

Innovations

in early education: *the international Reggio exchange*

PUBLISHED BY WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY, COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

The Relationship Between Architecture and Pedagogy in the Experience of the Reggio Municipal Infant-Toddler Centers and Preschools *By Lella Gandini*

THE QUARTERLY
PERIODICAL OF THE
NORTH AMERICAN
REGGIO EMILIA
ALLIANCE

vol. 17, no. 1
Winter 2010

WHAT'S INSIDE

Follow Your Vision:
Inspiration
for Dreamers

NAREA Column:
Welcome to
New NAREA
Board Members

"The Wonder of Learning
The Hundred Languages
of Children"
Exhibit Schedule

Conference Calendar

New Resources
from Reggio Children

North American Study
Groups and International
Professional Development
Initiatives in Reggio Emilia,
Italy

Lella Gandini is the Reggio Children Liaison in the U.S. for the Dissemination of the Reggio Emilia Approach and Associate Editor of Innovations in Early Education: The International Reggio Exchange. The editors of Innovations would like to express their appreciation to Amelia Gambetti of Reggio Children for her contribution to the publication of this article/interview.

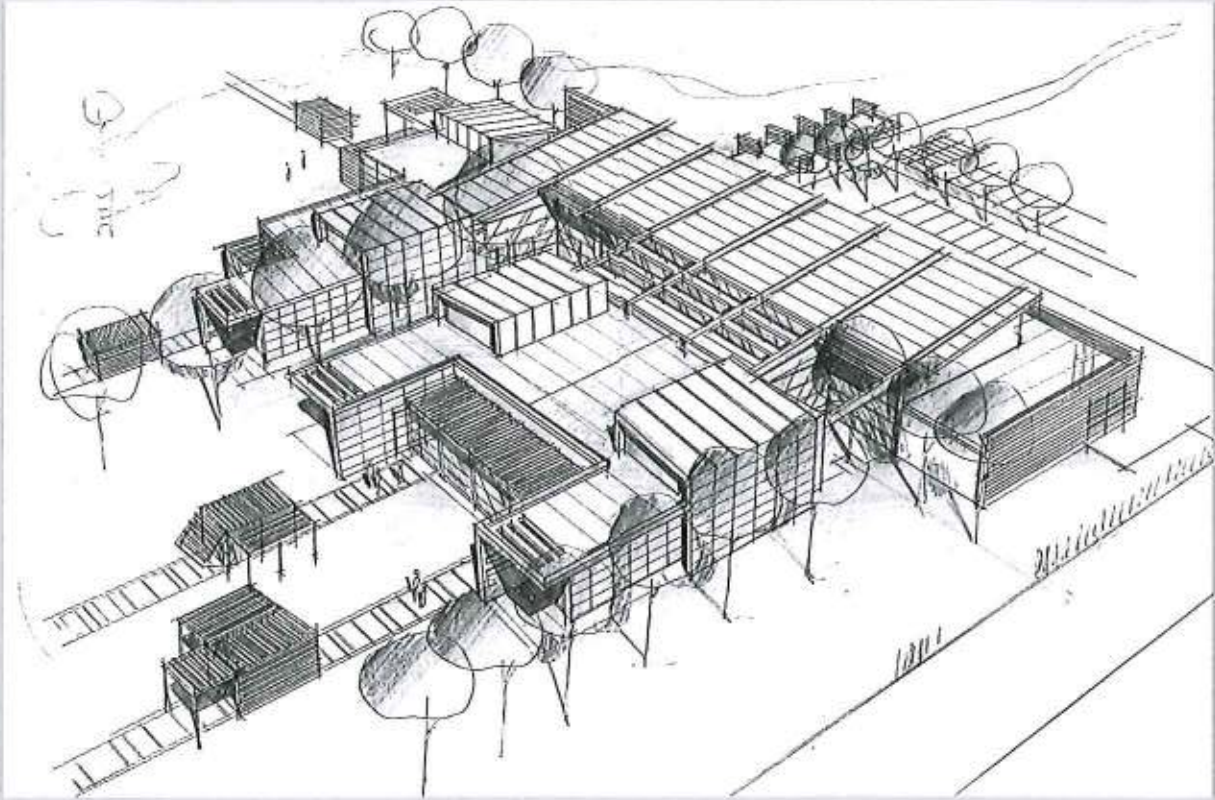
"Our goal is to build an amiable school, where children, teachers and families feel at home. Such a school requires careful thinking and planning concerning procedures, motivations and interests. It must embody ways of getting along together, of intensifying relationships among the three central protagonists, of assuring complete attention to the problems of education, and of activating participation and research."
—Loris Malaguzzi, *The Hundred Languages of Children: The Reggio Approach – Advanced Reflections*

