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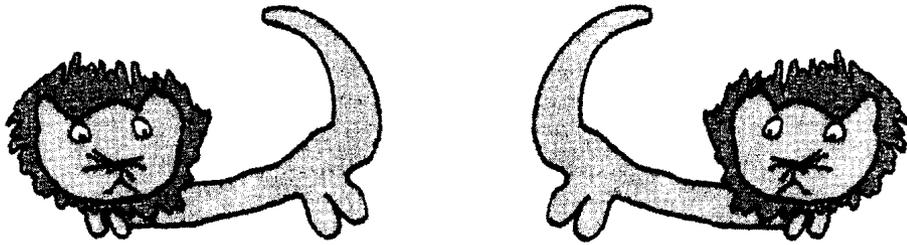


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11

Caregiving Through a Relationships Lens

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From the beginning of life, babies are eager to engage and interact with the people around them. Even at such a young age, they are capable of directing their attention and interest beyond the family toward any adults and children who seem friendly and exciting or loving. Although parents mediate their child's early interactions and relationships, infants actively reach out for relationships and want to manage their pace, content, and degree of closeness. In today's world of childcare and working parents, these babies have new opportunities to become part of social groups beyond their immediate families. They want to be participants in the community (Malaguzzi, 1993; Rinaldi, 2001).

THE DANCE OF RELATIONSHIPS

Thus, nonparental adults such as providers, teachers, and directors of early childhood programs become significant figures in children's lives—implicit or explicit partners in what we have called a “relationship dance” (Edwards & Raikes, 2002).

Sensitive, emotionally available parents create the framework for interaction with the infant by responding to the baby's cues, engaging the baby in mutual gazes, and imitating the baby. The baby, born with a primary ability to share emotions with other human beings and the need to join in and “learn a culture,” eagerly joins the relationship dance (Thoman, 1987). The child depends on the nurturance and concern of others in order to survive, so right from the start, relationships are crucial to existence. Attachment, which forms as a result of the first satisfying relationships, organizes further development by providing the child with the foundations and motivations to move forward and get to know, interact with, and trust meaningful people. The intimate family circle soon widens to include peer friends and teachers, thereby extending the dance to include new relationships.

Close relationships, first within and then reaching beyond the family, are believed to be critical to healthy intellectual, emotional, social, and physical development in childhood and adolescence as well. These conclusions have been documented by diverse fields of science, ranging from cognitive science to communication studies and social and personality psychology. They also include many studies showing how relationship dysfunction is linked to child abuse and neglect, aggression, criminality, and other problems involving the lack of significant human connections (Shonkoff & Meisels, 2000). More positively, in recent years developmental scientists have also explored the facets of relationships that contribute to security and trust, promote skill development and understanding, nurture healthy physical growth, infuse developing self-understanding and self-confidence, enable self-control and emotion regulation, and strengthen emotional connections with others that contribute to prosocial motivation (Dunn, 1993; Fogel, 1993; Thompson, 1998).

In extending the dance of primary relationships to new relationships, a childcare teacher can play a primary role. The teacher makes the space ready—creating a beautiful place that causes everyone to feel like dancing (Edwards & Raikes, 2002). For a new

baby who is just entering, the teacher must take the initiative to become attuned and get into rhythm with the baby by following his lead. Because the newcomer enters the program “in the arms” of parents, the teacher also enfolds parents into this process.

Gradually, as the dance between them becomes smooth and familiar, the teacher encourages the baby to try out more complex steps and learn how to dance to new compositions, beats, and tempos. The dance partnership can also widen as both infant and adult try out new partners, and as new peers or teachers are added to their group. As the baby alternates dancing sometimes with one or two partners, sometimes with many, the dance itself becomes a story about who the child has been and who the child is becoming, a reciprocal self created through close relationships.

This chapter describes the kinds of benefits these widening relationships can provide for very young children and outlines some specific steps that teachers in Reggio Emilia have taken to ensure the best, most “amiable” environments.

THE PRIMARY COMPONENTS OF RELATIONSHIPS

Given children’s requirements for human support, teachers and caregivers need a basic vocabulary for talking about children’s emotional health and well-being. Children have a variety of needs and desires that their cultures must respond to in appropriate ways to build satisfying relationships. According to Josselson (1996), there are eight such needs whose satisfaction contributes to fostering relatedness. These are holding (i.e. the need to be held), attachment, recognition and validation, mutuality and companionship, passionate experience, identification, embeddedness, and opportunities to give care and help other people. As each way of building relatedness emerges within the life course, it is at first concrete and elemental, but then becomes more symbolic and complex.

