

Technology Rich Inquiry Based Research

Creativity and 21st Century Teaching and Learning: Inspiration from Reggio Emilia

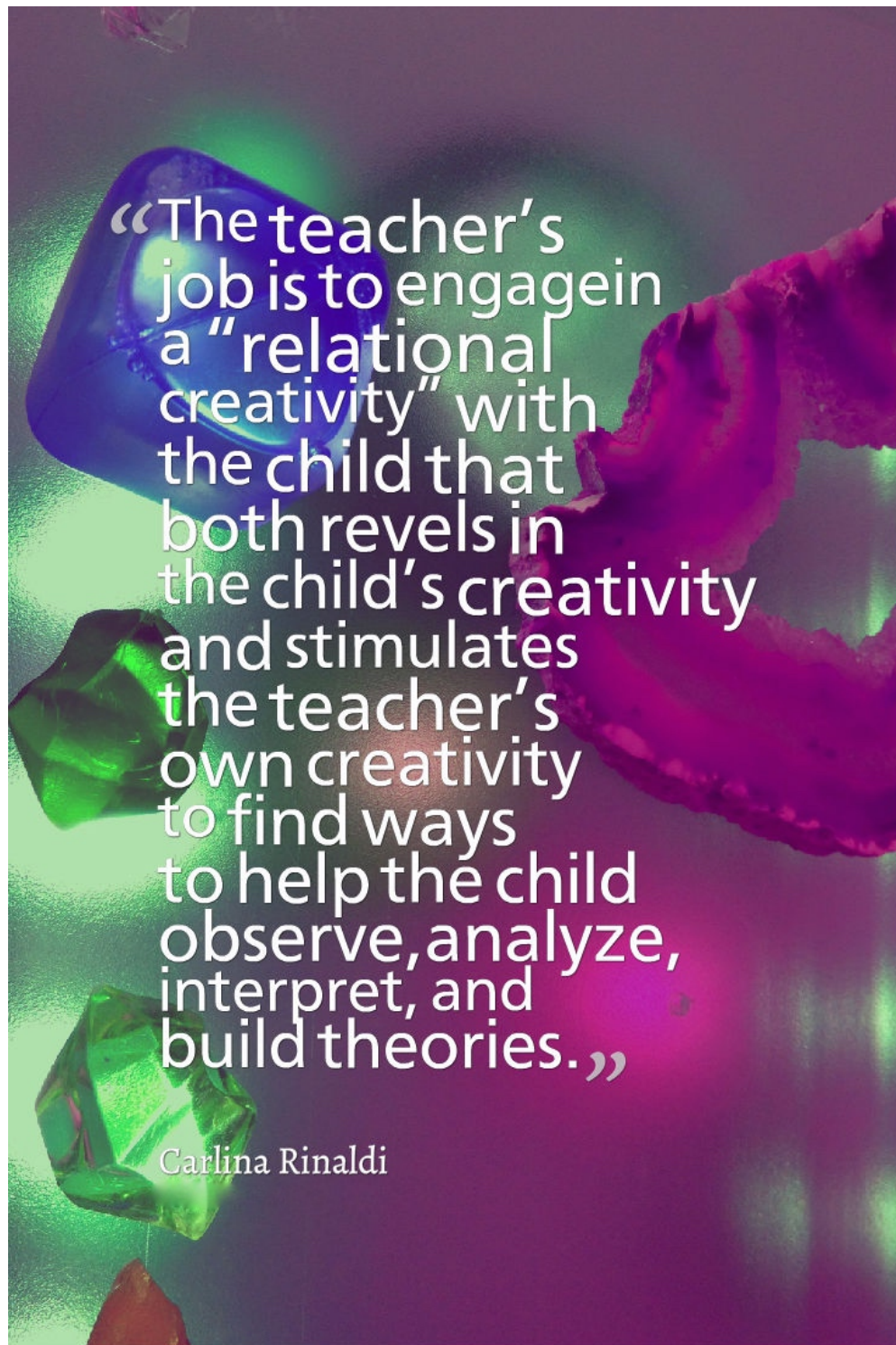
This entry was posted on April 11, 2015, in Play, Professional Learning, Reggio Inspiration and tagged #ReggioPLC, collaboration, education, Reggio inspired. Bookmark the permalink. 10 Comments