Multiple Relationships, Dialogue and Exchange About Space and Identity Accompany the Birth and Life of an Infant-Toddler Center

The intensive dialogue between pedagogy and architecture has oriented the thinking and design of space for young children in the educational landscape of the Reggio Emilia municipal infant-toddler centers and preschools. This dialogue has involved teachers, *pedagogisti*, designers and architects, and has contributed to a culture respectful of the rights of children by enriching the identity of their spaces. This has taken place through the consideration of learning through relationship and participation as a central aspect of education.

"An environment of daily life continually activated and modified by explorations and research by all the protagonists – children, teachers and parents – marked by traces of events, social and personal stories, becomes an empathic place, a place of learning, and suggestive of actions and change." —Paola Cavazzoni, "Pedagogy and Architecture Encounters," University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, April 2007

continued on next page



The intensive dialogue between pedagogy and architecture has oriented the thinking and design of space for young children in the educational landscape of the Reggio Emilia municipal infant-toddler centers and preschools. This dialogue has involved teachers, *pedagogisti*, designers and architects, and has contributed to a culture respectful of the rights of children by enriching the identity of their spaces.

—Lella Gandini

A key aspect in the development of the dialogue between pedagogy and architecture is the relationship between the Reggio municipal government and the architectural community through their active participation and work throughout the city. This relationship is a strong factor in the development of construction and design for sites devoted to the education of young children birth to six years of age in Reggio Emilia. The municipal administration has chosen to strongly address the dilemma created by increasing requests of families for places for their children in infant-toddler centers and preschools, the number of places available and the long waiting lists for these places in a city where there is an increasing birth rate, which is unusual for Italy, and also a large influx of immigrant families, which is now quite common throughout Italy.

The architectural design of the Reggio municipal preschools and infant-toddler centers shows the deliberate effort to create places that guarantee the well being of children and teachers as they construct learning together and welcome families that are considered active participants. Loris Malaguzzi characterized these places as "amiable spaces," and in the 1970s and 1980s, new buildings began to grace various neighborhoods of Reggio Emilia and became reference points for the community as sites of various meetings of families and citizens.

The premises for the architectural characteristics and descriptive qualities for these buildings were elaborated collectively through time by the pedagogical team, teachers and *atelieristi* together and in 1998, were published by Reggio Children and Domus Academy in the book, *Children, Spaces, Relations: Metaproject for an Environment for Young Children*. The

book analyzes a series of descriptions and terms (key words and metaphors) that are all connected and have been developed by architects and teachers working together to examine critically the experience in the schools of Reggio Emilia, in order to formulate some general criteria and situations that indicate the desirable characteristics and qualities of an environment for young children. These ideas are based on the fundamental principles of pursuing relationship and constructing educational experiences through observing and listening.

The publication of this book was an accomplishment that formalized a long-standing collaboration between the thoughtful pedagogical and aesthetic choices developed through many years in the experience of municipal preschools and infant-toddler centers in Reggio Emilia. This newly formulated and now public perspective, along with the increasing participation of others in the private and public sector in the city of Reggio Emilia (including efforts to create new enterprises), has determined the development of various projects and activities in the city that are visible in public spaces.

The relationship of the city with the schools for young children has been enriched by several gifts given, and others invited and received for architectural projects, including the restoration of the International Center Loris Malaguzzi, an admirable architectural feat. One case in point is the gift by the Maramotti Foundation in 2005 for the construction of an infant-toddler center through an agreement with the Municipality of Reggio Emilia and the *Istituzione Scuole e Nidi dell'Infanzia*, and with the organization and support of Reggio Children. This agreement was made with the aim of enlarging the municipal infant-toddler center network through a