We will describe each need (summarizing Josselson’s descriptions), suggest how satisfaction of this need relates to positive outcomes for the child’s development, and finally describe how the infant-toddler environment (physical and human) can satisfy this need in an appropriate way.

Certainly, we would not claim there to be only one appropriate solution. Just as there are many styles of dancing, so throughout the world cultural communities embed their children in close, rhythmic relationships with caring people in many ways. The language and customs may vary, but their essence is similar and the primary needs the same (Whiting & Edwards, 1988). It is only necessary for the caregivers and cultural community to “hear” the child and “speak” back.

Holding

Holding is the most primary need but is not easy to describe. It involves our earliest interpersonal experience of being encircled and contained safely by protective, powerful arms. Clinical psychologist Erik Erikson (1985) called the resultant sense of safety and predictability “basic trust,” and David Winnicott (1965) described the

“good enough” mother who provides an adequate “holding environment.” In the absence of such basic caregiving, exemplified by feeding, carrying, calming, and protecting from too intense stimuli, babies are overwhelmed by fear and anxiety. The developmental outcomes of adequate holding are sense of safety, confidence, optimism, and a general expectation of support. Children can open up to the world when they know that someone will be “there” when needed—not smothering them, but also not letting them flail around and become exhausted and desperate. Thus, the caregiving environment must provide safety, protection, nourishment, and comfort.

Well-being, or “being at ease,” is promoted in Reggio Emilia through beautiful, orderly, harmonious, “amiable” spaces (Gandini with Bondavalli, 2001; Rinaldi, 2001), as well as through adult readiness to hold and touch children and use endearing terms to soften moments of interaction.

Attachment

Attachment is the second relational need and the one most substantiated through research. Attachment arises from the child’s need for proximity, security, comfort, and care. John Bowlby (1969) spoke of the child’s “bond” or “tie” to the mother and argued that attachment constitutes a primary biological system. Attachments provide the child with relief when distressed and with security to explore. When attachments are disrupted, children may enter the separation cycle of first, protest; then, sorrow and despair; and finally, indifference. The developmental outcomes of secure attachment are emotional regulation (the capacity to feel, express, and control emotions in culturally appropriate ways) and competence motivation (the desire to learn and move forward in development).

Educational supports for attachment in Reggio Emilia involve devoting attention to delicate beginnings, satisfying celebrations, and careful endings as children and families move through the centers; harmonious separations and reunions each day; and close communication and continuity of care between home and center over time. Skilled, attuned caregivers know how to establish rapport and empathy with children and families and bring children into the life of the center and the new circle of relationships there (Gandini with Bondavalli, 2001; Edwards & Raikes, 2002).

Recognition and Validation

When the child looks into a special adult’s eyes and is looked at in return, this creates an emotional meaning between them (Trevarthen, 1995). Each receives the sense of being recognized, or “seen.” Eye-to-eye contact with babies is something natural and universal, but all the senses can play a part in the experience of being recognized and appreciated, as when babies are “heard,” “touched,” and “noticed.” Through such moments, the child begins to realize that he or she, and everyone else, is a “self,” with a subjective inner life. The developmental outcomes of adequate recognition are self-identity and the beginning of empathic understanding of others.

Educational supports for recognition and validation are a human and physical environment that makes visible each child and family. Instead of feeling impersonal and anonymous, the environment individualizes the experience of coming into the center. The children find their names, faces, personalities, connections, favorite things, and preferences reflected through the ways that teachers speak to them, display photographs about them, and organize routines and activities. Reggio Emilia has embodied the philosophy of “education as relationships” (Malaguzzi, 1993) through particular ways of communication and documentation (Gandini & Goldhaber, 2001). These welcome the child to social life in the group and mirror and interpret each child’s and family’s place in and contribution to that life. The process is well summed up by Carlina Rinaldi, who said, “You cannot have a school in which the child doesn’t feel right, in which the teacher doesn’t feel right, in which the family doesn’t feel right. It is essential to create a school and infant-toddler center in which all the subjects feel welcomed, a place of relationships” (2001, p. 53).

Mutuality and Companionship

Mutuality, being with others and joining in, is first seen in the infant’s joint attention (“looking together”) that then evolves into pointing and sharing. The psychologist Colwyn Trevarthen (1995) has written of the child’s desire to produce meaning through emotional joining, and the great pleasures the child feels when moving or communicating in synchrony and rhythm with others, thereby creating a “space of we.” The developmental outcomes of experiencing adequate mutuality are capacities for cooperation and companionship.