By: Diane Kashin, Ed.D, RECE. In 2012, I ventured into the unknown when a group of students encouraged me to enter the world of social media for the purposes of professional learning, communication and collaboration. Previous to that I was not aware of what the significance of the passage of one century into another would have on my practice as an early childhood educator and teacher educator. It wasn't until I became an active Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest user did I see beyond the wall that I erected to what was possible. Today, I see the infinite possibilities of professional collaboration and when my friend from Sweden, Suzanne Axelsson (<https://twitter.com/SuzanneAxelsson>) (whom I met on social media) suggested that we continue our dialogue about creativity for our next #ReggioPLC global chat on April 18th at 4:00 pm EST, I started to think about the place of creativity in this new age of information, media and technology. I also began to read and re-read the words of the great Reggio educators, Loris Malaguzzi, Carlina Rinaldi and Veia Vecchi as inspiration for my creative thinking about creativity.

Our task, regarding creativity, is to help children climb their own mountains, as high as possible. No one can do more.

Loris Malaguzzi

I love the mountain metaphor that Malaguzzi uses. I used it to frame my doctoral dissertation – *Reaching the Top of the Mountain: The Impact of Emergent Curriculum on the Practice of Early Childhood Educators* (<http://www.amazon.ca/Reaching-Top-Mountain-Diane-Kashin/dp/383830120X>). My findings at the time supported the view that when teachers see their task regarding creativity as helping children to climb their own mountains, as high as possible, they too can reach the top of the mountain, a vantage point that allows them to see what is possible for children and themselves. From the top of the mountain, you would see that creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problems solving, communication and collaboration are skills that early childhood educators need to nurture in themselves and children in order to adjust to the new era of the 21st century. There is a role for learning programs to play in this new century (<http://extension.psu.edu/youth/betterkidcare/news/2013/21st-century-skills-what-are-they-and-what-role-can-early-childhood-programs-play>). Here play takes on double meaning, as it is also the medium that supports creativity. It is during play that teachers can engage in what Carlina Rinaldi calls “relational creativity”.



(<https://tecribresearch.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/rinaldi-quote-jpg-961.jpg>).

Relational Creativity

Our twice a month Twitter chats and writing for this blog have helped me to get my creative juices flowing and I turn to my computer and its capacity to accelerate the search for articles and resources that get me thinking deeply about the topic. I get excited when I think of sharing what I find and so I am especially pleased to provide multiple links on creativity. I found a great article on [creativity development and the role of educators](http://www.academia.edu/4083534/Creativity_Development_in_Early_Childhood_The_Role_of_Educators%20) (http://www.academia.edu/4083534/Creativity_Development_in_Early_Childhood_The_Role_of_Educators%20) and a chapter from a book on [t\(//www.sagepub.com/upm-data/15555_02_Skinner_Ch_01.pdf\)](http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/15555_02_Skinner_Ch_01.pdf) [he importance of developing creative activities in the early years](http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/15555_02_Skinner_Ch_01.pdf) (http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/15555_02_Skinner_Ch_01.pdf) that includes developing an ethos and structure to support those creative activities. I wasn’t surprised that during my search that I would come upon the [Boulder Journey School](http://families.boulderjourneyschool.com/learning-experience-2-infants.html) (<http://families.boulderjourneyschool.com/learning-experience-2-infants.html>) and their work on creativity. I have

