

CHILDREN BELONG TO A NEW GLOBAL DEMOCRATIC, TRANSCULTURAL AND ECOLOGICAL CITIZENSHIP

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Years of international dialogues referring to the political, cultural, aesthetical and social laboratory of Reggio Emilia

"We do not simply believe in building schools - we believe in the necessity to build a renewed global democratic citizenship – schools are just tools for this." Carla Rinaldi - chair of Foundation Reggio Children Centre Loris Malaguzzi in Stockholm 2007.



A Swedish voice

In this text, I wish to contribute to the dialogue about a strong inspiration of my own - the inspiration from the world-renowned preschools of the northern Italian city - Reggio Emilia. My voice is not a neutral voice as I am one of the founders of the Swedish Reggio Emilia Institute in Stockholm, founded in 1992. With my voice I want to expand the 'question of inspiration' into an international dialogue on the challenges of education of our time.

Today we are facing growing attacks violating decency and responsible civic action, inviting hate and despair in our everyday lives, as well as attacks on, the three global challenges of our time:

- the growing waves of nomadism¹ - to be human
- the crisis of the planet - facing tipping points to be sustainable
- the crisis of democracy - to be together in diversity and disagreements.

First I want to stress that responding to these challenges is not primarily a matter for universities and scientific projects. It is a matter for citizens acting with social values that have to be negotiated with or opposed by those with the most power. We need to connect these challenges with education as our main tool to a public and civic preparation and actions. As education is easily captured in traditions and already 'taken for granted', a new vitalisation could be to invite early childhood to new concepts of education, making preschools - as well as compulsory schools - possible democratic meeting points. The base for my assumptions and argument is on a historical analysis of the relation between education and community/society. In this we can create a practical theory in dialogue with science, art, teachers, families and politicians.

Reggio Emilia's gift to the world

More than ever the world needs a deepening of the definition of the liberal and secular idea and practice of democracy. In a growing number of countries this idea is under attack from extremism and populism, honouring the autocratic attitude of only one viewpoint. This is focusing on the pronominal 'I' and 'we', neglecting the 'you' ~ the respect for 'the other - my and our opponents ~ the other point of views'. It celebrates the idea of the few enlightened, similar to the ideal state of Plato, except he demanded 50 years of education for the rulers; the philosophers². All the

same it is possible to say that even if he did not support democratic societies he focused on what we, who believe in democracy, also see as a crucial issue ~ education. And this is the necessary addition to the brand and logo of the Reggio Emilia approach to education opposing the risk of making it a method and a tick box approach - Reggio Emilia's approach to education says democracy is/as education.

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This takes us to the questions of citizenship. This takes us into the questions of how a globalised democratic society shall survive and develop in relation to political, cultural, ethical, religious and economic diversities as well as to gender and different ways of defining the concept of family.

This takes us into the role of what kind of learning should and could be supported for all children and families in a diverse and democratic society.

This takes us into our image of children, childhood, learning, schools and families.

This takes us to our image of the role of preschools in a democratic society opened and in solidarity with childhood worldwide.

This challenges our preschools and schools to support a moveable, transcultural identity as something necessary in a world where strict definitions of culture, class, ethnicity and discourses are challenged by our need to develop strategies to live and develop together. It also stresses the idea of education as the fostering of citizens - and the concept of knowledge as something negotiable and expanding. Education should be looked upon as a meeting place where the skill to learn together is a basic goal that is needed in a democratic society and therefore one of the most important challenges for every teacher and to every didactical organisation. The primary goal of education should be to support the development and the redefining process of a society that supports diversity but still supports community. This is more necessary than ever.

This requires that we choose an image of democracy that does not support each group having their own school. This is only understandable when minorities are refusing schools only defined by the dominating majority.

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I think that this challenge is the most important contribution that Reggio Emilia can give in our time - a challenge to see schools as tools for developing and fostering a renewed global democratic citizenship. Not schools as a place for researching value neutral processes but researching as processes for constructing hope for the future as the post pragmatists like Rorty³ are still arguing.

This means that we in Sweden, as well as other friends in the rest of the world, have to accept the inspiration from Reggio Emilia as not merely a pedagogical, but firstly a political, social and cultural challenge. And therefore I feel good seeing that the dialogue with Reggio Emilia has created almost a modern social global movement. Not without risks - but with huge possibilities.