The educational supports for mutuality are easy to provide. Children need time and space for involved, ongoing peer relationships and rituals, such as are portrayed in *The Little Ones of Silent Movies* (Reggio Children, 1996), a story of make-believe with the children and fish at the Rodari infant-toddler center in Reggio Emilia. As children mature, they also develop mutuality by participating in group games and expressive activities involving singing, shouting, clapping, and hand motions. They eagerly join in with dancing, chanting, marching, and chasing. These ancient and joyful forms of play create heightened emotion through the use of synchrony, rhythm, and/or patterned turn-taking and alternation.

Passionate Experience

Passionate connections involve intense feelings and create a drive to be with another person, touch them, and overcome separation. Young children do feel passion—for parents and for peers. They then must learn to express their feelings in socially acceptable ways. It helps them to work through their feelings if they can play out scenarios that attract and fascinate them and talk through their thoughts and feelings. Symbolic and verbal behavior carry them beyond the real world into the realm of imagination and back again. To do this emotional “work,” children need spaces that invite complex pretend play, and sometimes enclosed places that provide a sense of

seclusion and privacy from the larger group, where imagination often flourishes best. The developmental outcomes of passionate feelings are capacities for intense and tender relationships, heightened imagination, and fantasy, and rich symbolism.

Educational supports include allowing and encouraging children to have intense friendships and attractions to particular “special friends.” At the Diana preschool in Reggio Emilia, the 5-year-olds set the table for lunch leaving aside a little table for two, where “sweethearts” could sit together (*Diana Hop*, Reggio Children, 1990, unpublished). The book, *Tenderness* (Reggio Children, 1995), tells the story of two 5-year-olds at the Villetta preschool. Daniele has known Laura since they were little; he feels that he “loves” her and wants to marry her when he grows up. She says he is her “bestest” friend (“it’s like my heart almost explodes”). The story presents some of their conversations about heaven, birth, the beginnings of the world, and the future.

Identification

Identification is a process that draws us to observe and imitate those whom we admire and want to be like. Through identification, the child takes the admired other into the self and participates in adult power and competence. Sigmund Freud (1969) was a great theorist of identification, but Albert Bandura (1971) and other social learning theorists have operationalized the concept and validated the theory. Identification provides the child with moral guidance and helps her make choices based on what she thinks the admired adult would do. The developmental outcomes of adequate identification are the establishment of conscience and faith in the goodness of adults.

Educational supports include caring adults who act as moral models and support ethical behavior and discussion in age-appropriate ways. The project narrative, *A Journey into the Rights of Children* (Reggio Children, 1995), portrays children’s own concepts of their rights in discussions at the Diana preschool in Reggio Emilia.

Embeddedness

Embeddedness has to do with being part of a social group—a community of place, kinship, values, or memories and shared experience. Children’s early experiences of group belonging have to do with group experiences that usually extend beyond the nuclear family. Belonging to a group provides the child with an important part of self-identity, especially in traditional or collectivist societies, but also in individualistic ones, even though people may be less aware of its influence. Rituals, literature, history, myths, and folktales are the cultural expression of embeddedness—as are such negative outcomes as exclusion and ethnocentrism. The cultural psychologist, Barbara Rogoff (1990), believes that “participation” and “apprenticeship in thinking” are the means by which children appropriate the cultural tools and skills of language, communication, and interaction. Children become embedded in a particular cultural community.

In Reggio Emilia, educational supports for group belonging are provided by documentation, project work, and group decision-making. These group activities create a sense of classroom community and bridge children to the wider world around the school. The project narrative, *Theater Curtain: The Ring of Transformations* (Reggio Children, 2002), portrays how children from the Diana Preschool designed and created a glorious new house curtain for the Ariosto Theater. The book, *Reggio Tutta: A Guide to the City by the Children Themselves* (Reggio Children, 2000), begins with a survey of the children in the municipal infant-toddler centers and preschools and presents their collective portrait of the city identity and their advice about visiting and living there. This unique “guidebook” demonstrates that even young children can have a strong sense of place and embeddedness. Other ways that children learn symbols of group life include folktales, drama, and puppetry. Puppetry is especially important in Reggio Emilia, and a professional puppeteer serves all of the schools. An old saying about children and storytelling goes, “Adults listen to stories with their heads, but children with their hearts.”

Giving Care

The philosopher, Nell Noddings (1984), has written about the ethics of care and responsiveness as organizers of experience. The roots of care and responsibility lie in the first, simple, socially valued behaviors seen in most toddlers, when they share and show, try to help with household work, try to help someone in distress, and imitate and seek others’ attention to prolong pleasure. Being helpful and kind allows the child to feel competent, powerful, and grown-up. Prosocial behavior moves the child from dependence to interdependence, and its developmental outcomes are dispositions toward kindness, helpfulness, responsibility, and leadership.

