

Southern
Early Childhood
Association

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Fractions

Myths & Fables

Reggio

Discovery Centers

Toddler Books

of Early Childhood

Southern Early Childhood Association

Editor - Janet Brown McCracken

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Dimensions of Early Childhood

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Dimensions of Early Childhood

Volume 30 Index

When did you last rethink your teaching practices? This Montessori kindergarten teacher describes how the Reggio Emilia approach influenced his classroom.

Hundred Language Zoo

Josh Thompson

Many books and stories, articles, and new ideas come across a teacher's desk each year. Sometimes, an idea catches the eye, looks interesting and promising. More often, it gets filed away for future reference. Once in a while a new idea comes along just when a teacher and class are ready. Teachers seize the moment, implement the new strategy and, voila! extraordinary learning takes place. That's just how it happened when one Montessori kindergarten explored the Dallas Zoo with a hundred languages, the Reggio Emilia way.

The Hundred Languages of Children: The Reggio Emilia Approach to Early Childhood Education (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998) was picked up on a booktable at an early childhood education conference. The book was attractive because of the overt emphasis on community, team teaching, and collaboration, all in an effort to serve the child. This resonated with the author's preferred type of classroom, where multiple adults participate in the active life of a large, diverse classroom, couched within a supportive school. Community involvement is central and core to the Reggio Emilia approach, but there was much, much more.

What Is Reggio Emilia?

Reggio Emilia is a city of 130,000 people in northern Italy. For more than half a century, beginning within days after the end of World War II, this community has united behind its schools to communally care for young children in a system of high-quality early childhood learning environments. The founder and visionary of this approach, Loris Malaguzzi, attributed the success of this approach to the commitment of the community infrastructure: "Relationship is the primary connecting dimension of our system, however, understood not merely as a warm, protective envelope, but rather as a dynam-

ic conjunction of forces and elements interacting toward a common purpose" (Edwards et al., 1998, p. 68).

This dependence upon relationships at a political level inspired the success, through relationships, of each successive layer of the program: child with parent, parent with teachers, teachers with child, child with child, teachers with teachers, and parents with parents. "As a result, children discover how communication enhances the autonomy of the individual and the peer group," concluded Malaguzzi (Edwards et al., 1998, p. 69).

So how do these diverse elements communicate with each other? There is a way, in a top-down organizational structure, for the form to dictate the communication, creating a linearity that may be efficient, though wholly ineffective. In contrast, the Reggio Emilia community promotes multiple forms of communication. This creates a multiplicity of means to say the same thing, or, in some cases, the discovery that there is, in fact, one and only one way to express something; hence the hundred languages (see the poem by Loris Malaguzzi).

The process of discovery becomes the communal property of the individual and the group. Like the formation of synapses in the developing brain, this road of discovery and communication may be used again.

The value placed on communication is clearly highlighted in the relationship between the school and the home. Parents are primary educators of young children, and the Reggio community builds upon this primacy by promoting communication between parents and every element of the school.

Once in a while a new idea comes along just when a teacher and class are ready.

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No way. The hundred IS there.

by Loris Malaguzzi

The child is made of one hundred.
The child has a hundred languages
A hundred hands
A hundred thoughts
A hundred ways of thinking
Of playing, of speaking.
A hundred always a hundred
Ways of listening
Of marveling, of loving
A hundred joys
For singing and understanding
A hundred worlds to discover
A hundred worlds to invent
A hundred worlds to dream.
The child has a hundred languages
(and a hundred hundred hundred
more)
but they steal ninety-nine.
The school and the culture
Separate the head from the body.
They tell the child:
To think without hands
To do without head
To listen and not to speak
To understand without joy
To love and to marvel
Only at Easter and Christmas.
They tell the child:
To discover the world already
there
And of the hundred
They steal the ninety-nine.
They tell the child:
That work and play
Reality and fantasy
Science and imagination
Sky and earth
Reason and dream
Are things that do not belong
together.
And thus they tell the child
That the hundred is not there.
The child says:
No way. The hundred IS there.