Reggio Emilia's approach to education is inspiring

What happens with ideas and tellings of experiences when they travel from one context to another? What happens with the idea and what happens with the receiving context? In a time defined as *globalised*, it is reasonable that these questions could be useful to avoid simply a cargo⁴ of methods or a construction of a cult, by accepting that this is a risk in all processes of inspiration.

To be inspired by Reggio Emilia initially, in my opinion, is to invite the complex and contradicting reality that surrounds every decision of action and thinking in general.

This means to accept that risks and possibilities often exist together - interwoven and always in need of being interpreted with multiple strategies. To act and to think is not passive or innocent; it is always related to ethical or innocent choices and responsibilities - relating to your chosen points of reference. Risk and possibilities - you always have to find a balance - and make a choice. In my case the reference point is Reggio Emilia and the encountering part is the educational context of Sweden. Being a friend amongst friends in an international network, I often have the possibility to visit and work in other countries. When meeting in other countries, I can see that the importance of focusing on the relationship between education and democracy is more understood in countries with poverty and unequal distribution of wealth than in my country where our fairly equally distributed social and educational welfare services are easily taken for granted. Perhaps this is one of the most important questions to bring into focus when discussing Reggio Emilia in an international context - the question of so many childhoods lacking schools or with only poor schools. To focus on the rights of *all* children is necessary to build a decent global village - not a perfect but a good - enough community. This is to 'flip' the African saying: 'It takes children to raise a village'.

This is what networking is about - sharing values but also acting on them in different contexts. Certainly 'value' is a slippery word and therefore we need to resist finding final answers. We need a community of learning where we are not only guided by, but also critically questioning, our own guiding values. This challenges us to identify new questions and provisory answers, accepting contradictions, but to still go on acting. These are networks that invite us to believe in dialogue with the other - not exclusion of the other.

This is a network that relies on dialogue as the winner over autocracy and dictatorship. This is a belief in democracy as firstly a matter of being dependent on my opponent. And this is a base for a belief that schools can become micro political places to make a difference contributing to the health of a democratic community.



This is a normative position that of course can and must be examined in practice and through critique. But this is still standing up for the modern thought of mutual or common sense and of hope. This attitude is often seen as problematic in the postmodern critiques of big tellings. This is a fruitful and healthy examination of science and dominating discourses. But this critical position has to resist the possibility and risk of only creating irony, relativism or even nihilism that risk to encourage populism making all news '*fake news*'. Therefore, this critique opens for an ethical choice of references⁵. It calls for reconstruction - if not of big tellings - but on an ongoing acting for small tellings of meaning in small communities - as preschools and schools.

So what are the challenges for the Swedish ECE contexts - what is the image of what should motivate the existence of schools for all Children in Sweden - what are schools' tools for?

The history of the Swedish encounter with Reggio Emilia

In different encounters with colleagues internationally, I have been asked to write about the Swedish relationship to Reggio Emilia.

The Swedish encounter with Reggio Emilia could be a story made in many ways. The most obvious is to refer to the meeting between my colleague Anna Barsotti with Reggio Emilia in the late '70s. This led to the first presentation of the exhibition "*The hundred languages of children*" at the Museum of Modern Art in Stockholm as early as in 1981. The exhibition returned to Sweden in 1986 and now again in a new iteration in 2017.

Together with colleagues within the Swedish early childhood education field we, in the late 80s, created a group for studying what we could understand of the Swedish challenges in education, by looking more closely at the experience of Reggio Emilia. This group

named AREA started to collaborate with Reggio Emilia and with Loris Malaguzzi in 1989. Later some of us founded the Reggio Emilia Institute.

In Reggio Emilia, we met not just a celebration of beautiful principles and declarations of children, we also met a local society experiencing the idea of preschools as a democratic force that inspires the development of the identity of a city. It was an idea that inspired not only teachers but also local political thinking and acting, as well as empowering a new citizenship by a developed participation of families in the preschool's everyday life. Here we could see and touch a 'practice' that showed that democracy is not fulfilled just by the right to vote. It demands that the most important role for a school is to support the possibility to formulate and respect your own viewpoints. But also to put your viewpoints into negotiations with your peers so you can learn together and also learn strategies for negotiations that turn conflicts into energy. Our analyses of the Swedish ECE system gave us the understanding that it is not enough to just have a national policy and legislation defining accessibility, curriculum, standards and a supporting tax-based, well financed system making it affordable for families.