The educational supports for giving care are opportunities to help, give care, show kindness, and take the lead. The anthropologists, Beatrice and John Whiting, showed how nurturance and prosocial responsibility are fostered in a multitude of cultures where children share in the subsistence work and sibling care in large, multi-age households (Whiting & Edwards, 1988).

In Reggio Emilia centers, children become part of a community where they are inducted into the life and rituals by the oldest children, then gradually grow themselves to become the “big kids” teaching the little newcomers. Children participate in the ordinary routines of daily life, such as setting the table and preparing cots for naptime.

Even small children have occasions to give as well as receive care, as illustrated by Bondavalli’s story about Francesca, a girl aged 24 months, who helped another toddler, Mattia, settle in at the Peter Pan Infant-Toddler Center. When Mattia was distressed over being separated from his mother, Francesca watched closely and then came over to him and said, “Come on, Mattia, don’t cry! You will see, your mommy will come back.” Mattia accepted this and began to really like Francesca and to feel comfortable in the group (Gandini with Bondavalli, 2001).

CONCLUSIONS

Children need more from their childcare program than just the possibility of secure (secondary) attachment. They also need human relationships that provide safety, recognition, friendship, intensity, identification, belonging, and opportunities to be helpful and caring. Educators can look at the quality of their programs and services through a “relationship lens” so that practices support rather than undermine relationships. There are many ways to support and strengthen relations between each child and all of the others—peers and adults—at the center. Through acting on the insight that all children can form multiple connections and enter a group life, teachers can support them in moving out with skill and confidence.



12

The Relational Rights of Children in Our Care

Deborah Alexandra Doherty



When my colleagues and I first heard Carolyn Edwards' presentation at the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) about children's relational needs in infant and toddler care, we became excited about what it could say about our program. Our context in Canada is a laboratory school for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers in a small community college that had been on the path of dialogue with Reggio Emilia educators and their approach for five or six years. We were confident that we were working with children, parents, teachers, pedagogy, and environments from a relationships framework, but we wanted a new way to reevaluate our own values and re-enchant ourselves about children's processes of self-development.

As we began to document the eight relational needs in a presentation for each other, we reflected more deeply on our values and the pedagogy of relationships. The beauty and challenge of this schema had a dynamic effect and (thinking about ways that Reggio Emilia has inspired us) provoked us to look at relational *rights* of the child! In other words, we went from thinking about children's wants and needs to talking about what we *owe* to them and *should do* for them. I want to illustrate this by telling some of the stories the discussions led to in our school.

HOLDING

We first looked at the value of the relational need (right) of holding, and asked what we thought it meant. Holding is a simple value, yet elusive. We searched for its traces in our school. How did this value reveal itself in our interactions? How did our environment mirror this relational right? We nostalgically revisited our documentation to see how we had captured images of holding. Then we discussed the very specific ways we could make the relational right evident in our everyday relationships with the children, parents, pedagogy, environment, rhythms, and rituals of the day.

As a metaphor for holding, I chose the phrase, "embracing the essence," to symbolize to my colleagues how we try to carry out this value. Then I must tell you how surprised I was, when preparing a slide presentation for my colleagues, to discover virtually no photographs portraying teacher-child interactions during which a child was held in anyone's arms! I asked us to examine their hearts and minds and ask the difficult question, "Do we value embracing the children?"

After individual and collective reflection, we emphatically concluded that we do, but perhaps were not making it transparent to others. Did we take this value so much for granted that we did not think it needed recording? We asked ourselves, How did our documentation reflect our practice and what we were communicating to parents and children? Were we thereby giving the impression that our pedagogy was more important than the relationships? Were we working so hard to illustrate teacher efforts and the work of children that we were overlooking the importance of presenting the tenderness of relationships?



Many days we enjoyed the luxury of beak-to-nose encounters, when children and birds beheld each other through the window glass.

We next turned to our environment and asked about its holding qualities. We decided that in order to answer the question, we needed to turn it around and consider it from the children's point of view. How did the children embrace and (be)hold their environment? One example that became important for us involved the children's delight in the warm sunlight coming in the window. They would climb up on a radiator to bask in the sunshine, and then (good caregivers that we were) we would encourage them to keep their feet on the floor. Then one day, we stood back and listened to the silent dialogue between child and window. The question confronted us, "Really, why can't the children sit in the window?" We began to build a structure that would straddle over the radiator and offer a pleasing construction and safe haven for the children to regard the world outside. Our children began to observe the coming and goings of parents, other children, and vehicles.

