learn there. The atmosphere of the learning environment at the Reggio Emilia municipal infant-toddler and preschool centers made a strong impression on me when I visited Italy with the delegation from New Mexico. I could feel the potential of community influences for engaged learning.

I was very impressed with the manner in which the children moved freely and confidently throughout the classroom engaging in different activities. As a former Montessori teacher, (which is another Italian teaching philosophy and methodology), I could relate to the unique classroom environment. It emphasizes hands-on experiences for children and the use of colorful and natural arrangements. It was obvious that the teachers have respect for the children, and in return the children are respectful towards them.

The preschools are structures unto themselves. They are not preschool classrooms located in the elementary school. Each site has the same configuration: one classroom each for the three, four, and five year olds. Each of these rooms has its own mini atelier, or art studio. The building also houses a large atelier, with an art teacher specifically for that room. The entrance is known as the “piazza, [which is] the place of encounters, friendships and games and other activities that complete those of the classrooms” (Malaguzzi, 1998, p.64). An important aspect of these schools is that the entry often provides information about the school’s name and why it was chosen. A roster of teachers with their photos is displayed. Some form of documentation of a project to welcome visitors into this learning approach is also included.

On the other side of the piazza, adjacent to the classrooms is the kitchen, where the children very often participate in baking delicious snacks served every day in school. It was a delight to watch the children savoring what they had just made, and to see the pride they exhibited as they shared these goodies with us, “the guests from America,” as they said.

The physical environment in Reggio schools is exceptionally attractive, with furniture that is appropriately suited for the physical needs of the various age groups of the children. The organization of the space, and the sculptures and drawings of the students, offer a warm, happy welcome to the families and their children as they arrive each day.

Having the opportunity to observe some of the classrooms for extended periods of time, I could appreciate the potential



for the many options given to the children to experience and respond creatively to their world. This learning environment is social in nature and provides a secure and stimulating climate for different age groups of children.

In addition, it allows them to take appropriate risks and to explore and investigate whatever is new in their environment without adult interruption or close supervision. Due to the trust and independence which the learning environment fosters in the children, teachers and children appear relaxed, content, and engaged.

Making children visible through the Reggio approach is part of the school philosophy. The children’s drawings are one way of giving them visibility, not just in the school, but in the community and city at large through public displays. I couldn’t help but notice while walking through the tunnel that leads to the Loris Malaguzzi International Centre, the numerous photographs of bicycle drawings and sculptures that the children had made from recycled materials. One senses how much children’s efforts are being validated through their projects. This premise is fundamental to the Reggio approach.

Environmental awareness in Reggio schools is a crucial part of the overall education. Children are offered the use of recycled and natural materials inside the classroom as well as in the outdoors. This education helps shape children’s values, perspectives, and understanding of how to care for their surroundings. Materials are creatively displayed and are accessible to children. This allows them to interact with materials that are man-made as well as those that come from the natural world. Children’s participation, caring, preparation, and appreciation are evident in their projects which evolve in

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## Beautiful Environments: *Welcoming Children to Learn*

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an organic way under the careful guidance of the teacher. It encourages gratitude for what nature has to offer.

I observed in the late afternoon how sunrays filtered through the curtainless windows of the atelier. They reflected from the high-pitched ceilings, highlighting the displayed materials (sea shells, twigs, rocks, dried fruit, leaves, rose petals, sand, corn, colored plastic bottles) on glass tabletops, and turned them into beautiful rainbow colors.

The most extraordinary elements in the Reggio Emilia educational approach include the quality of life within the classes.

There is a home-like setting full of energy and freedom, an exchange of thoughts, respect, and dignity for children of all ages, a natural beauty that offers a sense of welcoming. The environment provides serious learning – and so much more. I can still hear the laughter that echoes beyond the school walls onto the streets of the city of Reggio Emilia. ♥

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# Reclaiming Resources

by Diana Montoya

**H**istoric Route 66 runs through the heart of Albuquerque's Nob Hill neighborhood, founded in 1933. A thoroughfare with motels and restaurants for the weary traveler, it boasts a vibrant mix of antique shops, clothing boutiques, and galleries, as well as renewed eating establishments. Old buildings and businesses, once abandoned and in disrepair, have taken on a new look and purpose respecting and honoring what once was.

Nestled in that neighborhood is a white square building. With the exception of a funky rustic metal sign that has twisted and curved metal letters on the overhang, and colorful materials in the windows, it is not very interesting. Just a building, and a simple one at that, by architectural standards.