Loris Malaguzzi, when opening our Institute in 1992, challenged us to involve not only educators but all local participants - politicians, administrators, educators, teachers and parents - in the process of defining, building and organising the development of a not only legal, but also legitimate ECE system. We understood a need both of a top-down and bottom-up strategy. We felt that we lacked the latter. We needed to engage many in a revitalisation of the pragmatic inspiration Swedish teachers had gained from the Deweyian pragmatic thinking since the '30s.

This thinking is that in a democratic society with big differences in culture, economy, religions and political thinking, we need a school where we can experience how to learn together and still be different; a school built on diversity and participation as democratic values that each generation has to discover and revitalise.

In the political ambition to expand quickly, the quality of the everyday activities for the children in Swedish ECE centres was not articulated either in politics or in the society as a whole. The expansion also meant that the staff consisted of few experienced teachers and many of those employed lacked necessary education. This opened the risk that ECE should be defined firstly as a replacement for the family as the mothers and fathers were off to work. Seen in this way, the matter of schools was discussed mostly as a 'labour market issue' or as a 'family support issue' and of course also as a gender issue.

The arguments for why children, in a democratic society, should meet with other children in institutions complementing families, were weak.

This idea - that schools should be equal for all children - was an important part of the post-World War 2 discussion in Sweden on the topic of what responsibility, education, childcare and family upbringing had in the breakdown of a civilised and democratic society opening the space for the belief in authoritarian political philosophies.

A vast majority of the Swedish parliament then reformed the Swedish school system inspired by pragmatism and John Dewey's thinking. The first new curriculum in 1962 aiming for a school system for all children from 7 - 16 years was often referred to as '*A school for all children*'. This ideological base has successively been weakened – or worse – never been a broadly understood topic for a systematically local approach. Luckily it still lives in many individual teachers and some politicians' ambitions.

This approach to learning and schools seems less obvious in the internationally dominating discourses on education. In Sweden today, educational research in learning, is more often discussed as neutral in value issues or is turned into general methodological advice. In this aspect group learning will only be looked upon as a *method* instead of being seen as a basic aim for the learning process in a democracy.

This is what we - together with many colleagues over the world - saw as one of the main future challenges in education in Sweden.

What can we learn from Reggio Emilia?

What were our starting considerations in the encounter with Reggio Emilia? We shared our mutual reflections in a report called 'Child oriented management'. These reflections gave us some lenses to look at differences between Reggio Emilia and our Swedish context.

Firstly we were again reminded of the necessity to define educational challenges, not by interpretations of traditions and principles but by relating to the issues that surround modern childhoods and our understanding of these in Sweden and our time.

This made us aware of the need for an ongoing critical discussion on the dominating discourses within our organisations in ways of thinking and acting. This created a need for confronting our reflections not only with Reggio Emilia but with the international discussion about early childhood as a matter of dominating discourses. We confronted these with different theoretical positions. In this we were supported by the participation of and dialogue with Professor Gunilla Dahlberg at Stockholm University. Later she developed her critique on Early Childhood Education in the book - *Beyond Quality (Equality)* together with Professor Peter Moss and Professor Alan Pence (1999).



It soon became obvious for us that the political decisions had been influenced by an international trend

to criticise public services and financing social rights through taxes. This had opened for a development towards the neoliberal tendencies we have followed over the last decades all over the world.

Reggio Emilia pointed towards a reverse way of thinking and acting, while focusing on the qualities of life and citizenship of childhood and out of this discussion came the responsibility of a school for all children.

We could from this, start asking what type of organisation we need to build - what its costs would be and then to make priorities when resources are lacking or not yet legitimate. Another thing that became obvious was that organisational matters and educational stand points had to be kept together within the same political and didactical philosophy.

For me as I was working with management development in communities, this created a challenge. Reggio Emilia had 'thrown a glove down' to our local communities - how can we relate the identity of our city and our city name to a discussion of renewal of the rights and gifts of children and childhood?