Note. From *The Hundred Languages of Children: The Reggio Emilia Approach to Early Childhood Education* (pp. 2-3), by L. Malaguzzi, translated by Lella Gandini, 1990, Greenwich, CT: Ablex. Copyright 1990 by Ablex. Reprinted with permission.

Within the school, the communication grid again reflects multiple avenues rather than a hierarchical structure. Reggio classrooms are run by teams of teachers, two teachers in every classroom. They are co-equal partners in running the classroom and are equally responsible for its operation, inside and out, including conversations with parents. The teachers run the school, in collaboration with other teams of teachers, parents, and the municipal board.

Two specially trained resource people assist the teachers and the children, the *pedagogista* and the *atelierista*. Somewhat like a mentor teacher, the *pedagogista* circulates between classrooms, and through different schools. This resource person confers with teachers, models inquiry and reflection, and focuses documentation of the children's work. The *pedagogista* serves as a resource for teachers in much the same way that the teachers are to serve as a resource to the children.

An *atelierista* manages the *atelier*. The U.S. concept of an art teacher falls far short in describing the *atelierista*, who is trained in many artistic media. This person is also prepared to cultivate children's use of symbolic languages (New, 1993). The *atelierista* promotes a multiplicity of means of expression to facili-

Six attributes of Reggio Emilia schools

(adapted from Gandini, 1993, pp. 161-178, in Edwards et al., 1998)

- Amiable
- Active
- Inventive
- Livable
- Documentable
- Communicative

tate the children's exploration of a topic or project. The atelier is a resource room within each school, facilitating the multiple media the children need to explore their expressions.

Montessori and Reggio Meet in Kindergarten

These multiple forms of communication became the vehicle for a Montessori kindergarten, deep in the heart of Texas, to integrate Reggio Emilia concepts. For a long time, this classroom had unwittingly incorporated some Reggio principles. Its teaching team works closely together, each adult caring about each child, while maintaining clearly defined areas of expertise. Clear lines of responsibility are drawn and redrawn, based on constant communication about observations of children and their work.

Parents were already integral to the classroom, because they are of primary importance to the children. Teachers invite parents to work in the classroom, to read with children, assist in snack preparation, and to interact with their own children and their children's friends. Children are trusted to be responsible for their own learning experience. Teachers intervene only to prevent harm or assist children in evaluating their mastery of skills required to pursue their line of inquiry.

How the Zoo Trip Emerged

Planning for a field trip to the Dallas Zoo began during a language experience session. The 5- and 6-year-old kindergartners gathered around the easel with large poster paper and markers. The main objective of this group time was simply to

involve children in deciding what to do for a parents' night program. The brainstorming generated so many projects and topics of interest that the teachers followed a number of them in the ensuing months, including the trip to the zoo.

The children's list of ideas (Table 1) was developed into a web (Figure 1) to cluster similar concepts and link related ideas. The process of webbing was done by the class, using sticky notes that could be attached to one group of ideas and then reattached easily to a different topic. After much sifting and sorting of ideas, five topics evolved, general themes of similar concepts and ideas: dramatic play, field trips, books, class activities, and class research. These topics were not preestablished, but evolved out of the logical groupings of similar