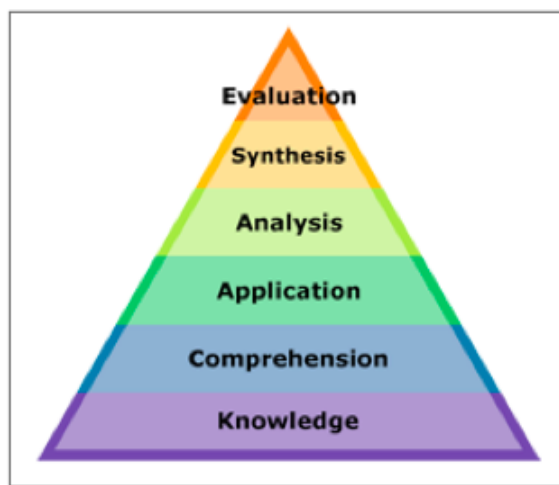
visited the school twice once in 2008 in conjunction with the opening of the Wonders of Learning (http://www.thewonderoflearning.com/exhibition/?lang=en_GB%20) exhibit and again in the fall of 2014 in conjunction with the Hawkins Exhibit (<https://tecibresearch.wordpress.com/2013/10/23/messing-about-in-denver/%20>). The environment of the Boulder Journey encourages creativity and is a testimony of the creativity of the teachers. As part of my first visit to the school in 2008 I was given a CD that I cherished for years but have misplaced. I was delighted to come across the very same images on Vimeo (<https://vimeo.com/28415117>).



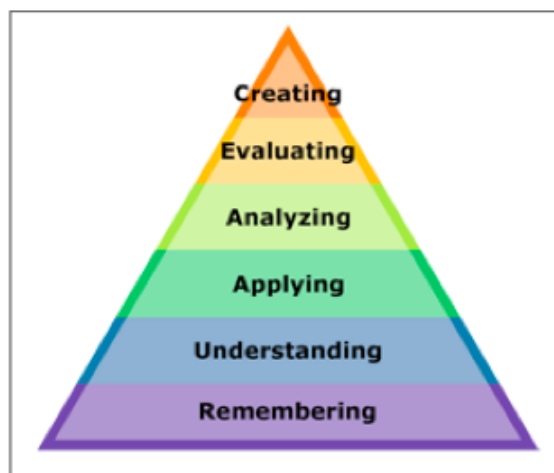
(<https://tecibresearch.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/screenshot-2015-04-07-14-51-19.png>).

Boulder Journey School

Creativity has always been a part of the early childhood tradition but not necessarily the focus of learning in the later years. In my experience in higher education the focus has been on developing higher order thinking skills related to the cognitive domain using Bloom's Taxonomy. Psychologist Benjamin Bloom and several colleagues created the taxonomy in 1948. Later it was revised by Bloom's students and creativity was added to the pinnacle of the triangle (<http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/4719>). In the 21st century this tool for teaching and learning gets flipped so that we start with creativity, which leads to the acquisition of knowledge.



Original Bloom's Taxonomy.



The revised taxonomy.

(<https://tecribresearch.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/screenshot-2015-04-06-08-57-54.png>).

Starting with creativity is something I believe that 20th century Reggio co-founder, Loris Malaguzzi (<http://www.reggiochildren.it/identita/loris-malaguzzi/?lang=en%20>) would have supported as he knew of the importance of creativity and his words are inspirational.

Creativity seems to emerge from multiple experiences, coupled with a well-supported development of personal resources, including a sense of freedom to venture beyond the known.

Loris Malaguzzi

Creativity becomes more visible when adults try to be more attentive to the cognitive processes of children than to the results they achieve in various fields of doing and understanding.