In Reggio Emilia we found that all answers on organisational matters was given with reference to its importance on how it supported the quality of participation and exchange in the relational triangle - Child-Teacher-Family. In Sweden organisational matters such as opening hours, size of groups, as well as questions of age mixing or not, were mostly related to purely economical and organisational considerations separated from didactical issues.

We formulated a challenge - how can we encourage forums and strategies to develop the relationships between parents - teachers and between teachers and politicians and the surrounding society. What should and could we mean by participation?

In Sweden we often have a child-oriented view on the relationship between children and the surrounding society but our encounter with Reggio Emilia gave us questions of what image of children this was based on. We found that the reflections in Reggio Emilia on what should define the preschool, originated from questions of children's rights more than of their needs. The need was coming from our democratic society to bring children together as citizens.

In Reggio Emilia they used a metaphor that the preschool should be placed on a piazza with the walls torn down, to show the importance of giving society visibility to the children and vice versa. This is where they find their curriculum; democratic values in research of context.

This challenged us: how were we to bring the complex and provocative issues of society, into the reflections and learning processes of children? Our starting actions were a new type of projecting and using the 100 languages.

To construct a new podium – the Reggio Emilia Institute

The challenges we formulated also took us into a reflection on who is responsible for change and development in a society? Private or public? We decided to talk about civic responsibility for initiating concrete actions aiming for making it a *public* responsibility.

We had to confront the idea that organisational issues

are mainly a question of formal roles and appointments. We became aware that we had to take responsibility for our viewpoints and create arenas for discussions and for actions. In 1992 we opened the Reggio Emilia Institute as a cooperative non-profit Institute in Stockholm. This initiative was not an official initiative but was due to our analysis that there was a need to strengthen the ideological and pedagogical base for the development of the fast-expanding childcare system in Sweden - but also for the renewal of education in general.

Our answers to 'what to do' were not easy to formulate in the beginning and perhaps they have become more and more clear through the actions we started to project.

Progettazione is the concept used in Reggio Emilia, more as an attitude to learning, as a looking for - creating of - than of a project method guided by clear goals and steps. I once heard a colleague in Reggio Emilia say that we need a strong idea - an idea of humanity, of knowledge and of the role of a teacher - more as a torch than as a map.

Our strategy was to start walking 'on two legs' - firstly we tried to finance a collaborative project where we could work together with teachers and preschools that also had been inspired by Reggio Emilia. Together with the Institute of Education in Stockholm, we created a project - the Stockholm Project - to try to, by actions, find what was possible to develop with inspiration from Reggio Emilia in a Swedish ECE context. This effort has been described in many different ways but in English firstly in *Beyond Quality - postmodern perspectives on Early Childhood Education*, (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 1999).

The second leg was to create conferences, courses and to start the publishing of a magazine that today is financed by subscriptions for four issues a year plus one summarising edition in English per annum. All our efforts aimed to support the building of local and regional networks.

We wanted to become a support for networks and for cooperation between top-down strategies and bottom-up movements. But we had to have finance in order to be able to act. The question of economy is always problematic - what is commercial and what is having the resources to be able to act on an idea? The Reggio Emilia Institute has created a rather free position to act due to financing through our own activities. This makes us viable, but our aim is to support networks and cooperation that contradict a strictly economic position.

The Reggio Emilia Institute has become a hybrid of ideological and commercial efforts. This hybrid identity of the Reggio Emilia Institute is always accompanied by risk - and possibilities. This is always a matter of balance. Today we meet approximately 20,000 people every year and we could easily just become a consulting company with over more than 75 consultants all over the country. Many of them have been accepted as members and owners of the Reggio Emilia Institute.

The building of networks has become the DNA of our Institute; a practice-oriented Institute promoting new practices for local politicians, scientists, citizens, families and teachers as well as directors and other roles. The building of hundreds of different kinds of networks of teachers related to the Reggio Emilia Institute all over the country has supported a bottom-up movement which also has some influence on top-down strategies both on a national level and a community level.

Many communities have invited the Institute to participate in their in-service training as well as being hosts for national network meetings. Often local politicians participate in local network meetings making these new arenas for sharing and discussing, a necessity for creating new political and educational initiatives in the community.