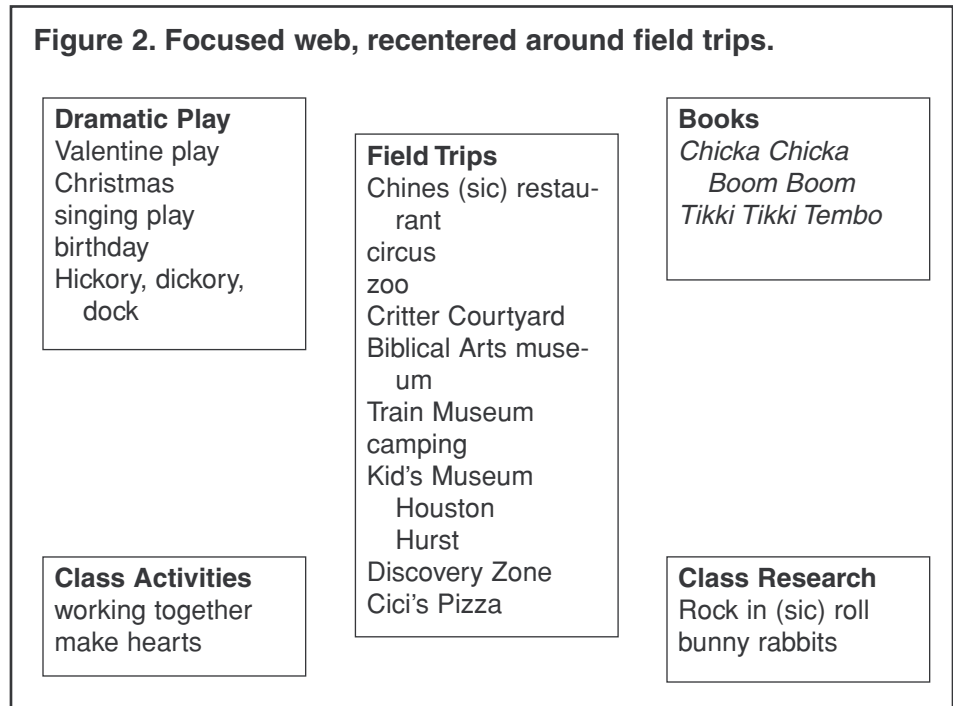
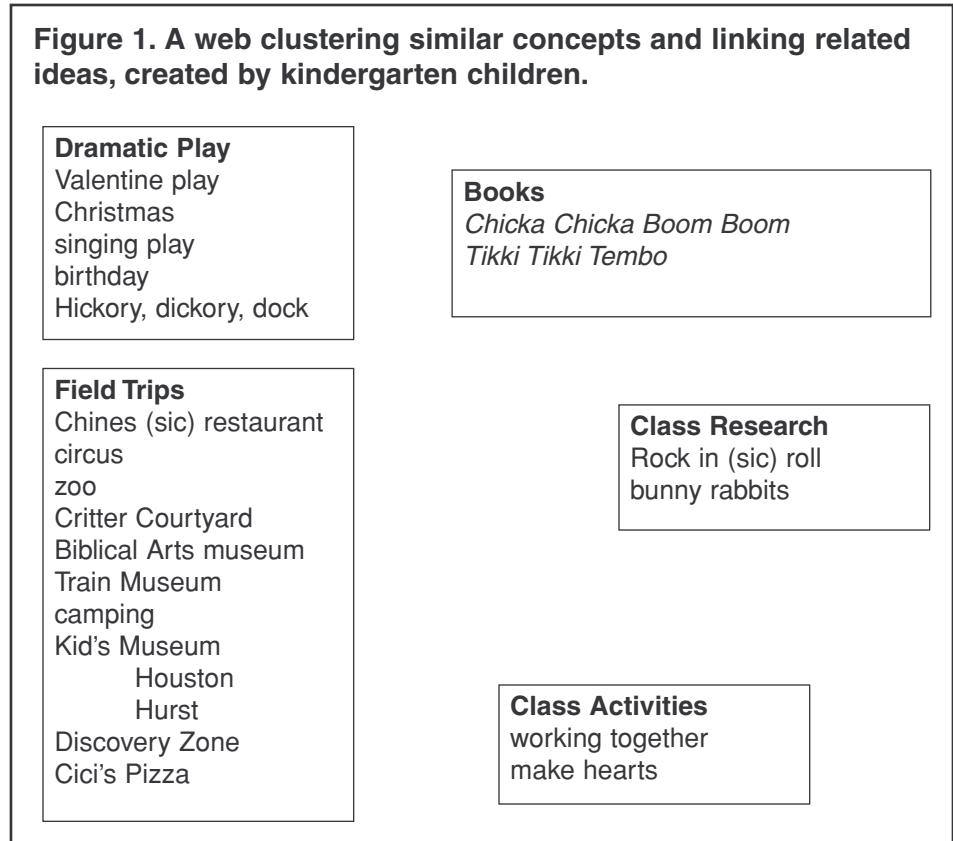
concepts and ideas. The logic was left up to the children. They had to defend and explain their notions of logic, why they choose to put certain things together.