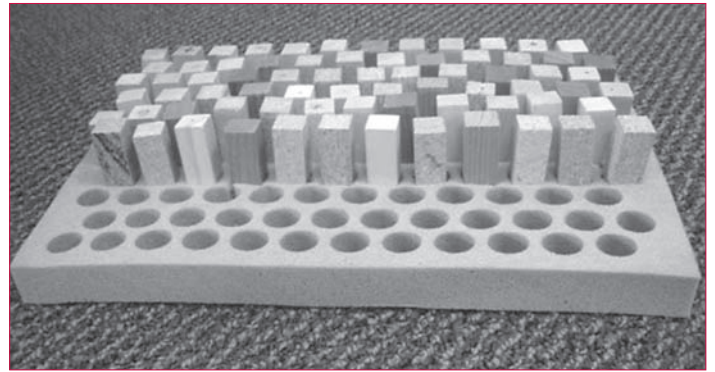
What can be seen from the outside when peering through the windows piques the curiosity of those who walk or drive by. Pedestrians often come inside and ask, "What is this place?" This place is the Wemagination Center and is part of the University of New Mexico's Family Development Program.

When you walk into the Wemagination Center, you see a showroom full of items in an array of colors, a variety of shapes, and a mix of the unusual and the every day. For instance, there are foam punch-outs, caps that would have covered perfume bottles or cans, beads, and a variety of paper, among other things. They are things that would normally have ended up in the landfill, because they often are irregulars, overruns, or manufactured extras. They find their way to our center by the environmentally conscious: businesses, educational and governmental organizations, and community members. The materials have their own stories to tell and invite visitors to investigate them.

Most adults can't wait to get their hands on these resources and explore and wonder what they were and what they can be. They are reminded of how they used to play as young children with things found around the house and in the natural environment; how a stick found outside could be anything imaginable. It could be a conductor's wand or a tool to write in the sand.

Educators and parents are able to access these donated items after a fun two-hour workshop during which participants explore recycled material through play. We call this a Play Orientation; see the side bar on page 10 for more information.

The workshop promotes current brain research and best practices for how children learn, which suggests that children need to manipulate materials over time and in a variety of ways. For example, Wemagination materials can be used as building supplies to develop balance and fine motor skills; math supplies for patterns, counting, and sorting; science supplies to examine weight, floatation, volume, and gravity; pre-



literacy resources for developing imagination, as well as for use in social and emotional development when children play together.

*Even though we use the term 'creative recycling,' what we really try to do is prolong the life of materials, to give them new identities.*

- Graziella Brighenti

In New Mexico the Wemagination Center has been referred to by many as "an educational jewel." In Reggio Emilia, Italy there is another re-use center that is also an educational jewel, called Remida. The children in Reggio Emilia say that Remida is the house of objects...It's the place of children's dreams.

Even though these centers are thousands of miles apart there are strong connections between the two. Like the historic Nob Hill neighborhood, the town of Reggio Emilia is rooted deep in history. Both centers were inspired by the Center for Creative Learning in Boston. All three have a deep respect for materials by promoting them as useful and beautiful beyond what is normally recognized.

Entering the Wemagination Center is very much like walking into Remida. Both centers display unique odds and ends, industrial discards, and things found in nature. Every material placement is intentionally thought through. It all has a pur-

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# Reclaiming Resources

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pose. The environment and the materials invite visitors to go on a journey of creative possibilities.

*They take on and suggest forms, occupy the space and transform it. They tell new stories, generate rough or delicate exploratory actions while attracting you towards the silence; in silence the imagination is deeper and more intense; it takes your attention toward “that which is not here,” toward creative expression.*

- Ferrari & Giacopini, (2005, p.45)

In the article “The Hive Project,” Dave Kelly and Susan Lukaart write about the value and potential of recycled materials stating that, “Everyday objects shape people’s experience and perception of the world. These things are part of the learning process...” (2005, p. 18).

These powerful statements give us much to think about when we discard what we come to think of as disposable items. When we think that an item’s use is over, it’s done...we can think again. A recycle center for creative use and engaged experiences in the Nob Hill community and in a town called Reggio Emilia, shows us that with these materials we can invent something new and create new possibilities.