In this way the meeting with Reggio Emilia has made many teachers aware of the necessity for them to also be involved in formulating and arguing for new local policies. It has also created a possibility for politicians to deepen their understanding of pedagogical everyday situations through the frequent use of pedagogical documentation as a tool for mutual reflections and multiple interpretations.

Through our work and the work of the networks all over the country, many references in the Swedish curriculum are made to the philosophy of Reggio Emilia. The Ministry of Education has edited a report concerning a retrospective on the last 30 years of policymaking in the area of Early Childhood Education. They especially stress the importance for the curriculum of the encounter with Reggio Emilia.

A conclusion could be that Reggio Emilia has helped us to develop a new podium for a new voice of childhood and democracy in Sweden - a voice inspired by the dialogue with, but not the voice of, Reggio Emilia. Still with all this said this is only one of many podiums being built in a market oriented society. Our cause is to revitalise the idea of 'a school for all children'.

The Reggio Emilia inspiration has had a strong impact on many places and societies/communities in Sweden but big challenges are still to be met to really support a new image of the child, childhood and a reconstructed democratic society.

In the construction of new challenges for the Reggio Emilia Institute we are better positioned today to be a strong voice in our own context at a time when our country as well as most of the world, focuses more and more on measurements and tests of very small children. This year we have celebrated a 25th anniversary of this journey, and now the Institute has to be renewed in a time with new challenges, to be re-formulated and re-constructed. It has made us renew our network identity by focusing on education and democracy as supporting 'A Sustainable Future'. We have a coordinating group from all over Sweden of 20 coordinators supporting six to seven regional and innumerable local networks.

We are also defining our current challenges by being a part of an international community, as we are part of, and also responsible for, the building of an international centre in the name of Loris Malaguzzi in Reggio Emilia. To formulate the local challenge today is more and more about being aware of all the relations and interdependencies that tie us together in a risky time for our globe.

Perhaps this is the largest challenge for Reggio Emilia-inspired people all over the globe – we have to listen to and support the experiences from Reggio Emilia as a call for international thinking and acting.

A school for a global democratic citizenship?

We have to take into consideration what Carla Rinaldi from Reggio Emilia said while ending the first

international network meeting outside Reggio Emilia in Stockholm 2007, in her position as chairperson of Reggio Children: "We do not simply believe in building schools - we believe in the necessity to build a renewed global democratic citizenship - schools are just tools for this". So what could that mean in Sweden?

A democratic education can never be practised as indoctrination aiming for consensus. It opposes this by supporting each child - each human being - in her right to be listened to, to be given the space for each unique way in relation to understanding of ourselves and our surrounding context. But it doesn't stop with the individual perspective. It values subjectivity.

Just like our colleagues in Reggio Emilia we, in our work in some preschools in Sweden, have been able to document young children's ability to cooperate. Carla Rinaldi writes in *Making learning visible* (2001) that very small children show us that they wish to have a voice. They already know how to listen - and wish to be listened to. Social ability does not have to be taught - young children are social species from birth.

This is the foundation of the image of humankind on which Reggio Emilia built their image of society and of the role of an empowering preschool - and hopefully also a postmodern school. This we can see in my sharing, along with other international voices in the beautiful telling in *The diary of Laura*, (2009).

This is the real value base for a democratic school built on listening, welcoming the other - the stranger - and the action of solidarity. This is a school that doesn't lecture and talk about democracy but practises these values.

In everyday life these values should be seen in how we organise the environment and how the children's time is organised. It is a preschool and school that offers children the possibility to play and work in small groups every day. In projects and other activities, differences and similarities between eyes, noses, trees, small birds and people, are observed and are a focus for discussions and thinking and acting. It is an ongoing inquiring of the concept of 'learning by doing' where you have to think to create a belief that makes it possible to act, but when you act it always creates doubt that makes it necessary to think again and vice versa. And perhaps not as in steps and sequences but probably in a messier way - a more rhizomatic⁶ way.

This gives us the motivation for a preschool as being a meeting place supporting these values -subjectivity, diversity, mutual interdependence and learning - so often stressed in Reggio Emilia.

Only with these values can you talk about a shared value base for a school in a democracy that aims to engage all social classes and cultures. A citizen's upbringing cannot be a simple matter for every family. This value base is not a biological need for children - it is a necessity for a democratic society or community.