About that time, the children had begun a relationship with a sea gull that opportunistically visited during their stroller walks. Our babies (and the gull) enjoyed snack during their walks, and sometimes cracker and muffin crumbs would be left behind. What did these trails mean in "relationship language"? Could they be a trail for the children to find their way back to school, a communication for the birds, or both?

It was as if a question was resonating from the environment: What would happen if we placed birdhouses in the window? Would the birds follow the crumbs back to school? Would the birds understand the communication? Putting out birdhouses, we indeed did find that the birds came to meet the children, just as the children had

met them on the walks. Many days we enjoyed the luxury of embracing the moments of beak-to-nose encounters, when children and birds beheld each other through the window glass.

We also asked ourselves whether we value tenderness and softening in the children's classroom. How did the environment caress the relationships that were beginning to form? Did the environment embrace, hold, nurture, and regard each child? Our previous experiences with the radiator and the birds allowed us to take the risk of not answering the question immediately. Instead, we attended to the dialogue between children and objects that may not have involved speaking out loud but nevertheless would communicate to us if we would listen. This hypothesis allowed us to trust ourselves, and the faces and responses of the children then told us that they felt we also trusted them and considered their knowledge and feelings to be important.

Finally, we again reflected on our documentation. How did it reflect our values about beholding the children in their environment? Again, we discovered that by concentrating so hard on illustrating the theories and investigations of children and teachers, we inadvertently were making the assumption that the basic relationships did not need to be captured. We were overlooking the importance of presenting the tenderness of relationships, whether person to person or baby to bird.

To make the relationships more visible, we found many things to do. We placed photographs (Polaroid pictures, 3 × 5 inch color reproductions, and 8 × 10 inch black-and-whites) in prominent places in the playroom. We also offered the families plastic bags at registration time to use over the summer to capture their child's summer interests, as a foundation for experiences and pedagogy next fall. Then, when fall came, we shared in the children's bags of treasures and invited our parents to display them on a wreath that dangles from a grapevine on our ceiling. (If you hang the wreath horizontally, its resemblance to a nest is evident.) We placed family albums in all of our rooms to embrace the families throughout the day. We also measured the height of each parent, child, and teacher, intertwined sets of ribbons of these three lengths in a circle, and placed these around each doorway to symbolize our ongoing support of each other. We put images of the children onto their blankets and transitional objects with elastic ribbons, so the children could have cozy moments throughout the day with objects conveying love and warmth. The photos also invited the children to offer these important moments to each other.

ATTACHMENT

The second relational right of attachment suggested the metaphor "to hold most closely and let go," a phrase that returns to the first right and builds a bridge to next steps. As teachers, we pondered how to build good relationships with the other sides of the parents-children-teachers triangle.

We examined the environment in light of the metaphor. How did the environment create a space for the children to feel secure enough to know that they could

venture forth connected to the ground but could also take flight? At the time, teachers altered the rooms each week to reflect themes such as a jungle, harvest celebration, or seawater aquarium. We looked at the traces the children left behind in their play (kind of like the crumbs for the birds) to try to find places where they especially liked to play or be together. We hung a large, blue parachute (from a nearby military base) from the ceiling in their cuddly area, and kept available children's blankets and objects of attachment like teddy bears and soft pillows. The parachute streaming down created a translucent space that drew a soft, dreaming energy into a billowy envelope where children offered each other warmth. The good feelings spread throughout the day, and often at nap time children would retrieve each other's blankets and tuck each other in to sleep.

Carla Rinaldi once spoke to the Canadian delegation about how "the other" defines us—how the teachers in Reggio Emilia could offer us a definition of ourselves and our country, and how we from another country could offer the teachers in Reggio insights about themselves and their culture. Thus, knowledge comes through contemplating contrasts, like light and shadow, up and down, and ultimately, like you and me. How could we help the children to experience the idea that through contrasts with things that are different from us, we can see how we are all the same? We made a risky hypothesis, "What if we introduced an overhead projector into the toddler room and shone the images throughout the room?"