*Objects can not only invoke in us our own experiences; they can also suggest to us a memory of what the particular object could be.*

- Elena Giacopini ♥

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While the Play Orientation is a structured workshop, the overall intent is to provide a creative environment in which self-directed exploration and discovery can take place. Follow-up discussions extend the scope of possible material uses and enhances an understanding of the central role play has in total child development.

To sign-up for a Play Orientation contact Monique Chavez by email: [machavez@unm.edu](mailto:machavez@unm.edu) or phone at 277-5800.

For more information about the Wemagination Center contact Diana Montoya by email: [dlmontya@unm.edu](mailto:dlmontya@unm.edu) or phone at 277-1004.



# Cities with Children in Mind

by Emily Holzknacht

**S**idewalk cafes spill onto a narrow cobblestone street lined with multi-story yellow and orange buildings. From windows above come the sound of music and laughter. You pass bicyclists and pedestrians with strollers – people who nod with a friendly “buona sera.” An archway offers a glimpse of a brilliant green courtyard garden. You continue along the lane and pass through a small opening to enter a piazza, buzzing with the activity of old and young, men and women, boys and girls. Children jump off the large stone steps of an ancient church while others climb stone lion statues. You smile as relaxation and interest pour over you. You want to linger, to join in the hum of social life in Reggio Emilia, Italy.

In a thoughtful book, *The Forgotten Child: Cities for the Well-Being of Children* (2000), Lennard and Lennard explain how the built environment of traditional cities such as Reggio Emilia contributes to the quality of life for all its citizens – adults and children alike.

They believe that when designing cities to be functional for all, the needs of children should be acknowledged as a design factor. It must be accepted that children use the built environment in ways that are different from adult uses. Children need a city to be meaningful, inclusive, accessible, and legible to them.

Meaning is created for children when they are able to associate places with interactions that have occurred there. Meaningful interactions include observing and participating in varied and stimulating social exchanges with community members as well as experiencing the built environment using all the senses. Unlike adults, children do not fully experience public art by simply looking at it. They need to touch it, climb on it, hide behind it, run around it, and integrate it into pretend play in order to truly make it meaningful.

In order for stimulating interactions and social development to occur, cities must be inclusive, with spaces and events designed for use by both children and adults. Cities with no place for people to gather, or with segregated children and adult spaces, are not inclusive. Neither are rules that limit children’s use of public spaces such as “no climbing,” “no touching,” and “no running.” In contrast, spaces for gathering such as plazas, fountains, parks, and sculptures encourage people of all ages and types to gather and share public space. The most inclusive play structures for children are informal: statues and low walls for climbing, steps for jumping, nooks and benches, corners and doorways.

Children need the city to be accessible in order to reach and remain in these stimulating and inclusive locations. This means the city must be designed so that children can easily and safely get from location to location without a car. Streets



*...touch it, climb it, run around it, and pretend.*

with fewer lanes, slower speeds and mixed-use development make stimulating and inclusive public spaces more accessible. Streets with front porches, sidewalk store fronts, and businesses with living spaces above allow families and neighbors to share in the supervision of children.

For a city to be truly accessible, it must also be legible to children, meaning it must be navigable even to those who cannot read. For children to become increasingly autonomous, they need to understand where destinations are in relation to one another. Cities with connecting street grids and recognizable landmarks allow children to travel confidently.



*Wide sidewalks and landscaping are inviting.*

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# Cities with Children in Mind

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## Evaluating Neighborhoods with Children in Mind

Meaningful	Are children able to interact directly with people and built environments that are diverse and stimulating?
Inclusive	Are public spaces and events created for use by both adults and children?
Accessible	Are many destinations including shops and public spaces accessible without the use of a car?
Legible	Can streets be easily navigated without having to read? Are purposes of buildings clear to young people?

Understanding children's needs for cities to be meaningful, inclusive, accessible and legible, can help us to consider these needs as design factors as we redevelop and expand our neighborhoods and cities in New Mexico. We can preserve positive features of the built environment as well as remove and avoid adding elements that work to exclude the youngest citizens of our state from participating in community life. New Mexico's long and rich history means that many communities already enjoy benefits of traditional city design. These include: traditional plazas and community celebrations, farmer's markets, and neighborhoods with garages hidden on back alleys. Many newer buildings and developments, such as the Manzano Mesa Multigenerational Center in Albuquerque and the planned community of Mesa del Sol are also working to make public spaces that consider and include children.