Our motivation is built on an image of democracy where we, in spite of diversity, are mutually dependent and have to share some decisions. Today we see that other images of democracy are built on the right to stand outside the general solutions. This supports an acceptance of a society more built on individual rights than on duty to contribute. This promotes the creation of profiled schools based on similarity instead of schools as meeting places for all.

This attempt is understandable when minority groups experience that their voices are neglected by the dominating majority in a society. For instance, this has been the experience of the Sami and Finnish speaking people in Sweden. This exclusionary strategy seems to be extremely dangerous in our world after the 9/11 tragedy, as have the actions the dominating powers of the world have chosen since then.

Today the challenge of ‘the other’ is also to question the anthropocentric gaze on the planet. In 2003 Terry Tempest Williams, one of the American “nature writing” authors, made a speech for the graduates at the University of Utah; *“In the future brave women and men will formulate a ‘declaration of interdependence’ that will be read and respected beside the Declaration of Independence, as a proof of our evolution, our revolution of our power to grow and expand our knowledge. The open space of democracy will offer justice for all living - plants, animals, rocks and rivers, as well as for humans. Democracy encourages multiplicity and dislikes conformity. In the space of democracy every voice is heard and counted”*.

This gives us an expanded concept of democracy. This is to allow a world where we are a species amongst others, an expression of life amongst others, all connected in an eternal ecological process of becoming. A process of ongoing change - of learning in multiple networks. In a process where ants, just like us, have different ways of surviving and expressions of life, that all are needed and have rights in interdependency. This is the base for saying an ecological citizenship. More than ever we need to find strategies to create schools for finding ways to coexist. But this normative activity-oriented position has to be tested through experimentation and challenges from critical friends. It has to become a political and didactical shared project.

Education as/is democracy

Diversity is the impetus for all meaning making and learning. This makes democracy a very special epistemological culture that invites the challenging of established ideas rather than conforming to those that are already known. This is a culture of citizens as learners who change their minds. Cultures are often designed according to similarities that conform to our way of thinking and our way of living. This results in education being an issue of transmission. Here, the child, the new member, is not welcomed with his or her own curiosity - the child who is always asking ‘why?’ In a culture of similarity, the revolutionary question ‘why?’ must be controlled.

A democratic society always invites this question ‘why?’ because its citizens respect other cultures (multiculturalism) and are open to dialogue between cultures (interculturalism) and learning from other cultures (transculturalism). This is the challenge for us, as democrats (those who believe in democracy) — whether we are Republicans or Democrats, conservatives or liberals, Muslims, Christians, Pashtons, Pacific Islanders or everybody that is offering the vote to the citizens with different opinions ... or or or ...secularised Swedes to invite dialogue and organise spaces for that dialogue that changes us and our society into one that celebrates diversity as a tool for learning. A transcultural citizenship.

Dewey believed that in a society built on growing diversities in wealth, religion and race, it is necessary to

create a public school where people learn how to learn with people who are and think differently. Society’s differences create different lifestyles and different interests for gaining power. In this kind of society, you have to educate to support understanding, not only of the rights you are given in society but also of the duty you have to respect the same rights for the ‘others’ - your classmates, your neighbours, and those beyond your neighbourhood! This is why the school in a democracy has to be shared and for all. Education is not only an individual need but also the need of a democratic society.

The interesting thing about democracy is that the concept is the first human societal idea to confirm conflicts as contributing to a society based on our ‘agreement’ to include all people. A culture of democracy. A democratic citizenship.

Democracy gives us a very weak organisational idea of society, since it doesn’t necessarily promote the idea of staying together and thinking the same. But unity is a necessity, so this is a paradox. To be able to support diversity, we have to agree on some shared values. The problem is that even these agreements will be criticised in a democracy built on rights. Yet the question is about the values related to building a democracy:

- *The value of subjectivity*
- *The value of contrasts, variations, and diversity*
- *The value of mutual interdependence, negotiation, and participation*
- *The value of learning as the right to change your mind.*

A democratic society encourages and values knowledge as a matter of different points of view, complexity and multiple interpretations in confronting dialogue; a citizen always in learning - in change.

If the decision to attend public schools is compulsory, then it is not only a right but also a duty to participate. The school itself becomes a place where you meet others that you have not chosen. Therefore, you will find your citizenship-identity in a public place that you have a duty to attend. Therefore, we have to meet children not as private learners but as public learners as citizenship learners. This is the base for saying children belong to a citizenship.