Loris Malaguzzi

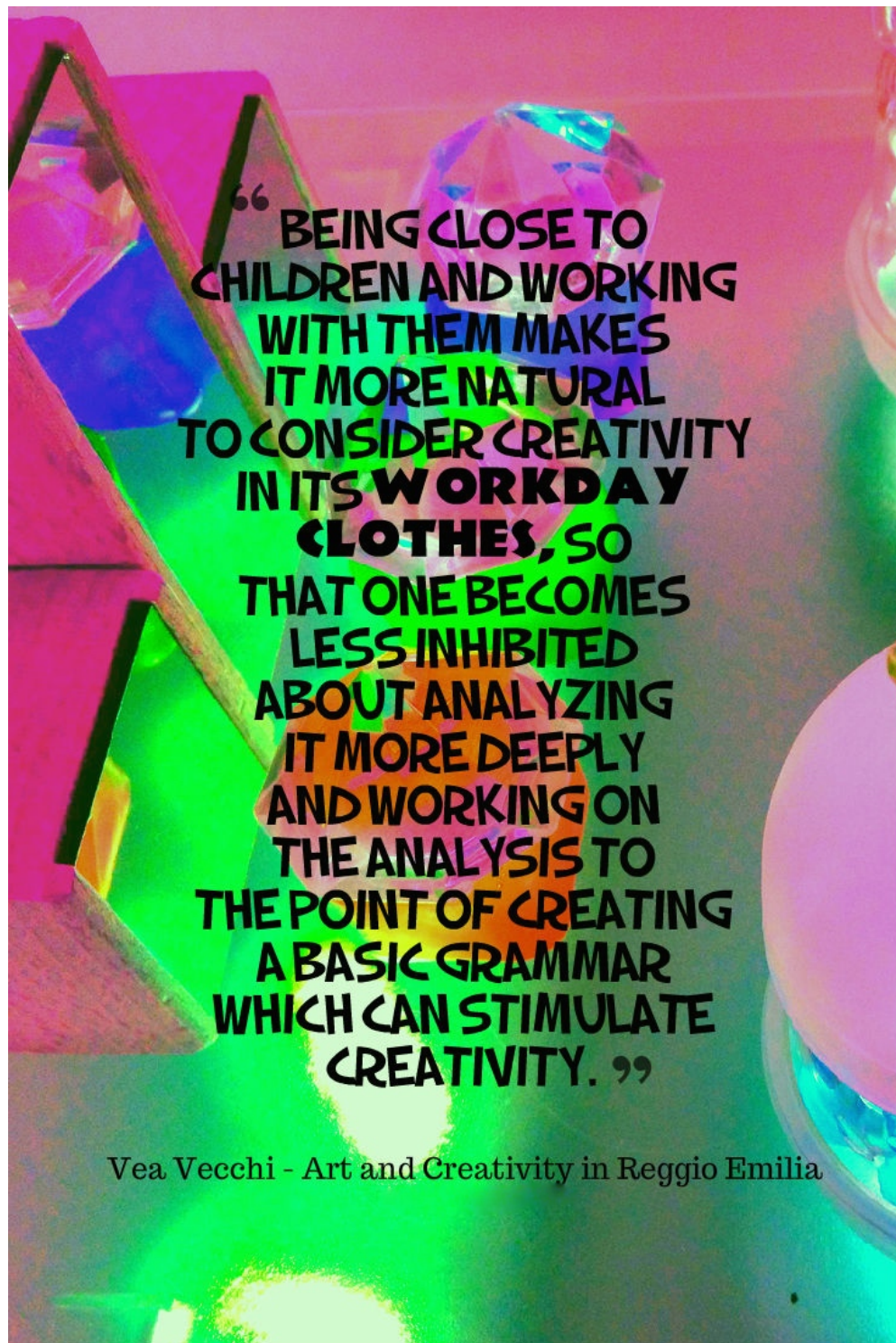
One of the highlights of my two visits to Reggio Emilia was spending time in the Loris Malaguzzi International Centre (<http://www.reggiochildren.it/centro-internazionale-loris-malaguzzi/?lang=en>). The centre, dedicated in 2005 to the memory of Malaguzzi, was vast and impressive when I toured it. It houses workshops, laboratories, a child care centre, and a primary school. Juxtaposing my experience in Reggio visiting the very first centre built by the hands of determined parents with my visit to this expansive and beautiful edifice made it clear why this is called "the centre of the possible." The pre-primary schools of Reggio Emilia grew out of the ashes of almost total

devastation following the Second World War. This was the context for the transformation that occurred for the children and teachers of Reggio Emilia. Context should not limit possibilities. Context does not erect a wall from which we cannot see past.