Suddenly, the children realized that, among all the interesting

things discussed, they had generated more ideas for field trips than anything else. This became the new center, and the other topics were placed in proper perspective around the field trips (Figure 2).

Table 1. List of project ideas generated by 5- and 6-year-old Texans

- Valentine play
- about working together
- make hearts
- Christmas
- singing play
- birthday
- *Chicka Chicka, Boom Boom* (Martin & Archambault, 1991)
- *Tikki Tikki Tembo* (Mosel, 1968)
- Rock in (sic) roll
- Chines (sic) restaurant
- Hickory, dickory, dock
- circus
- zoo
- Critter courtyard
- Biblical Arts Museum
- Train Museum
- Camping
- Hurst: Kid's Museum
- Discovery Zone
- bunny rabbits
- Cici's Pizza



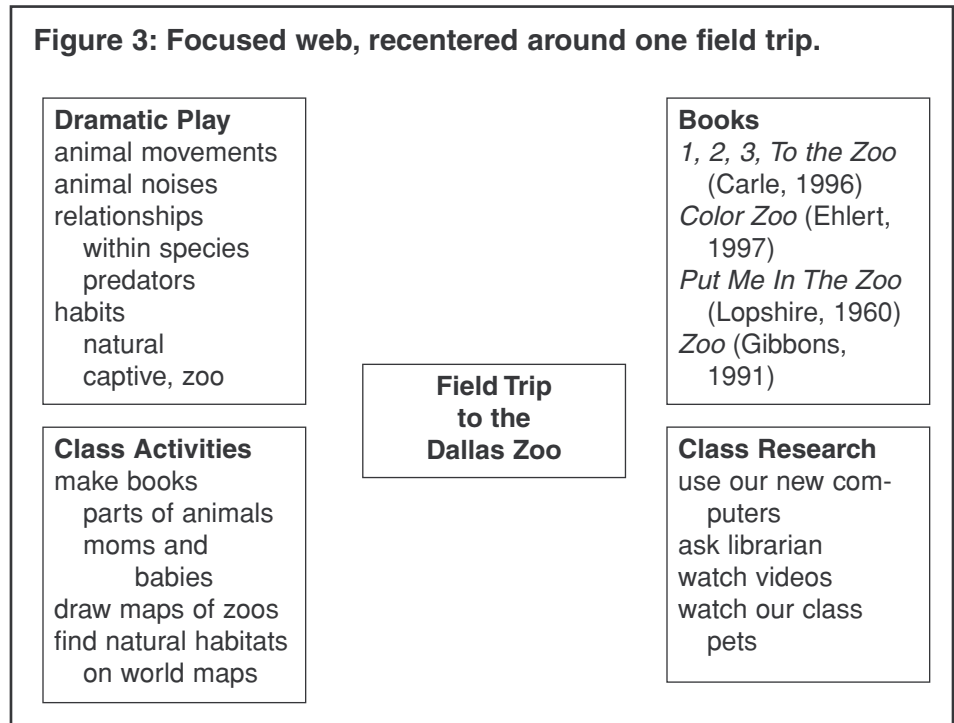
Finally, among all the interesting field trips, the zoo trip seemed interesting to most children, both in and of itself, and for all the potential activities that could be generated in the revolving topics: dramatic play, books, class activities, and class research (Figure 3). These ideas were generated from many seasons of inquiry and research with this Montessori classroom. Many of the children had been in the same classroom, with the same adults, since they were 3 years old. They were accustomed to owning their own learning and creating an emerging curriculum.