Giulia Maramotti Fontanesi was born in Reggio Emilia on October 12, 1888. She learned the art of dressmaking from her mother and worked as a dressmaker until she was married. Giulia moved to Switzerland with her husband, who taught Italian there. In Switzerland, she began to develop a method to make dressmaker's patterns and published a textbook on this topic. In 1925, Giulia came back to Reggio Emilia, where she established a dressmaking school. She improved her method, which was characterized by its great simplicity. Her main objective was to teach those who lacked educational qualifications how to cut and sew women's clothing. Moreover, she organized a school that offered more professional courses for aspiring dressmakers. This later activity developed and Giulia opened new schools in Parma, Modena, Rome and Alto Adige. Over more than forty years in the "Maramotti Dressmaking School," many young women learned a profession and in the postwar period, most of them found a job in the new clothing and knitwear industries in Reggio Emilia, Correggio and Carpi. Giulia Maramotti died in Reggio Emilia on April 12, 1973 at the age of 85.



collaborative relationship, which could favor workers both in their professional activity and in the care of their young children. This synergy between the public and private sectors seemed to answer the various needs of a city with an increasing birthrate.

The gift from the Maramotti Foundation was made in honor of Giulia Maramotti, who is an exemplary figure in the history of professional work of dedication and achievement as well as in the history of education in the art and craft of designing and making women's clothes. Her work in developing and teaching dressmaking methods was the origin of the design brand Max Mara.

In 2004, the Maramotti Foundation, in collaboration with Reggio Children and with the patronage of the Order of the Architects of Reggio Emilia, announced a contest for the realization of a new infant-toddler center named after Giulia Maramotti. The competition called "*un nido a penello*" (loosely translated as "a perfectly fitting *nido*") was open to architects and engineers under the age of 35. Its main objective was to offer young professionals in the Emilia Romagna region the possibility to project an educational space for children inspired by high-quality pedagogical and

architectural criteria and values. The winner was chosen according to the criteria established in the announcement of the competition, which invited these professionals to consider both the functionality of the structure and the formal quality of the building itself.

Paola Cavazzoni, the *pedagogista* who followed and supported the architectural activities related to the Maramotti Infant-Toddler Center, elaborated on the process of the competition:

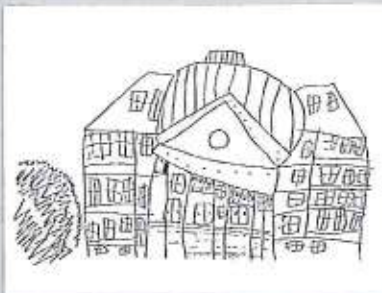
"Before the competition, we organized three meetings with representatives of the Maramotti Foundation and Reggio Children, including Giordana Rabbiti, who was then the President of Reggio Children. I introduced the Maramotti Foundation representatives to the pedagogy and philosophy of our educational approach specifically related to environment and space, and we visited together infant-toddler centers and preschools. There were 26 projects submitted and presented for the design of this infant-toddler center. What was interesting was that none of the projects was banal; they all demonstrated a strong and respectful consideration of children. There were some that were a bit off the mark but most were designed in dialogue with our context and open to flexible change.

In the end, the project selected was the one prepared by the architects, Francesca Fava and Carlo Margini. Their project named "Paffi" demonstrated great attention to the experience of very young children. They designed a space open to the outdoors that included *ateliers* that were movable, and could be placed close to the building in the winter and further out toward the grounds in the summer. They can be moved according to the changes of the season. The selection was based on the coherence of ideas about space that are part of the values of Reggio Emilia. Their proposal was for a building that contained key concepts consistent with the "Metaproject for the Environment" – mobility, transparency and transformation – along with giving attention to the context, and the physical and cultural space.

We selected the project by Carlo Margini and Francesca Fava because it included careful attention to relationship, which is one of our basic values. We

also found their care about including and considering the continuity between interior and exterior space to be a positive aspect of their proposal. In their plan, there was a flower garden where colors and aromas are specified and made visible, so that they can be offered to the children and adults within the educational community. A vegetable garden to be planted with parents was also included in their design.

We organized an exhibition with all the projects featuring the winners and their plan. After the exhibition, the group that had reviewed the projects was brought together to follow the construction of the infant-toddler center. I was a part of this group along with architect Tullio Zini, who has designed several buildings within the municipal infant-toddler center and preschool system and in collaboration with Reggio Children, including the restoration of the International Center Malaguzzi.