One day, with little fanfare and a lot of faith, the overhead projector made the acquaintance of five of our most inquisitive and vivacious toddlers. The children placed their faces close to the lamp, squinted, and smiled. They placed one hand close to the warmth of the glass, jiggling their feet, and then placed their colder hand close to the warm one. Their toes beckoned them to bend down low so they could hear the fan whirring musically, and they pointed to the grate that allowed the air to circulate. They smiled their widest grins and went running off to bring a friend. The exploration continued, and they began to improvise. They brought their teddy bears and favorite toys to say hello to the overhead and to share in the warmth of the experience. Then they sat on the overhead together and noticed the big shadow that appeared on the blue parachute. They looked at each other, pointed at the shadow, and looked at each other again. Were they wondering what could make such a shadow? They hopped off the projector, maybe to tell this new friend (the projector) about the big shadow, and pointed to show the shadow on the big blue parachute. And in trying to introduce the shadow to the light, somehow the shadow disappeared. As teachers we could have solved this mystery for them, but we knew that holding close also means letting go. We supported the children for several hours, encouraging them to capture the light and the shadow meeting together. The source of their embrace eluded the toddlers until two little boys looked at their favorite toy on the glass of the overhead, smiled at each other, turned to look at the parachute, and discovered together the shape of the toy! The children's love affair with light and shadow persisted throughout their toddler and preschool years. The group helped create a large shadow screen, a light table in the studio, and ultimately a light and shadow *atelier* in our school, as measures of their attachment.

Next we looked at the process of acquaintanceship when children joined the program. We regarded every new relationship, with everyone and everything, as making a new acquaintance or friend. Welcoming each child, toy, ritual, and routine as a new friend illuminated the possibilities of attachment. We examined the rhythms of the day, identified the most important appointments to keep (meal and rest), and allowed the other moments to flow around them.

To safeguard the attachments that were forming, we organized ourselves into primary caregiving groups. From the beginning, children became part of a group composed of a teacher and some friends, and together they would move from infancy through preschool. They experienced appointments and experiences together, often separately from other groups. We looked at opportunities to smooth and reduce transitions during the appointments and experiences of the day. The Italian systems offer us the concept of *insertimento* for the settling in process of incorporating a new child (and family) into the group. To help the children feel attachment for their whole classroom, we placed their photographs on items for which they demonstrated affection, including blankets, cots, cubbies, water sippers, and daily journals.

RECOGNITION

The relational right of recognition inspired the metaphorical phrase "eye to eye, ear to ear, hand to hand, and mind to mind." Collectively we teachers strongly identified with this value and its emphasis on the individual child. We had observed other programs that treated the child only as part of a group and did not validate the image of each child. Remembering this together created feelings of isolation, a kind of ironic confirmation of the need for recognition and the value of the self-reflection path we were traveling.

We were inspired to see each other for our strengths, not our differences. Sharing insights and actively listening to one another, we experienced the same comforting sensations of recognition as the children do. But then we were reminded of how we view the children (Are they needy? Do they need us?), unsettling our image of ourselves as strong and venerable. Letting go of that self-image and co-creating curriculum with babies and toddlers was an adventure that shook our egos and minds but nurtured our hearts and souls.

Just as we needed to recognize the vulnerable side of ourselves, we also needed to recognize the capabilities of our children. We often underestimate the symbolic capacities of small children because we assume they are in a sensory-motor stage of development. Yet our infants and toddlers created both two- and three-dimensional representations. We introduced play dough in our infant and toddler rooms many years ago, and the children used the medium as a language of expression and means for communicating ideas to each other. They liked to tell stories as they manipulated the material, often speaking of an unrelated experience as their small hands almost absent-mindedly created characters and creatures to be shown and shared. One child at age 3 began to create a whole cast of dough and plasticine characters that he used



We recognize and reflect each child's ongoing presence by using photos, recorded texts, and panels.

to carry on "Claymation" shows for his friends that he would direct and record and ultimately post on a website.

How did we try to recognize and reflect each child's ongoing presence in the environment? In photos, recorded texts, and panels, we endeavored to ensure that we nurtured everyone's hopes and possibilities. We also used images to make it legible to even the youngest children. For instance, we labeled the children's juice sippers with black-and-white pictures, and placed them in a small refrigerator in the dramatic play area ("symbolic representation"), so they could identify and meet their own needs to drink. The children also could retrieve their friends' sippers by recognizing the image on the side, and then a pair might take their cups and retreat into a quiet area together.

MUTUALITY

I chose the metaphor, "and heart to heart," to signify the relational right of mutuality as a continuation of the "eye to eye" of recognition. Cooperation and companionship begin with seeing oneself reflected in the eyes of another, which extends into joint attention and sharing of objects and builds into heartfelt action together.

In illustration, we return to the parachute and projector, which offered the children many moments of heart-to-heart companionship. They would bring beloved objects to their old friend the overhead projector, who would shine them forth not only on the blue parachute but also on the floor and ceiling and even their own bodies. They would burst into delighted laughter at recognizing a shadowy Barney toy, silhouetted truck, or gray shape of a leaf resting on their tummies. They would choose items together and then make up jokes and little shows for each other, moving to more advanced levels of role-playing and pretending. One particular little boy who was going to be a ring bearer in a wedding liked to retrieve a pillow from underneath the parachute, turn on the overhead, and then perform the "wedding march shadow charade." He would peek around the folds of illuminated material and smile until his teacher and friends cried out, "The wedding!"

