

NEWSLETTER

Issue 5: June 2010

Reggio Emilia Aotearoa New Zealand



Kia ora Koutou and welcome to our latest REANZ newsletter.

2010 has been such a busy year already with a number of stunning events & guests already been and gone!

Newsletter Issue 5 Contents at a glance:

- ❖ Recent Events and links on the website
- ❖ Reflections and highlights from study tour to Reggio Emilia, Italy!
- ❖ Up-in-coming events this winter: Conversation series, centre visits, Melbourne study tour updates

Have you been to the REANZ Website lately? www.reanz.org

The web site is constantly being updated so please check it out for more info on events and stories, articles, notes from our recent events/international speakers and web links relating to Reggio inspired pedagogy. A space for discussion is also now available. Latest info on the web includes highlights and info from:

- Reflections, highlights & photos from our 2 day Seminar in April
- Reflections on the May Melbourne Study Tour
- Reflections, highlights & information from Early Years Seminar Day 12th June

2010 REANZ Events for your diary! Enrollment details on the web site.

July, August, September	Winter Conversation Series,	with Anne Meade, Brenda Soutar and Sally Groenhart
September	Melbourne Study Tour	Leaders: Chris Bayes & Helen Aitken
October	Melbourne Study Tour	Leaders: Prue Crarer & Denise Heald * some places still available
October	Centre Visits	The Crib, Matakana; Helensville Montessori
October/Nov	The Outdoor Environment	St James Kindergarten

and 2011...

March 2011	Sydney Conference & Mia Mia
April 2011	Melbourne Study Tour
April 2011	Reggio Emilia Study Tour

Update - Melbourne Study Tours 2010

The September Melbourne Study Tour is all organised, and we are now accepting registrations of interest for an additional October 2010 tour - there are a few places still available on this tour - please register your details and payment to secure a place. The week's study tour will involve: visiting six centres in Melbourne where teachers are engaged in innovative practice; engage in facilitated professional discussions; and of course dabble in a little sightseeing and shopping. The cost is currently \$1990 - this covers air travel, accommodation, study tour, transfers in Melbourne and insurance. The study tour guides from REANZ are experienced and know how to look after you.

Thoughts & Reflections on the Reggio Emilia Italy Study Tour: April 2010.

Many thanks to all the study tour participants whose energy and good company made a memorable maiden tour for REANZ ☺

If you are considering going to Reggio Emilia and would like more information on joining the REANZ 2011 April tour, please contact Lorraine Manuela via the REANZ website www.reanz.org.nz



Written by Lesley Pohio

This was the first study tour to Reggio Emilia lead by REANZ. In April, seventeen participants and co-leaders Lorraine and Lesley travelled to Reggio Emilia, arriving several days earlier in order to explore both the local area and beyond. Trips to Florence and Venice were part of the itinerary and several of the participants took the opportunity to take a train to other places of interest too (Bologna, Parma, Milan, Cinque de Terre). We were fortunate to stay at a beautiful historic Hotel, *Hotel Posta* which is well situated in a busy piazza where we often gathered for a drink at the end of a busy and stimulating day.

The study tour itself began on the Sunday afternoon with a guided walk around the town. The following morning, nearly 400 eager participants from throughout the world, with Australia and New Zealand accounting for over a quarter of these, gathered at the Loris Malaguzzi International Centre, where an overview of the week's events, was revealed. The week entailed various presentations featuring in particular the role and place of *the Atelier* and the *Atelierista* and the *Atelier of Taste* (kitchen and dining room), reflecting the value and importance placed on these teaching and learning spaces.

Visits to early childhood centres along with a cultural tour (optional) to parmesan cheese factories, balsamic vinegar factories and castles were part of the tour. We were also fortunate to be able to visit the newly opened early childhood centre in the International centre and we were all amazed by the spaciousness and layout of the centre. The dining room and kitchen captured our attention illustrating the critical place these hold as Gandini, Hill, Caldwell and Schwall (2005) describe, "[the kitchen] like the dining room, the atelier, the classrooms, the "piazza", and the outdoor are, is a place of life and possible relationships, a vital space inhabited on a daily basis by adults and children, a space for thinking and research and learning" (p.4). Likewise whilst the ateliers provided spaces for children to explore materials and tools, they are more importantly seen as a place for research and for "wondering with children about what they see, think, and feel and how they make sense of their experiences" (Gandini, Hill, Caldwell and Schwall 2005, p.2).