In the end, the project selected was the one prepared by the architects, Francesca Fava and Carlo Margini. Their project named "Paffi" demonstrated great attention to the experience of very young children. They designed a space open to the outdoors that included *ateliers* that were movable, and could be placed close to the building in the winter and further out toward the grounds in the summer. –Paola Cavazzoni



When the construction of the Maramotti Infant-Toddler Center was completed in 2007, we organized the opening of the building with the Maramotti Foundation that had given 1 million Euros for its construction as a gift to the city. The municipal administration provided the internal fixtures, furnishings and the access road for the infant-toddler center. A certain number of places are reserved for the children of employees of the Max Mara Company. Through a public competition, the Panta Rei Social Cooperative was charged with managing the Maramotti Infant-Toddler Center, which welcomes 78 children from the age of 10 months to 36 months."

"This infant-toddler center is the result of the collaboration of a number of institutions. It also the result of a competition offered to local architects younger than 35 years, which was won by a team, Francesca Fava and Carlo Margini of Studio Lapis, who prepared a courageous and visionary project. It is dedicated to my grandmother, Giulia Maramotti, who dedicated her life to work and to teaching women the professional art of making clothing and while doing so, she engaged in transmitting to them the value of the personal dignity of work. This value of continuous learning in any phase of life can be a model for all of us." – Luigi Maramotti, President of the Maramotti Foundation, at the inauguration of the Giulia Maramotti Infant-Toddler Center, February 7, 2008

The Panta Rei Social Cooperative was established on July 12, 1999 and became part of the early childhood sector in Reggio Emilia on September 1, 1999 through the opening of the Choreia Infant-Toddler Center and Preschool, which was managed by Panta Rei. The eight founders of the cooperative, the teachers and the *atelierista* all attended courses within the project N.O.W. (New Opportunities for Women), which is sponsored by the European Union, promoted by the Municipality of Reggio Emilia and managed by Reggio Children. The Choreia Infant-Toddler Center and Preschool was an innovative project with the participation of three different subjects: the Municipality of Reggio Emilia, Reggio Children and the Panta Rei Cooperative itself. The innovative aspect lies in the fact that Reggio Children coordinates and supervises the activities of Panta Rei. Since September 2001, Panta Rei together with the Totem Cooperative, has managed the Otello Sarzi Infant-Toddler Center. Since 2003, Panta Rei has managed the Faber Infant-Toddler Center and Preschool, at first together with Totem and since September 2006, on its own. Since January 2007, Panta Rei has managed the Giulia Maramotti Infant-Toddler Center through a convention with the *Istituzione Scuole e Nidi dell'Infanzia*, and an agreement between the Maramotti Foundation and the Municipality of Reggio Emilia.

Interview with Paola Cavazzoni and Carlo Margini
September 2009

LELLA: *I found it extraordinary that the ateliers at the Maramotti Infant-Toddler Center are movable. Was this a request from the educators or a part of your original design?*

CARLO: It was a thought that Francesca and I had. In fact, this infant-toddler center is very much a part of Francesca and me, of our thinking and planning together. It was a mission and a true satisfaction to build it. It is important for the two of us to continue to live this place for children by visiting it as often as possible. It is a pleasure for us to continue to visit it. I always find a good reason to come and explore a little when I am in Reggio for work. In a sense, I feel that this *nido* is still being born. Every time I come and see it, my awareness is that this place is increasingly part of our research as architects.

LELLA: *While listening and observing the teachers for a short time today, it was interesting for me to see how they live this space as something new and special that has to be handled with special care in a very delicate way.*

CARLO: A thoughtful observation...

PAOLA: The teachers are all very young and find that it is an extraordinary adventure to be in this infant-toddler center.

LELLA: *I heard the teachers ask themselves, "If we add this or that to the space, how would the space change?" It is clear that this is a very fresh experience for them.*

CARLO: In effect, the basic premise is the idea of continuous change. It was one of the cardinal points of our project: to create a space that is in continuous transformation with parts that are movable. Our thought was and still is that transformation should be possible through the daily use and life in the space. As you observed, we are still experimenting.

LELLA: *Are you planning to make other additions?*

CARLO: The conceptual part of the project evolves in ways coming from teachers and children who are active together within the space. It is important for ideas to have possibilities to change through time and that is why we included the movable modules, the *ateliers*. They provide possibilities for change. However, we are not planning to add to the architectural structure.

LELLA: *Did you have a chance to observe the children's many types of constructions and how the teachers are documenting their processes? They are beautiful and complex, and the children seem to work together on them intensely.*

CARLO: The children seem to be influenced by the structure of the building. It is so interesting to see how the space is being used by the children. For example, to see what can happen in relation to the large glass windows is very affirming.

LELLA: The materials that the teachers offer establish a relationship with the space that surrounds the children.