The class chose to search for information about zoos in general on the Internet, using Yahoo!igans (this child-friendly search engine is available online at www.yahooligans.com). The Dallas Zoo Web site (www.dallas-zoo.org) intrigued everyone with maps, facts about the animals, schedules, and links to other interesting Web sites. The trip was scheduled and children began individual research about animals and zoos.

Children owned their learning and created an emerging curriculum.

The links to other Web sites produced a collection of animal stories and graphics that were printed and collected in a class book. Many of the photos were printed as line drawings. Most were printed in full color, which the children cut and pasted into their hand-written stories. Other sources of photographs included magazines and old books. A few original drawings were volunteered during this early preparation

Figure 3: Focused web, recentered around one field trip.



stage, but nothing like the explosion of original art work that came later, after the zoo trip.

At the Zoo

The trip to the Dallas Zoo happened like so many other field trips with 5- and 6-year-olds. Subdividing the 25 children among the adults (two teachers and five parents) provided for low maintenance, quick roll calls, and plenty of cooperative learning as the adults asked prompt questions and led small-group discussions.

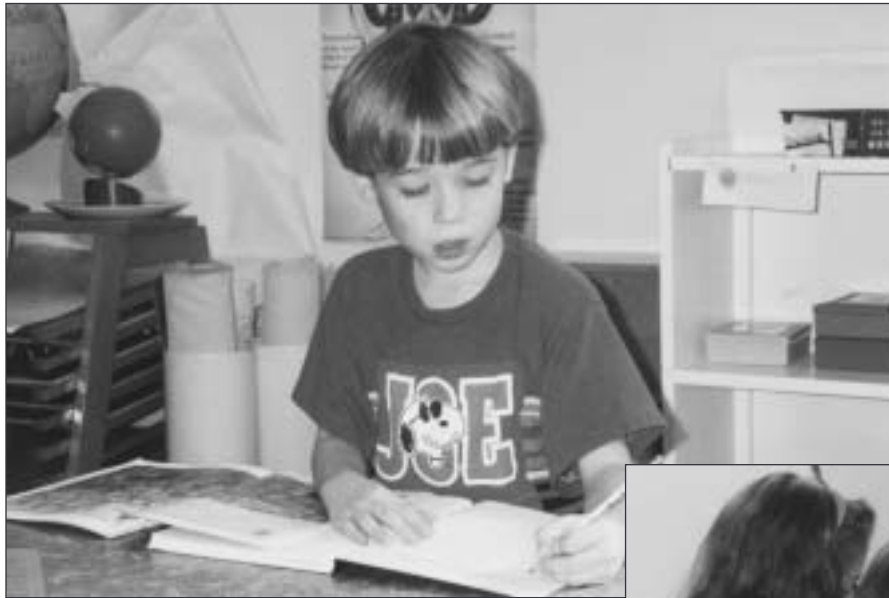
The parents were familiar with the children's preparations, having been involved as classroom volunteers and as readily-available resources for the children's inquiry at home. The children carried maps of the zoo, and scheduled their trip around their interests: large animals, carnivores, the children's petting zoo, and then, finally, the monorail over the Wilds of Africa exhibit.

The children were interested in looking at the animals for physical similarities to the photos and draw-

ings they had made. They also were looking for animals from different places. A few children had prepared a list of continents, and wanted to see if they could find at least one animal from each continent. A different group of children were interested in animal families: they counted how many mothers with babies they found, and noted the youngest animals there.