After several stimulating days involving discussion, eating, sightseeing and being generally absorbed in town of Reggio Emilia, we all set off in various directions to either continue our travelling adventures or make our way home. However the volcanic eruption interrupted these and for some this meant spending an extra few days in Milan, while others remained in Reggio Emilia awaiting flights to London. Now that everyone is safely home we all had stories to tell and these have created an interesting dialogue...read on for more reflections and stories.

An Italian Affair: For the love of Reggio Emilia...

A reflection on the Reggio Tour April 2010

Written by Sally Groenhart

The Crib
Matakana

An orange sunrise bathed our bus in a golden glow as we sped past trees still nude after a long hard winter. Their spring cloak not yet showing through the brushstrokes of the watercolor scene. Low mist and sunlight melded into soft morning light. Thoughts of last time, three years ago, when I passed down this same road. A different group of New Zealanders but with the same destination, Reggio Emilia. Then I had been the head teacher of a kindergarten, this time I had my own tiny centre for Infants and Toddlers, inspired by my last tour of Reggio Emilia. I was hungry for information about the way in which the Reggio 'experiment'

(as they constantly referred to their system) applied itself to infants and toddlers.

Arriving in Reggio Emilia some two hours later was a warm 'home coming' of sorts as I recognized various landmarks. Our large bus wove its way through the narrow paved streets of the inner city, just missing elegant adults on bicycles, and parked cars. We arrived outside the historic Hotel Posta, a small inner city hotel reflecting a sense of timeless beauty. The next two days were spent getting to know other participants from New Zealand and exploring Florence and Venice. Florence with her villa laden hills, olive trees, the river Arno dividing the city. Venice with her waterways, secret places, Milano glass and thousands of tourists. The history and beauty of both cities was well worth a look. Reading my notes, my description of Venice, "a graveyard for decaying building with music its heart beat". Vivaldi echoed through the streets.

Our Study Tour began with a guided walk around the city. For me the highlight was the Jewish Synagogue, now used as a place for exhibitions. A place of breathtaking beauty with a central light shaft projecting a beam of light into the middle of the space. The stair wells led to several levels where the woman and children viewed the proceedings through barred viewing windows. An aerie silent space. Listening carefully you could feel the pulse of those that had gone before.

Monday at last. I was ready for the tour to begin. The three hundred and eighty delegates from across the world were welcomed by Amelia Gambetti and then shown a video clip of the Mayor welcoming us all. That first day fed my own passion and I recognized my feelings and beliefs as I heard words from Paola Cagliari, a pedagogista of thirty years experience. Words like "Education is the Right of all children", "Education becomes the responsibility of the community". She described the history of the Reggio schools...after the World War Two, the woman of the town wanted schools for their children "not just any school, a new school, a different school. Not a school to substitute mothers going to work, but a children's place. A place where children had a right to be, to play and grow. A place to become a citizen." And thus the Reggio schools were born. Over sixty years later the 'experiment' is still in progress. The town of Reggio Emilia chose to make Education a priority.

Children are treated in respectful ways. They believe them to be born researchers. Born with the capacity and willingness/desire to learn. As researchers they have the mental and physical structures for questioning, making hypothesis, and are able to think and make connections in complex ways.

The art of research already exists in the hands of children acutely sensitive to the pleasure of Learning, of knowing, of understanding. It is one of the fundamental sensations each human being expects from experience faced alone or with others. (Loris Malaguzzi)

Over the week I made links between deeply embedded cultural practices and the routines seen in the schools. The value of food and eating together, the cultural glue of families for many generations. The children's sleep time after lunch, the whole town shuts down for a three hour siesta, the use of clay in every classroom, the traditional statues and art work that grace the town. The focus on drawing and other 'languages', again the town is rich in paintings, and performing arts culture. Even the perforated metal shelving seen in many centres, is the material in which the parmesans are bound to create the huge rounds of cheese.

