

October 5, 2006

Read to: The audience at the PITC 20th Anniversary Symposium
“Infant/Toddler Childcare In America: Three Perspectives.”

From Carlina Rinaldi of Reggio Emilia:

It is with a very sad heart that I inform you that I cannot participate in the work of this morning.

Very heavy personal reasons do not allow me to be there with you to share in the wisdom of today's exchanges and the joy and the enthusiasm of the celebration of this twenty-year anniversary.

This celebration is a must for people like me, who not only followed the birth and the growth of PITC but also have admired the cultural and political role that it has played.

I will miss a celebration of past accomplishments but, above all, will miss the planning for the future; the future of thousands of children, families, educators of your country, of my country, and of other countries.

The histories of the infant/toddler centers in Italy and in Reggio Emilia are, obviously, very different from those of your country, but there are values we hold in common with PITC. Values that together we need and we want to defend, such as:

- An image of children that considers the child a competent learner right from birth. A child with human rights who begs to be recognized and realized by and in the civil society.
- A responsibility to offer to each child and each of their families, places for their education that are not just places that give answers and meet basic needs, but places that define, support and realize each child's rights. Rights such as the provision of a learning/playing context in which they can be educated in relationship building with other children and adults through the assistance of competent educators working in concert with their families.
- A commitment to build and certify quality infant/toddler programs that can be places of culture, education and social

growth that provide extraordinary possibilities for the development of all children, their families and their society.

These values have a strong history in the infant/toddler centers of Reggio Emilia and in the infant/toddler centers in many other municipalities in Italy. They are also part of my personal history. I started working in Reggio Emilia in 1970, where I was a pedagista.

But these values we share with PITC, as do all sets of values, need to be continuously confirmed. Now as in the past, in my town, in my country and in the world, nothing can be taken for granted. Nothing is acquired forever.

We still need to fight against those who want to confine infant/toddler care to a custodial kind of care; and against those who see infant/toddler programs only as a cost to society and not as a social, cultural and economic investment. We need to fight to show that a childhood rich in shared affection and in social and intellectual possibilities, is a contribution not only to a happier life for children but also to a more democratic, welcoming and peaceful society. Babies need peace for their education and for them peace is education.

Many are the reasons that infant/toddler programs become socially diminished and politically forgotten. We must speak against those reasons. We cannot allow families to become satisfied with low quality because they have no other options. We cannot allow program operations to be defined by the lowest common denominator of society need—low cost settings in which children can be left while family members work or go to school. When parents have no quality options they become satisfied with low quality. We need to remind people that the needs and rights of infants should define the quality of programming.

That is why, being with you today would have been wonderful—to remember together, to clarify values that come from our shared ideas, to build our future together.

Celebrating the twentieth anniversary of PITC means to remember difficult years, years rich in work and friendship, but, above all, it means to honor the educators who are trying to improve the quality

of infant/toddler care and are striving to acquire higher levels of professionalism through better professional development. Better infant/toddler programs mean a better society, a society which is just, right, and more democratic.

Carlina Rinaldi : Pedagogista and Director of Early Childhood Services in Reggio Emilia, Italy for 30 years. Currently, she is Executive Consultant to Reggio Children, the International Center for the defense and promotion of the rights and potential of all children and a professor on the Faculty of Science in Early Education at the Universities of Modena and Reggio Emilia.