After the Zoo

The debriefing after the field trip started as usual with language-experience group activities around the easel. That's when the hundred languages emerged. We were discussing and recording the variety of tools available to express our experience when the children began talking faster than the scribe could write. They recorded a long list of activities that they could do with materials on hand. They wanted to paint, draw, make labels, create puzzles, construct cages with blocks, design maps, create charades, and make an animal-sounds tape. The classroom



Photos courtesy of the author
A few original drawings were volunteered during the early preparation stage, but nothing like the explosion of original art work that came later, after the zoo trip.



art shelf, like other elements in a Montessori classroom, contains highly organized sets of self-help materials. Crayons, markers, chalk, paper, and cloth are, likewise, ample and accessible.

Through scaffolding, children were challenged to build on their knowledge of these materials with new applica-

tions related to their interest in the zoo trip. They had been using the music area with much creativity lately, so they were invited to compose songs about the trip, or about individual animals. The class listened to audiotapes of Prokofiev's "Peter and the Wolf" and Saint-Saens' "Carnival of the Animals." They responded with a tonal symphony of animal noises, made from rhythm instruments, the piano, and the bells.

Adults invented a number of animal riddles, with the clue on one side of sentence strips and the answer on the back, such as "What is big, has floppy ears, and stomps?" "An elephant." The children then created many more riddles, some more logical than others. "What goes underwater and comes up for air?" "A hippo." "Which animal sleeps with its shoes on?" "A horse, of course."

The map-making began with a large scroll of paper (3 feet by 12 feet) laid out on the floor. The five children around the paper began discussing their versions of a map, and then began drawing, from their own perspective. Therefore, the map has multiple starting points, with no single bottom or top. The children agreed that the final product must be viewed placed on the floor, the

way it was made, and the viewer must walk all the way around it.

The layout of the map invited interested children to expand certain areas. Flamingos were particularly interesting to one girl, perhaps

Children built on their knowledge with new applications.

because they were pink, but more likely because she found great delight in replicating their form: two ovals,

one roughly twice as large as the first, with numerous straight lines, for the neck, the legs (some bent, others straight), and the beak. The multiplication of similar forms, each one distinct, prompted others to begin naming each flamingo: Domingo, Pongo, Ringo, and Pinky were some.

Other students recognized that the interest in flamingos may have been prompted by the large number of birds in the flamingo exhibit. "How many were there?"

"Oh, about a hundred."

"Naw, there were 25 kids, and we were more than they were."

"Let's go back to the zoo and count them."

"No, let's call the zoo and they can tell us." When they called the zoo and asked, there were 53 flamingos on display that day.

Some children found drawing to be too confining and restrictive a medium to express the qualities of animal bodies, not to mention the sense of character and personality that they wished to explore. Paper collage was an obvious first step, having studied Eric Carle's collage. The children found that they could prepare paper with a variety of media, paints, crayons, pencils, and then use the prepared paper to cut and paste together any number of

body parts to represent what they thought and felt about each animal.

Through dramatic play, the children explored the movement of animals, and found ample material, both written and visual, to supplement their activities. One student began a study of animal feet, or lack thereof. His drawings and clay models became a part of the movement and dance activities, "because they have feet like us, or at least they know how to get around without them."

Having planned the trip, researched about animals and zoos, gone to the Dallas Zoo, and subsequently explored multiple ways to express their interests, the children were now ready to document, to produce a culminating display of their whole zoo experience. They decided that a monorail play would best portray their experience, because it would be just like the monorail they rode at the zoo, and the viewer could come back at different times and different things would be on display.

Through this encounter with a project and the children's active inquiry, the hundred languages exploded throughout the classroom. There is no convincing this class that there is any other way to learn, or to "do school."

Understanding What Happens With Reggio

To better understand what was happening in the classroom, and how to participate in and contribute to its future growth, teachers sought more information about the Reggio Emilia approach. The ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education (<http://ericeece.org/>), spon-

sored by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, is a generous wellspring of information and referrals. Their link to the Reggio Emilia Web site (<http://ericecece.org/reggio.html>) led to many insightful articles, practical explanations by Lilian Katz, Rebecca New, and Carolyn Pope Edwards, among others.