If your neighborhood or city is not meaningful, inclusive, accessible, and legible for children, all is not lost. Examples of redevelopment which balance children and community with cars and economy can be seen throughout New Mexico. In

Albuquerque, many residents in Nob Hill and the University area are converting their garages to additional living spaces, allowing for more eyes on the street. Similarly, there are proposals to reduce speeds and lane numbers along parts of Central Avenue to encourage on-street development and increase accessibility for pedestrians and bicyclists, changes that will certainly benefit children in the area. Talk to your local representative or your city planner about current plans for redevelopment in your region and voice your own concerns about inhospitable areas and their exclusion of children. While waiting for redevelopment, seek out places where your children can be more autonomous, where they can make meaning of the built and social environments, and where they are included in public spaces and communal life. ♥

### References

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*The "WE" promotes open-ended, hands-on, play-based learning through the creative reuse of seconds and irregular materials. We offer a free play orientation that supports ways you can design creative experiences to enhance children's learning styles.*

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# Taking a Stand for the Rights of Our Children

by Lois Vermilya

*Children are the citizens of the present.  
They have rights and we have responsibility to them.*

Reggio Emilia Study Delegation Notes, May 2008

New Mexico has a long tradition of advocacy for the rights of our children led by organizations and individuals who have been untiring in their commitment to make a difference for children. Their collective efforts over decades have created community-based access to resources of public health, developmental care, early learning and family support even despite great odds and limited funding. While we still have a long way to go to address the very real needs of our state's youngest children, we have also consistently demonstrated our dogged determination to come together to place children at the heart of New Mexico's agenda.

As part of the 20th anniversary celebration of New Mexico Voices for Children this past winter, an exemplary group of Legislative and Community Leaders were honored as Champions for Children, including the Family Development Program's former Director, Dr. Mary Dudley who led our statewide program for many years. The Family Development Program has always taken a firm stand for the rights of children, joining with many other advocates to fight for needed services that can positively support families and young children. We have been greatly inspired by lessons learned from the philosophy of Reggio Emilia which challenges us to think deeply about children as full citizens of our communities – right from the very beginning of their lives.

Loris Malaguzzi, the founder of Reggio Emilia's early childhood programs, called for the rights of children with an unwavering conviction that children must be seen as powerful, competent and resourceful. "We must give enormous credit to the potential and the power that children possess. We must be convinced that children, like us, have stronger powers than those we have been told about, powers which we all possess – us and children" (Rinaldi, 2006, p.55).

Reflecting on the creation of Reggio Emilia's distinct approach to early childhood education, Malaguzzi describes the underlying aspirations that shaped every aspect of their work which grew out of the determination of parents to create a future for their children after the devastating effects of World War II in their community.

The equation was simple: If children had legitimate rights, then they should have opportunities to develop their intelligence and to be made ready for the success that would not or should not, escape them. These were the parents' thoughts, expressing a universal aspiration, a declaration against the betrayal of children's potential, and a warning that children first of all had to be taken seriously and believed in (Malaguzzi, 1998, p. 58).

Taking a stand for the rights of our children with parents as full partners is a core belief that guides the Family Development Program. It also is the underlying premise which unifies statewide initiatives of the New Mexico's Early Childhood Action Network (ECAN), a broad coalition that seeks to align statewide programs and services for families. As a member of ECAN's Executive Committee since its inception four years ago, we have been working collaboratively with a large group of state early childhood advocates to continue the hard work of defining a bold vision for the well being of young children in our state.

ECAN is a statewide policy forum whose Steering Committee is appointed by Lt. Governor Diane Denish, Chair of the New Mexico Children's Cabinet, to make recommendations on how to improve the well being of young children and their families. ECAN brings together experts from many different disciplines to promote comprehensive, coordinated action plans that will assure that all children have equal opportunities and resources to reach their full potential.

ECAN is committed to achieve the goals set by our New Mexico Children's Cabinet:

- ♥ All children birth to five and their families will be physically and mentally HEALTHY.
- ♥ All children birth to five will be SAFE and SUPPORTED in their families and communities.
- ♥ All children birth to five will LEARN the skills they need to support their individual goals.
- ♥ All children birth to five will be able to TRANSITION to school successfully.

*Continued on page 14*



# Taking a Stand for the Rights of Our Children

Continued from page 13



- ♥ All children birth to five and their families are valued and their active participation promoted in their COMMUNITIES.