Beyond the wall there is always a beyond.

Loris Malaguzzi

Thinking of the wall metaphor is a way to spark creativity. Metaphors are a creative way to think deeply and they are also a reflective practice tool for teachers (http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/download/nwp_file/649/Metaphor.pdf?x-r=pcfile_d). Children are inspiring users of metaphors (<http://www.bankstreet.edu/occasional-paper-series/31/part-iii/theorising-through-visual-verbal-metaphors/>). Malaguzzi understood the significance of the metaphor. The wall metaphor is especially worth considering as the idea of getting over a wall or seeing over a wall is a way to advance your journey as a Reggio inspired educator. According to Malaguzzi there is a wall, which prevents us from going beyond what we know. When the Hundred Languages of Children Exhibit (<http://www.reggiochildren.it/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/rechild05.pdf%20>) was in its first incarnation, it was called "When the Eye Jumps Over the Wall." According to Malaguzzi inside the title there was a message "that the eye, when it looks beyond the wall of habit, of custom, of the normal, of the non-surprise, of assumed security", will find the possible. When the wall of old habits and customs is broken down the quest for the possible can begin. According to Malaguzzi the obstacle to overcome to see beyond the wall is the accepted image of the child. If education is seen as just a service offered to young children, it subjugates the child within a message that their voice need not be heard. The aim of the exhibit for Malaguzzi was to give "shape and vitality to research that vanquishes silence, that affords both children and adults a way to explore, to construct theories and ideas . . ." We can choose to erect the wall that Malaguzzi calls the wall of the "finite" when our responses to curriculum become habituated and left unquestioned, the result is the continuation of dubious practice and a limited view of what is beyond the wall (Kashin, 2009). Creativity is the lens, which can help us, see beyond the wall. When we see creativity in its workday clothes, as Veia Vecchi reminds us, it is something that becomes part of our everyday experiences.



(<https://tecibresearch.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/veia-vecchi-on-creativity.jpg>).

Veia Vecchi on Creativity

According to Fawcett & Hay, 2004 (<http://217.35.77.12/archive/England/papers/education/pdfs/j.1476-8070.2004.00403.x.pdf>) the word 'creativity' is often used loosely and with varying meaning but favour thinking of creativity as a way of understanding in all children and not viewing it as the preserve of a few talented individuals. Creativity is at the heart of young children's early learning.

Creativity should not be considered a separate mental faculty but a characteristic of our way of thinking, knowing and making choices.

Loris Malaguzzi

With regard to creativity Loris Malaguzzi wrote: ‘Once children are helped to perceive themselves as authors or inventors, once they are helped to discover the pleasures of inquiry, their motivation and interest explode.’ But he adds a warning ‘To disappoint the children deprives them of possibilities that no exhortation can arouse in later years’’. Carlina Rinaldi in Creativity, Shared Meaning, and Relationships (http://www.wested.org/online_pubs/ccfs-06-01-chapter4.pdf) tells us that the intention on the part of children to produce questions and search for answers is the genesis of creativity. It is the behaviour the teacher exhibits toward the child and their creative process can either dampen or support creativity.

When teachers “open up” to children and really listen to the child’s creations, not only in the physical sense but also in the metaphorical sense, they endorse creativity. They listen and give value to differences and make room for the points of view of others. Listening is the foundation of every learning relationship. Unfortunately, there are schools that do not listen in this way because they have a curriculum to follow and they try to correct “mistakes” immediately — to provide quick solutions to a problem and not give children the time to find their own solutions. What gets lost is creativity. Children are biologically predisposed to communicate and establish relationships; this is why we must always give them plentiful opportunities to represent their mental images and to be able to represent them to others. Teachers must realize not only that the other is indispensable to the child’s developing sense of identity but also that learning with others generates pleasure in the group and makes the group become the place of learning. This, then, is the revolution that we have to put into place in child care. Through “relational creativity” children develop a natural sensitivity toward creating ideas, appreciate and co-develop ideas with others, and share common meaning. This is why I consider the learning process to be a creative process.