These are the primary components of the Texas classroom that had afforded the explosion into multiple artistic languages:

- The availability of **artistic materials** in the classroom created an artistic vernacular. Children were familiar with the tools and materials, the creative process, and the expectations and permissions granted by the adults. The classroom artistic milieu set the standard for active, uninhibited exploration.
- **Ample time and space** were provided for projects that could go on for days, with interaction of adults, other children, outside resources, and time to think and feel, and to unify thinking and feeling into a more coherent expression.
- School was known as a place of **research, learning, revisiting, reconsiderations, and reflection**. The children had explored animal studies from many angles before. The class menagerie included three finches, a turtle, a fertile hamster couple (34 baby hamsters in one year!), a fresh-water aquarium, and innumerable live bugs brought into the classroom for a day, then released. These nurturing environs invited many stages of reflection and perspective taking.
- The children had experienced numerous **group projects** before, and were familiar with the give-and-take required for team effort. The gain that came

through self-sacrifice became evident as partnerships and cooperation increased their sources of ideas and inspirations, interpretations and implementations.

This Montessori classroom in Texas resembled New's description of a Reggio Emilia classroom, where teachers place a high value on their ability to improvise and respond to children's predispo-

sition to enjoy the unexpected. Regardless of their origins, successful projects are those that generate a sufficient amount of interest and uncertainty to provoke children's creative thinking and problem-solving and are open to different avenues of exploration (New, 1993, p. 4).

Various competing philosophies, worldviews, and ideologies exist in

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early childhood education today. One prevalent approach views the child as a learner who is on a trajectory toward adulthood. This perspective empowers the adult to dominate and control the life of children and schools, "for their own good."

An alternate motive emerges from an image of the child as a unique individual, with rights rather than with needs, as espoused by the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education. Carlotta Rinaldi, in *The Hundred Languages of Children* (Edwards et al., 1998), articulates seven characteristics of this young child. The young child has potential, and is plastic (mal-

leable). She is growing and is curious, and she retains the ability to be amazed. Finally, she seeks relationships and desires to communicate.

These components of childhood surfaced in many ways as the children in one Montessori classroom explored the Dallas Zoo with their hundred languages.

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SECA Proposes By-Laws Amendment

As an organization that is governed by and for its members and state affiliates, SECA is committed to ensuring that the selection of the SECA President represents all states and members. The SECA Board of Directors is proposing a by-laws amendment that will ensure that the SECA leadership represents the will and desires of its membership.

The proposed by-laws amendment changes the election of the SECA President from direct member ballot to a certified election by the states. The by-laws amendment is designed to enhance the participation of state members and affiliates in the election process, to enhance the nomination process to allow for wider input and nomination of diverse candidates and to ensure equity among the SECA states.

The proposed by-laws amendment will be considered at the annual SECA business meeting to be held during the annual conference, Saturday, March 15, 2003. The meeting is scheduled for 11:15 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. at the Myrtle Beach Convention Center.

As required, the text of the By-Laws Amendment is published for membership consideration. If you would like to receive a copy of the proposed SECA Policy and Procedures that will be implemented with an approved by-laws change, contact the SECA office at 1-800-305-7322 or by e-mail at gbean@southernearlychildhood.org.

Proposed By-Laws Amendment

Article VIII

Section D: Election of the President-Elect shall be by certified ballot and shall occur in a formally recognized meeting of the SECA Board of Directors. Each state shall have one vote and must conduct a selection process, certified according to SECA policy, to determine the candidate that will receive the state's vote. The duly elected state affiliate representative on the SECA Board of Directors will submit that state's vote to the SECA President.

Members-at-Large of the SECA Board of Directors shall represent SECA non-affiliate members. The Members-at-Large will cast one vote for President-Elect on behalf of the SECA non-affiliate members. Non-affiliate members will receive a mailed ballot and return that ballot to an independent audit firm. The audit firm will certify the vote tally of the non-affiliate ballots.

The SECA President will cast a vote only in the event of a tie. The Immediate Past President will not vote.