(For more information, see ECAN's web-site: [www.earlychildhoodnm.com](http://www.earlychildhoodnm.com))

ECAN is passionate in our commitment to stand in solidarity with families as our most essential partners to shape public policy on behalf of our children. We are joining our voices through a shared conviction declared in the core messages endorsed by ECAN's Steering Committee, 2008:

## **The well being of every child is the heart of New Mexico.**

- ♥ Every child deserves an equal start in life.
- ♥ No family should have to sacrifice their child's well being to support their family.

## **Children are born learning.**

- ♥ The first five years are most important for future learning, behavior, and health.
- ♥ All children are intelligent.
- ♥ Growing up in poverty compromises a child's ability to succeed.
- ♥ Engaged and supported families ensure that children reach their full potential.

## **Families are the foundation for learning and healthy development.**

- ♥ Families create the child's first and most essential relationships.
- ♥ Families are a child's first teacher.
- ♥ Responsive communities matter to the well being of New Mexico's families, and to our future as a whole state.

## **High quality makes the difference.**

- ♥ High quality early childhood development puts a child on the road to self reliance.
- ♥ Integrated services committed to quality – in health, early learning and development – are critically important.

## **Investing in children matters today and for the future.**

- ♥ Every child and family matters for a safe and economically sound New Mexico.
- ♥ There is an urgent need for investment for all children.
- ♥ Investing in the well being of every child is the best financial investment we can make in the future of New Mexico.
- ♥ We must eliminate child poverty in New Mexico.

ECAN is committed to call for the rights of our children as we urge our state to make sound policy decisions that can profoundly impact all children and their families. Like the determined efforts of parents and teachers of Reggio Emilia which have influenced educators throughout the world for more than 50 years, early childhood leaders right here at home continue to fight for New Mexico's own heritage of standing firmly with our children because they have rights that we hold very dear.

Our children are the citizens of today. They will also be our New Mexico citizenship of the future. ♥

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## VOICES FOR CHILDREN: *The New Mexico Children's Charter*

**V**oices for Children launched the New Mexico Children's Charter in 2007, in conjunction with its 20th anniversary celebration that honored a distinguished group of Champions for Children. As this powerful advocacy group looks ahead to the next 20 years, it has renewed determination to nurture a new generation of New Mexico children. The New Mexico Children's Charter takes a firm stand for the rights of children, inspiring all of us to achieve the following goals as we work together to create our state's future.



- ♥ No child lives in poverty
- ♥ Every child and adult has access to quality health care, including mental health care
- ♥ Every family has access to affordable, safe and high quality early childcare and education
- ♥ Every child has access to a public education system that is fully funded and in which resources are equitably distributed
- ♥ Every New Mexican can afford to go to college
- ♥ Our youth have access to positive development opportunities and alternatives to incarceration
- ♥ Our youth have enough positive options available to them that they put off parenthood until they are older and economically independent
- ♥ Every family has safe, affordable housing and sufficient, nutritious food
- ♥ Our economic development strategy provides for jobs that pay living wages, guarantee family leave, protect workers' rights, and provide access to education to improve skills and success in the workplace
- ♥ Our tax system is transparent, everyone pays their fair share, and it generates enough revenue to maintain necessary programs
- ♥ Children and families are a high priority in federal, state and local budgets
- ♥ Every family has access to appropriate credit, and predatory lending practices are abolished
- ♥ Our state has and enforces strong environmental laws that protect public health and the future of the planet
- ♥ All communities, regardless of diversity, size or place, have a voice in state government
- ♥ Our voter rights are protected and civic participation is encouraged
- ♥ Our elected officials are held accountable through campaign finance reform and ethics laws
- ♥ All New Mexicans are assured protection of their human rights and civil liberties
- ♥ No one experiences disparities in education, health, economic opportunity, housing, civil rights, self determination or personal power because of their race, ethnicity, religion, disability, gender or sexual orientation
- ♥ All immigrants to New Mexico are protected by just and humane immigration policies
- ♥ Every community is a safe, welcoming place for families and children

In order to realize this vision of a better future, we will continue to collaborate with our many allies, partners and elected officials, but we will hold ourselves accountable for reaching our goals. As this is a living document, we will revisit this charter and make course corrections as needs change. And we will ask the community to join us in these efforts. We hope you share our vision for New Mexico's children and families. And we hope that if you do, you will raise your voice with ours and speak for the children.

(Reprinted with permission from New Mexico Voices for Children Website: [www.nmvoices.org](http://www.nmvoices.org))

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