This is a focus on children’s societal rights - as addressed in the United Nations convention for all children. Children’s rights as CITIZENS, begin before given the right of a public vote. This creates opportunities to think about and debate how educational organisations support societal ideals.

This also makes the teachers’ everyday decisions important, because they will affect every student’s public identity in a public space. When all children have the duty to attend school, all growing citizens will meet a teacher. This is why the teacher’s role is an essential professional role in a democracy; a profession as the ‘defenders of mutually agreed democratic laws’ – as are the roles of the judges, the free press and the independent publishers.

If all of society’s citizens are present in the school at some time, the outcome of political decisions about curriculum and what should be assessed makes the teacher a representative of democratic political intentions and compromises. This makes it so important to relate didactical issues, as a whole and on an everyday basis, to the quality of the society that the school supports. Is it a

society for individual competition, for division of labour according to societal needs, or is it a society for democratic citizenship where knowledge and learning are part of the rights and needs of a democratic citizen?

Our standpoint is that schools should be places to formulate your own opinion and construct meaning in confrontation with diverse perspectives. Differences represented both by peers as by the different theories introduced by the teacher that has been formulated outside those experiences that belong to the children and pupil's own world of experiences. Therefore, we with Reggio Emilia can argue, education as/is democracy.

Children belong to a new global democratic, transcultural and ecological citizenship

I will conclude this paper by discussing some problems connected to our inspiration from Reggio Emilia that we still have to face.

Firstly, I see that when we expand and reach more and more contexts we risk being captured and integrated into the dominating discourses. The diversity disappears - our mission of provoking, of our 'taking for granted' becomes superficial. Our challenge is becoming accepted but not only as just a new way of talking about children. The language changes but under the surface the same old image of children resists and survives. This challenges us to become clearer and more provocative.

This also has to make us aware that to get a big impact we need a strong idea to avoid it becoming superficial. To say that our inspiration is just to support the renewal of culture is to close our eyes to how different messages transform when traveling to new times and new contexts.

Another problem is that our Swedish society with long hierarchical traditions is looking for definite answers from above. The debate in our society relating to democracy is often focused on rights more than on sharing responsibility and on the necessity of mobilisation and participation.

This challenges us to be clearer about the risks and possibilities in closing the dialogue between top-down and bottom-up strategies for development and cultural reconstruction. Our idea is that only by dialogue can contradictions be discovered and problematised. This calls for meeting places for dissemination and confrontation with other concepts of thinking within education but also with other fields of society.

In this situation we also have to be aware that the Reggio Emilia inspiration can become a good marketing label – something to sell – and to purchase. Suddenly we end up reducing the efforts of Reggio Emilia to simply a matter of every day methods and ways of working with no connection to the political aims of citizenship that is the main reason for preschools in Reggio Emilia. This is a real challenge as we face growing tendencies towards competition and market thinking that demand labels and profiles. The branding of Reggio Emilia to become 'goods' to be sold on the market is obvious.

Often our work meets a wish for fast answers as the everyday practice is not a forum for formulation and critical reflections in the way we find in Reggio Emilia.

Our only way to face this is to create arenas for reflection using pedagogical documentation to develop a culture of multiple interpretations and close the gap between the concept of theory and practice.

Our position is to support open and not definite definitions built on our belief in deconstructive analysis - also of Reggio Emilia. We believe in deconstructive analysis as a strategy to avoid the risk of it developing into a method or a cargo⁷.

We wish to invite other perspectives in constructive and investigating dialogue and we wish to take part in international dialogue and resist defining ourselves as 'belonging' to our context.

Such a dialogue can challenge the understanding of Swedish culture and identity and transgress into a global orientation of the local - think global and act local. This can help us create expanding cultural constructions of what it is possible to become, as a preschool in Sweden - and in Reggio Emilia.

For us all, the challenge with our strong inspiration from Reggio Emilia is to turn our focus towards our own didactical and political context.

The question is: what is possible to agree on and what has to be contextualised? Most didactical concrete questions have to be contextualised even though 'value is a slippery thing' as postmodern critique often argues, we can agree on, be guided by and research for the same value areas in all countries.