I arrived home wondering about how all this fits within the context of an Infant and Toddler Centre in New Zealand. A sense of urgency sits within. How can we reflect our own history and culture within our educational settings? How can we ensure that we don't just transpose the Reggio way into New Zealand, but take the best of their pedagogical practice, their 'experiment' (reflection and review), their community ownership and value of children and childhood? How can we work with our teams and centre communities to ensure we reflect our precious Aotearoa? How can we, as a community of people interested and passionate about education of our youngest citizens, ensure our children are not institutionalized and depotentialized, or seen as lacking in anything?

In the words of Howard Gardner "There can be no absence of conflict in a changing reality". Kia kaha!

Further thoughts on the Reggio Study Tour...

Written by Michelle Johnston and Lorraine Andrews

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Arriving at the train station of Reggio Emilia was very exciting. After 33 hours of travelling, we finally reached the town that we had heard so much about. What was going to unfold for us here? As tired as we were, we had very wide grins. What were we going to learn in the next week that would impact our teaching and learning in New Zealand. The Study Tour began with a walking tour around the town in the twilight of our first Sunday evening. The rest of the week was based in the very new Loris Malaguzzi Centre which houses the various activities of Reggio Children. It includes a brand new early childhood centre, and the auditorium where our group of 380 English speaking delegates from around the world had our sessions. The week itself, consisted of many lecture type sessions and visits to 3 or 4 centres – and one to the Remida Centre, the most amazing recycling centre!

Michelle

It was easy to be wowed by the visible differences - the fabulous environments, artwork and documentation but since my return, having reread my notes, the publications given and bought (particularly the book *Art and Creativity in Reggio Emilia* by Vea Vecchi), I now realize there are significant differences under the surface that don't fit easily with my philosophy and approach to Early Childhood education. One aspect of the Reggio Approach that did impress me however, was their determination to have core values reflected throughout every aspect of every centre. Although each centre we visited was different it was very evident that much thought had gone into the way in which resources, materials, lighting, furniture and spaces were arranged and presented. It's not so much about light tables and mirrors but about defining what we hold to be important for our centre, in our setting, and then making sure everything we do and say, aligns with that.

Lorraine

Two of the visits were to pristine centres, where many wondered what they would be like with children in them. By pristine, I mean set up with an eye for detail and with evident care, not just because the centres were new, or nearly new. It was a blessing to see them in working mode one morning during part of a normal morning school session. The huge space available for children in the newest centre was overwhelming. The amount of beautifully presented recycled (but not reused) materials in each centre and, of the wonderful smells coming from those fantastic kitchens now being classed as yet another atelier. Less is more in the amount of resources visible (this may not be the case - this is what I noted) - this being an important difference to the often seen clutter of NZ centres.

There will be ongoing conversations and discussions regarding many of our experiences which will impact on our teaching over the next years. Re-reading Reggio books and looking critically at our own philosophy and making change not for change sake, but with the view to maintaining a high quality centre for our children, families and our staff. It made me feel very proud of *Te Whāriki*, the New Zealand Early Childhood Curriculum. One comment pertains to the Bronfenbrenner ecological model evident within *Te Whāriki*. I see the Reggio philosophy working and around the micro, meso and exo system levels for the child well within the region, however does not appear to extend beyond into the wider communities of Italy, nor into primary sector schools, which remain conservative, and this surprised me. In New Zealand we have a great curriculum which accepts and embraces challenge and change. Another is the observation that all the documentation seems to be for the teachers and how they teach. I saw little evidence of documentation like the portfolios we use here, for individual children. I am not saying it didn't happen - I did not see it nor hear of it spoken about.

Lorraine Manuela and Lesley Pohio were great tour leaders. We all had a fun time together and appreciated not only the tours they organised for us to Venice and Florence but also the discussion times we had during the week to help us absorb what we were hearing. We saw lots, ate lots and spent lots!!! However getting back to New Zealand wasn't as easy as getting to Italy, with a certain volcano in Iceland blowing its top! Everybody's travel plans went out the window and each one of us had to improvise and make the most of an unexpected delay in Europe... which wasn't too hard, as we saw the lakes and mountains of Switzerland on our overland trip to Holland!

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!