

Answers to NAREA questions:

Andrea Sisbarro – membership coordinator for Colorado and Utah, NAREA member since 2002, Co-Director of Boulder Journey School

Share the work that you have been doing based on your inspiration from Reggio Emilia, Italy.

As a director of a school, the work that “I” have been doing is not separated from the work of the school and so my answers reflect that. For the past 16 years, Boulder Journey School has been inspired by the schools in Reggio and we have translated their inspiration into our context. A strong image of children, the use of materials, the theory of a hundred languages, teacher as professional, teacher as researcher, the use of documentation, the importance of reflecting on the work, partnering with parents, and advocacy are all a part of our daily reality. Our experiences have been many, but some of the most noteworthy include the following:

- Creation and continuation of a Teacher Education Program where early childhood teachers earn a master’s degree and birth-third grade license. The experience is rooted in daily classroom practice and woven together with constructivist and social constructivist theory.
- Advocacy for children’s rights. Contributions to recently published *Seen and Heard: Children’s Rights in Early Childhood Education* as well as many articles. Hosting initiatives and partnering with local agencies and politicians to pass local and national policies concerning children’s rights.
- Contributing to opportunities for professional development. We hosted The Wonder of Learning, The Hundred Languages of Children Exhibit in 2008 and participated in the 2008 NAREA summer conference. We have hosted other conferences (somewhere between 15-20 over the years) with American educators inspired by the schools in Reggio Emilia and with educators from Reggio Emilia. These conferences have been attended by thousands of teachers, administrators, advocates, students, policy makers, architects and parents.

Are you involved in any active networks or study groups in your area that are inspired by the values/ideas of the early childhood programs of Reggio Emilia? If yes, please describe.

Not formally. We maintain an alumni network for students who have completed our Teacher Education Program and are therefore inspired by the values of the schools in Reggio. All former graduates are connected through social networking, regular communication from the school and yearly opportunities to visit the school. Most of the people in this “network” are still in Colorado but about 25% are living in other states and a few in other countries.

There have been conversations over the years (and they have recently cropped back up) about formally starting some sort of a network in Denver. This is a great idea, and many people are in love with the concept but nobody has stepped forward to put in any of the work that will be necessary to get it started and up off the ground.

How has being a NAREA membership coordinator shaped your work?

Membership Coordinator Report – Submitted by Ellen Hall, Oct. 2011

It hasn't at all. Colorado has very few NAREA members. I think the highest enrollment for our state was in 2008 when the summer conference was here. Or, it might have been in early 2002-2004, something like that, when Boulder Journey School paid for many of our teachers to be members. (We have since stopped this practice as none of our teachers used NAREA for anything and they felt that it was a waste of the school's resources.) Otherwise, I get contacted very little in this role. Occasionally a parent or director from another state will inquire about other Reggio-inspired schools in the state. I always make sure the school contributes in anyway it can to NAREA projects (like the annual DVD, etc.)

What do you perceive as challenges in the membership coordinator role?

None, for me. I have a good understanding of what is happening in the state but most of that is through my role at Boulder Journey School, not because I am the membership coordinator.

Do you maintain your NAREA membership annually?

Yes, I have been a member since inception. My employer pays my membership fee; otherwise, I don't think I would be a member on my own. I only use NAREA as an avenue to support families from our school who are moving to another state and want to find a school with similar values to those here at Boulder Journey School. Occasionally I will use the Professional Development Initiatives section of the website.

Anita Sullivan – Membership Coordinator, Wyoming

1. Could you share some examples of the work you have been doing based on your inspiration from Reggio Emilia, Italy?

Trainings on Reggio Emilia

Coordinated efforts with University staff and teaching Intro to Early Childhood course at community college with focus on Reggio Emilia.

Assisting individual programs with Reggio practices. Textbooks that have been written on Reggio present it as a curriculum and this is leading to a great deal of misunderstanding among students, teachers and professors.

Identifying resources for Reggio inspired practitioners.

Connecting Administrators and staff to others in NAREA, including Boulder Journey School.

Integrating Reggio principles into work.

2. What do you perceive as challenges in the membership coordinator role?

Connecting people in large rural area. I have had to travel on site to programs to keep the conversations going. Training without follow-up means people get stuck. There are so many misinterpretations of Reggio so directing people to the resources on NAREA has helped.

Currently, low wages and long work hours are preventing teachers from enrolling.

Administrators don't perceive their role in supporting efforts of teachers since they don't see how critical their role is. Teachers make efforts but need structural supports to work in a Reggio-inspired manner-planning time, team support, schedule flexibility, etc.

3. Do you know of any active networks or study groups in your area that are inspired by the values/ideas of the early childhood programs of Reggio Emilia?

The networks are in individual programs. State and regional efforts have not been successful due to distance and diversity of programs. We have several agencies studying Reggio Emilia practices and our University lab school is very involved.

4. Are you involved in any of them?

If yes:

Do you know how it/they started? Yes.

What is its format? Regular meetings to share projects and activities and annual visits to Boulder Journey School

How often does it meet? Weekly or monthly

How many people are involved: Varies from 8-24

How might NAREA help the group continue or grow its efforts?

Cost is an issue for participants, so resources and access to conferences and web at different levels of membership might help.

More stories about the journey people have taken so that people are not discouraged by perceived failures or getting stuck. Reggio principles go against the traditions of early childhood and challenge preconceived and popular notions around early childhood and the role of teachers. Administrators could have focused information or meetings to help them understand how to support change.

More use of media tools and social networking- webinars, Facebook

Becky Hancock – Membership Coordinator, Arizona

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