This area became a place where children could plan experiences together. We made overhead transparencies of each child's photography, so they could use and share symbolic representation of themselves while they were at school, and more importantly, when they were not! They also could communicate ideas through light-and-shadow puppet shows and charades. One day, a 16-mm film projector was the toddlers' object of play, with the parachute serving as the screen. As before, the children introduced the

The mutual friendship of two babies enjoying togetherness in the translucent space of a parachute, the resonances of their relationship becoming part of their every experience. These children will spend the next five years together and continue through elementary school together.



movie image to the floor, ceiling, and each others' tummies. It became an ongoing ritual of mutuality for these children to go with the teacher to get this film projector, walking down the long halls of the college to the audio/visual area, finding the projector, and bringing it back with movies to enjoy over and over again.

PASSION

The fifth relational right—passion—suggested the question, “Who (and what) do the children love?” “Percolation of joy” was the metaphor I chose to describe how they absorb love and contentment from those who care for them, and carry those feelings through their days and lives.

When reflecting on this, we recognized a conflict between our professional intentions of focusing on children’s development and outcomes versus our personal involvement in their daily passions, which gave us so much satisfaction and pleasure. We decided to regard the school as a place of little stories that have a right to be captured and embraced, and we shifted our focus from the obligatory to the passionate. We looked within our spaces for niches of joy.

Imagine 16 children (aged 3 to 30 months) playing in the classroom when a puppet, in a surprise visit, announced his arrival by tapping his nose on the window. Slowly, in waves, the children recognized the sound as an invitation from their beloved friend, Crazy Cow. They pointed to the window and ran toward it with friends, screaming, clapping, and laughing. The teachers provided a next step by asking, “Should we sing the Crazy Cow song?” The children nodded and danced, swirled, hopped, stamped, and sang at the top of their lungs until, at the song’s end, Crazy Cow blew kisses and waved goodbye. The children offered kisses and farewells in return, but then, lo and behold, a puppet friend of Crazy Cow made his entrance, and the joyous chorus began again. This continued through all six of Crazy Cow’s “friends.” The children anticipated and announced each arrival and departure, ascribed characteristics to each puppet, and later created mailboxes and birthday parties for the puppets.

We created slide, video, and panel documentaries. We made overhead transparencies of the characters, laminated stick-puppets, and audiotaped the songs. When preparing our first panel of Crazy Cow and Friends (with their songs below the characters’ photographs), we asked our toddlers their opinion of the panel. Its legibility was evident as they pointed to each photograph (beginning of course with the star, Crazy Cow) and serenaded each character’s song. When we asked them where to place the panel (“On the wall?”), they adamantly shook their heads. They refused all our suggestions, so we asked them to show us. They took the panel and carefully placed it on the floor in front of the window where Crazy Cow had appeared. Then they danced and sang right on top of the panel, revealing their emerging capacity (developmental milestone!) toward decoding abstract visual symbols that were connected to strong memories and characters they were “crazy” about.

IDEALIZATION AND IDENTIFICATION

This relational right suggested a metaphor of “concentric circles.” Gianni Rodari (1996), in *The Grammar of Fantasy*, wrote about how significant words affect the mind like a “stone thrown into a pond,” provoking an infinite series of expanding waves and chain reactions (p. 5). In a similar way, relational moments affect children in profound ways that flow out through their work and play. Eventually, the underlying patterns (abstract values about human relationships) are internalized by children as lasting ideals.

We asked ourselves, Do our interactions and environment reflect good values, character, love of learning, and respect for others? We decided to reexamine our *ateliers*, as we thought they might mirror our values most clearly. (We have *ateliers* for infant/toddler sensory experiences, music, two- and three-dimensional episodes, and light and shadows). One story in particular illustrates how a child made visible his idealized image of his teacher as “co-learner.”

Suzanne, a teacher, had invited Quinn to paint at the easel and asked him if he would paint a picture of her. He agreed and showed her just how he wanted her to



Self portrait: Quinn with teacher and toys.
Coloured drawing by Quinn Doherty-Prince

stand. When she praised his painting, he asked, "Well, how about you paint me now?" When she said she didn't feel confident about doing it, he reassured her, "That's all right. I think it will be just fine." When she finished, he told her, "Pretty good!"