CARLO: The way in which the children use the space is important to us. It is true that we had thought about the many possibilities but to see them in action is so beautiful.

LELLA: *Paola, how did the development of the various constructions begin? Was this a result of conversations among teachers? Or did they evolve spontaneously from the children within a newly-constructed place?*

PAOLA: The teachers imagined the choice of materials that were appropriate for construction and a request was made to the parents to bring a variety of construction materials to the *nido*.

LELLA: *So this was a cultivated choice.*

PAOLA: The importance that the adult gives to materials is perceived by the children and it is evident that the children use the language of these materials. It is an explicit invitation to them.

LELLA: *Certainly the children's interest in construction is not a coincidence. They know how new and amazing the building is. There are photographs in the center's documentation that show children pointing from a field in the distance to the building and its structure, which may seem to them to be a construction with blocks or a toy.*

CARLO: The structure of the building is like a toy...

LELLA: *Do you have other plans to design places for children?*

CARLO: Yes, we are working on a combination of an infant-toddler center and preschool.



LELLA: *Is the Maramotti Infant-Toddler Center a source of inspiration for other projects?*

PAOLA: What has been done there serves as a reference with regard to our values. It is not that we intend to transfer an architectural project from one place to another. It is a question of values that become part of every project.





Each detail of our project is lived in the *nido* in several modalities. We think that this is the result of architecture that is centered on listening...listening to the place, and to the ones who have lived in children's places currently and in the past. Listening that way sustains our relationship with the *pedagogisti*, the teachers and the children. —Carlo Margini & Francesca Fava

*Interview with Carlo Margini and Francesca Fava
December 2009*

LELLA: *Carlo, you said that this project is so much part of the two of you that you feel the need to return often to see the nido. Which uses of space or transformations that children and teachers together do or have done surprised the two of you most?*

CARLO & FRANCESCA: The space interpreted by the children with their color and warmth renders the place changeable and in continuous transformation. For us to always find during our numerous visits new interpretations is truly satisfying and I think this is one of the most important reasons why Francesca and I are architects. Each detail of our project is lived in the *nido* in several modalities. We think that this is the result of architecture that is centered on listening... listening to the place, and to the ones who have lived in children's places currently and in the past. Listening that way sustains our relationship with the *pedagogisti*, the teachers and the children. In preparing the project and building the *nido*, perhaps we have played as children, becoming little ones. During a recent visit and because of the transparencies of the place, Carlo was exchanging smiles with a little girl. At first, she hid out of shyness, and then they began to play a game of hide and seek, feeling the emotion to be there and not to be there anymore, ending up with beautiful shared laughter. Space is an element that generates contacts along with evolutions and transformations.

LELLA: *As you visited various preschools and infant-toddler centers while preparing your project, which one inspired or suggested ideas to you?*

CARLO & FRANCESCA: Certainly the visit to the Nilde Iotti Infant-Toddler Center suggested to us pedagogical qualities. It was also illuminating to read the book, *Children, Spaces, Relations*, a source of stimulation for our ideas about space.

LELLA: *The connection between internal and external space that you planned within the Maramotti Infant-Toddler Center has great possibilities related to transparency, light, shadow, reflection and the encounter with plants and flowers that offers different colors and aromas. Do you think that the documentation of experiences in the nido during different seasons, which*

makes visible the growth of the children throughout their 3 years in the infant-toddler center, could be used by you and other architects to create new spaces for children's learning? Do you plan further collaborations with Paola Cavazzoni and the teachers of the municipal infant-toddler centers and preschools of Reggio Emilia?

CARLO & FRANCESCA: The documentation of what happens in the *nido* is of great help for us who create these projects. The research about this particular space is not finished but continues through structured monthly meetings of an interdisciplinary group that is called to evaluate and analyze the experiences and the use of the space and furnishings by the children. One example that you noted is the movable *atelier*, which we are still observing and studying in relation to the way children and teachers use them in the different seasons of the year. We note that the space of the *nido*, from the day of the opening, has acquired more and more individuality, and expresses the time lived through by its inhabitants on diverse occasions, both ordinary and extraordinary.

In sum, we have to say that we feel exalted to see the sensitivity of all the ones who inhabit the school because all seem to have understood and gathered so many aspects and sensations from the space of the Maramotti Infant-Toddler Center. For us, it is very touching to know that this place, born by our minds and our hearts, can communicate meaning and give meaning to the daily and intimate experiences of the ones who live this space.