The values of democracy we define as: subjectivity/singularity, diversity/alterity, mutual interdependence and learning. These standpoints can be looked upon as a matter of constructing cooperative temporary 'truths' knowing that they always have to be challenged by meeting practice.

To avoid a cargo or a methodological rigidity we have to develop an international culture of mutual sharing. We also need to use diversity in contexts and theoretical discourses as tools in the interpretation of what in our own different contexts, creates a risk for developing cargos of methods?

Aware of both risks and possibilities we always look for a balance. This is mainly the challenge for us - the inspired - not firstly the challenge for Reggio Emilia. They should go on relating to the world - only being aware of their risk to be captured or ending up with experiences that change their aims to contribute to a global democratic and perhaps trans-cultural citizenship.

Of course the crisis of modernity makes Europe and the U.S.A. into problematic voices in the global dialogue based on listening and the invitation to 'the other' as we carry a history of the problems in accepting 'the other'. This challenges us Europeans to create a new European identity built on multiplicity within and outside the continent.

This is the challenge for all the international networks surrounding Reggio Emilia - to look for supporting strategies all over the world to create theories and an everyday practice aiming towards 'a children's international'; an effort to support schools and preschools to fulfil the rights of all children to belong to this: a new global democratic, transcultural and ecological citizenship.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Nomadism, way of life of peoples who do not live continually in the same place but move cyclically or periodically. It is distinguished from migration, which is noncyclic and involves a total change of habitat. Nomadism does not imply unrestricted and undirected wandering; rather, it is based on temporary centres whose stability depends on the availability of food supply and the technology for exploiting it. The term nomad encompasses three general types: nomadic hunters and gatherers, pastoral nomads, and tinker or trader nomads. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/nomadism> retrieved 18.7.19
2. Philosopher king, idea according to which the best form of government is that in which philosophers rule. The ideal of a philosopher king was born in Plato's dialogue 'Republic' as part of the vision of a just city. This group of rulers included women... arguing that it is precisely the fact that philosophers are the last people who would want to rule that qualifies them to do so. Only those who do not wish for political power can be trusted with it. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/philosopher-king> retrieved 18.7.19
3. Richard McKay Rorty was an American philosopher. In place of traditional concerns about whether what one believes is well-grounded, Rorty, in *Philosophy and Social Hope* (1999), advises that it is better to focus on whether one has been imaginative enough to develop interesting alternatives to one's present beliefs. His assumption is that in a foundationless world, creative, secular humanism must replace the quest for an external authority (God, Nature, Method, and so forth) to provide hope for a better future. He characterises that future as being free from dogmatically authoritarian assertions about truth and goodness. <https://www.iep.utm.edu/rorty/> retrieved 18.7.19
4. Cargo, A term used by anthropologists to describe a phenomena observed on some South Sea Islands. During World War 2, islands were used as staging posts by U.S. forces. With the military machinery came wealth. When the troops left, the islanders began to build mock-ups of the planes etc. in the belief that by doing so the 'real' planes would return accompanied by more wealth or 'cargo' (or kago in the Pidgin English of Melanesia). The term 'cargo cult' is now often used to describe a belief, conscious or not, that imitating actions alone will produce desired outcomes and that an understanding of core principles is not necessary. <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199766567/obo-9780199766567-0108.xml> accessed 18.7.19
5. Every choice of references that you choose to refer to is an ethical choice as no theory or point of view is neutral as it is based on some basic ontological or epistemological assumptions.
6. Rhizome, "an image of knowledge [...] developed by the French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1999) as a way of transgressing notions such as universality, question and answer pattern, simple judgements, recognition and correct ideas. In a rhizome there is no hierarchy of root, trunk and branch. It is not a staircase, where you have to take

the first step before you move onto and reach the other, which is similar to the tree metaphor of knowledge that remains so prominent in education." (Dahlberg, G., Moss, P. and Pence, A. (2007), p.7)

YOU MIGHT BE INTERESTED:

www.reggioemilia.se/in-english/
www.reggioemilia.se/media/2237/modern-childhood-om-rei.pdf

www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=18&v=R1D6O1v1ls0

A film about two Swedish elementary schools inspired by the educational philosophy of the city of Reggio Emilia in northern Italy.

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