Later, the portraits of Quinn and Suzanne were displayed side by side in the *atelier*, with supporting documentation. They revealed Quinn's and our values about reciprocity and shared control. Evidence of Quinn's internalized images was seen in his teacher, himself, and his world—a documentation called "Quinn with Teacher and Toys." Yet he would not have been drawn into producing that series of portraits without Suzanne having been ready to step out of her intended role and follow his idea, producing a pair of portraits that made visible the value of mutual respect and equality between adults and children.

EMBEDDEDNESS

Children are rooted by their self-understandings and relationships to others. They take in the culture(s) around them and weave their own autobiographical narrative (a "story of myself") to find a sense of belonging. Because Canada is a bilingual country, I chose the French verb, *rechercher* (to research), as most appropriate to the concept of relocating, remembering, and reviewing experience—turning over rocks in the earth to see what discoveries hide beneath. As we reflected on the right of belonging, we felt our metaphor would be "roots and wings." Caregivers (whether teachers or parents) have the responsibility to give a group of children a rich foundation in which to spread their roots and grow, so that they can later find their own possibilities and fly off toward the sun and stars.

We pondered what kind of *rechercher* infants and toddlers must do to establish firm roots and belonging. We decided that their clear, sometimes primitive demands ("I want that toy and it is mine!"), as well as their pure offerings of hugs and kisses, were bedrock experiences of being part of group life in our school. Their basic explorations in sensory play likewise provided them with the starting point for all their later, culturally shaped concepts and projects. Thus, when the children encountered elemental materials (water, cornmeal, tissue paper, cotton balls, tapioca, rice, paint, or clay), using authentic tools for their research (brushes, spoons, rakes, and scoops), while negotiating their actions in a group of peers, we could see them gaining the chance to reach down into their past and move upward toward new possibilities. Each such encounter led to the next until the resourcefulness of each child and the group became visible, and we asked "What can we now create together? What stories are you reminding us to express?"

We fervently hope that reverberations and re-stimulations of these experiences throughout their lives will allow our children to recapture their early moments of discovering themselves. For us teachers, too, (re)living with the children their moments of embeddedness allowed us to find again (*rechercher*) our basic sense of connectedness.

The foundation of experiences is built upon learning through sensory play, while learning from children and teachers. The sensory pool is filled with tapioca and tools to expand the possibilities of the moment.



GIVING CARE

As we came to the last relational right, we selected the metaphor "a tendency to tenderness." Whether our children choose to be rooted or to spread their wings, should teachers not wish for them the tendency toward tenderness, wherever they are, whomever they meet?

Reflecting on young children as givers of care led us up against two seeming contradictions. In the first place, we adults believed ourselves (not the children) to be the caregivers. Indeed, to be honest, we often felt empowered by the children's need for us and secure in the resources we provided. But remembering how Loris Malaguzzi inspired us to think of the child as strong, competent, and full of resources, we felt a disequilibrium. Thus, we were provoked to alter our perceptions of the neediness of the children. As our thinking shifted, we began to embrace a co-creative image of child and teacher, projecting competency and possibility onto both sides.

In the second place, when we looked at children's exchanges with one another, we did not always see them as giving each other care! The infant and toddler years, as we saw them, were translucent in their intensity and highlighted by vivacious children climbing, biting, dumping, pushing, grabbing, and thrusting. Yet, we had also found that when messages of tenderness surrounded the children and they became a cooperative group, different possibilities became apparent. We knew that our infants had communicated to us their wish to take care of the birds encountered on their daily walks. We revisited the many moments when our toddlers offered blankets and tucked each other in at sleep time, and our babies retrieved bottles and sipper cups and offered milk to one another. We concluded that a "pedagogy of listening" (Carlina Rinaldi) builds trust and security within each child, as well as reciprocity and relationship with the teacher.

A tendency to tenderness, and to helping one another, is where it begins and where it ends, only to begin again.

CONCLUSION

The journey we took in recasting the relational needs (rights) of our children in metaphorical terms helped us teachers reflect on many aspects of our experience and consider many questions that deepened as we understood the issues more fully and in shared language. The first and simplest right of holding (“embracing the essence”) ultimately prompted us to ask, How together are we? We pondered the second right of attachment (“to hold most closely and let go”) and came to wonder, How do differences bring us together? When we reaffirmed children’s and adults’ rights to recognition (“eye to eye, ear to ear, hand to hand, mind to mind. . .”) and to mutuality (“. . . and heart to heart”), we learned how the environment offers different tools for fostering being together. We came to ask, Why do strength and vulnerability require each other? And likewise, in more stories than I can tell, the rights of intensity (passion), belonging (embeddedness), identification, and opportunities to be helpful and caring gave us our own meanings for Malaguzzi’s vision of education as relationships.

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