Carlina Rinaldi

I have enjoyed exploring the topic of creativity in this post and previously in conjunction to thoughts on curiosity (<https://tecribresearch.wordpress.com/2015/03/17/the-curiosity-creativity-connection-reflections-on-the-motivation-to-learn/%20>). I am particularly inspired and moved by the words of Malaguzzi, Rinaldi and Vecchi and continually encouraged by the work of Reggio inspired educators sharing images of making learning and creativity visible in their own contexts. They have seen beyond the wall to what is possible, for themselves and children. I thank them for giving me a glimpse of the creative possibilities of seeing beyond.

10 thoughts on “Creativity and 21st Century Teaching and Learning: Inspiration from Reggio Emilia”

1. Heather says:

April 11, 2015 at 11:51 am

It is only now, that I am nearing retirement from teaching Kindergarten within the Public School system, that my “eye is looking beyond the wall of habit” (I love the way that you have explained this, as it reflects how I see my role as a kindergarten teacher). It is only within the last three or four years that I have become aware of the Reggio approach and now, nothing is the same.

I appreciate your writing and the fact that I can follow your articles so easily through email. Thank you for continuing to inspire me!

Reply

2. dianekashin says:

April 11, 2015 at 11:56 am

Thank you Heather! What a lovely comment. I think we can train our eyes to see beyond the wall of habit by being critical and reflective educators. How wonderful for you that you have reached this point on your journey before you retire. Thank you for following the blog 😊 😊

Reply

3. **Gai Lindsay says:**

April 12, 2015 at 6:28 pm

Dear Diane, Thanks for your article. My thesis is examining the visual art beliefs of early childhood educators and referencing the underpinning philosophy in Reggio Emilia as part of my conceptual framework. I would very much like to track down the source of the quote you shared from Malaguzzi' – To disappoint the children deprives them of possibilities that no exhortation can arouse in later years"". Thanks for any direction you can provide.

Gai Lindsay

Reply

dianekashin says:

April 12, 2015 at 6:44 pm

Hi Gal! Sounds like a wonderful thesis topic ... the source for the quote is the 100 Languages of Children by Edwards, Gandini and Forman.

Reply

Gai Lindsay says:

April 12, 2015 at 7:30 pm

Thanks – I will track it down. I have both the 2nd and 3rd editions but that quote was not as familiar to me. I assume it is in the chapter where Gandini interviewed Malaguzzi?

4. **dianekashin says:**

April 12, 2015 at 7:59 pm

Hi Gai ... I actually found the quote in this article which attributes it to the chapter where Lella interviews Malaguzzi <http://217.35.77.12/archive/England/papers/education/pdfs/j.1476-8070.2004.00403.x.pdf> but haven't double checked my copy of the book.

Reply

Gai Lindsay says:

April 12, 2015 at 8:04 pm

Thanks so much Diane. I will follow through on that lead. May I ask where you work / are based? – Sounds like we are very much interested in the same issues and passions and further collaborations may be fruitful for us both?

Reply

dianekashin says:

April 12, 2015 at 8:40 pm

I'm in Ontario, Canada. I teach early childhood studies at Ryerson university. I completed my doctoral dissertation a few years back. I am always interested in collaboration! And you?

Gai Lindsay says:

April 12, 2015 at 8:46 pm

I'm at the University of Wollongong in NSW, Australia. I also teach into the Early Years degree – while pulling together the articles and chapters for the thesis.

My uni e-mail is glindsay@uow.edu.au and I am also on Linked in and Academia.

I wonder if you have heard of the International Art in Early Childhood Association? Our biannual conference is in Hong Kong this June – would be great to have a Canadian cohort there!

dianekashin says:

April 12, 2015 at 8:49 pm

I'll send you an email 😊

WPExplorer.