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**Books, Stories, and the Imagination at ‘The Nursery Rhyme’:
A Qualitative Case Study of the Learning Environment at an Italian Preschool***

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Abstract

The progressive educational systems of some regions of Italy are becoming increasingly recognized by educators and researchers (including those from North America) seeking insight from the international community into diverse educational approaches. This paper represents a case study of Filastrocca (“Nursery Rhyme”), a preschool in the Tuscan city of Pistoia. Filastrocca proclaims a special mission related to books, storytelling, and the imagination, and appears to offer a unique environment that supports children’s active and enthusiastic engagement in complex literacy discussions and activities. The purpose of this paper is to provide a detailed description of the learning environment for language and literacy at the preschool, present an analysis of issues/themes and offer assertions and reflections. There is an emphasis on exploring what kinds of opportunities related to books, children and their families, and in examining how the learning environment reflects the mission of the school in fostering early childhood language and literacy.

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What is the place of imagination in education? The word imagination does not appear in the government's list of "Goals 2000," nor does it turn up on lists of behavioral objectives or educational outcomes. There is no imagination curriculum or pedagogy of the imagination in our schools. Yet if, as the poet Wallace Stevens wrote, "the imagination is the power of the mind over the possibilities of things," then to neglect the imagination is also to impoverish children's worlds and to narrow their hopes.

—Herbert Kohl

In his Foreword to *The Grammar of Fantasy: An Introduction to the Art of Inventing Stories*, by Gianni Rodari, 1996, p. ix.

Filastrocca is a welcoming school that pays attention and listens to the children and seeks to promote their well-being and independence. We place trust in the children in order to gain their trust, establish an atmosphere full of respect and affection, and foster a harmonious development. Thoughts become affection; without affection there is no thought. The familiar relationships established among the children and their sharing of experiences foster a common group life that is affectionate and relaxed.

—Alga Giacomelli

Quoted in Edwards & Gandini, 2008, p. 3.

Introduction

In recent decades, educators and researchers have become increasingly interested in exploring diverse educational approaches by seeking insight from the international community, including from the progressive educational systems of some regions of Italy. The interest in Italian approaches has focused heavily on the infant-toddler centers and preschools of Reggio Emilia, in the northern Italian region of Emilia Romagna (e.g., Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 2012), but increasingly there is interest in educational practices in other cities where Italian educators, public officials, parents, and general citizens have worked together to build systems of high-quality, public services to support and serve young children and their families. The cities of Modena, Parma, Bologna, Milan, San Miniato, Trento, and Pistoia are among the cities of northern and central Italy that have earned particular recognition for their energetic efforts and success stories (e.g., Corsaro & Molinari, 2005; Gandini & Edwards, 2001; New, 2003; New, Mardell, & Robinson, 2005; Picchio, Giovannini, Mayer, & Musatti, 2012). While Reggio

Emilia continues to receive the highest level of international recognition, the other localities are also acknowledged sites of important leadership and experimentation.

For example, the central Italian city of Pistoia, in the region of Tuscany, has put forward a strong concept of the responsibility of public administration to create ways and means to enhance family participation in educational services. Pistoia has pioneered a system of diverse services and resources to reach out across the generations and segments of the city and communicate children's needs and a positive view of childhood. The public early childhood system includes traditional preschool and infant/toddler centers; part-time parent/child programs; after school enrichment classes; and *Area Bambini* ("Children's Areas") that specialize in diverse programming around domains of storytelling and oral tradition, nature and environment, computers and technology, and the visual and manual arts (Galardini, Giovannini, & Iozzelli, 1999).

This paper represents a case study of *Scuola Comunale dell'Infanzia La Filastrocca*, one of the city-run preschools in Pistoia. Filastrocca ("Nursery Rhyme") has been among the Pistoia schools and centers studied informally and formally by visitors and scholars curious about excellent practices in Italian early childhood education (e.g. Barrs, 2007; Cline et al., 2012; West, 2008). Filastrocca serves a high proportion of three- to six-year-old children who are from a neighborhood that is relatively disadvantaged socioeconomically, and it does so with what we shall assert is noteworthy spirit, focus, commitment, and continuity over time.

In this paper we shall describe the learning environment and how it invites experiences of language and literacy, under the guidance of the Filastrocca library teacher, Alga Giacomelli. Filastrocca proclaims a special mission related to "books, storytelling, and the imagination," and offers a nurturing and stimulating environment that supports young children's active and enthusiastic engagement in language and literacy. We characterize the learning environment as a whole, but place special emphasis on understanding characteristics pertaining to the language and literacy experiences and the school's self-proclaimed dedication to the fostering of imagination in children as individuals and members of their community, which includes other children, families, and the surrounding city. We will show that Filastrocca's environment promotes a community context for "emergent comprehension," that is interactions between and among children and adults that encourage children to explore possibilities and look for the meaning contained in books and environmental print (Dooley, 2011; Dooley & Matthews, 2009).

The Pistoia preschools and infant-toddler centers are a strong example of *relationship-based care and education* (Edwards & Raikes, 2002; Raikes & Edwards, 2009). We will present several key themes in the distinctive Filastrocca approach to literacy education as they are instantiated in the customary practices and interactions of adults and children of the school. We believe that the story of Filastrocca Preschool has potential to offer provocative and important insights to those interested in supporting children's early language and literacy learning as a means of empowering their capacities for success in their physical and cultural surroundings.

For the purposes of this paper, we conceptualize imagination in the terms put forward by the Italian author, Gianni Rodari (1996), in *Grammatica della Fantasia* ("The Grammar of Fantasy"), a book that has been enormously influential in Pistoia, Reggio Emilia, and many other progressive educational contexts in Italy and beyond. During the 1950s, Rodari, originally a journalist, wrote hundreds of poems, songs, stories, and novels for children that he published in different venues (Zipes, 1996). The "Grammar of Fantasy" resulted from a series of meetings held in Reggio Emilia in 1972. Rodari's premise was that children's lives are highly circumscribed by rules, routines, and traditional expectations, and therefore, if children are to grow up autonomous and creative, they must acquire methods of free exploration through actual and imaginary play and flights of fantasy that enable them to explore and master the meanings of the language and symbol systems of their culture. Imagination is a "force that enables children to put language into effect on their behalf" (Zipes, 1996, p. xx) and as such bears close resemblance to the concept of language as "tools of the mind," by Soviet psychologist, Lev Vygotsky. In a further parallel to Vygotsky, Rodari emphasized the social rather than individual context of learning and believed that imagination flourishes in a community of learners. Rodari himself proclaimed one of Vygotsky's publications on children's imagination and creativity to be a "small jewel" because it describes imagination in simple and lucid terms as a "process of the human mind," and also because it recognizes creativity as a "common capacity of all human beings" rather than just the achievement of a talented few (Rodari, 1996, p. 112). This philosophy of universal creativity has been influential in Reggio Emilia as well as Pistoia. As Loris Malaguzzi put it:

[W]e do not consider creativity sacred, we do not consider it as extraordinary but rather as likely to emerge from daily experiences. ... The more teachers are convinced that intellectual and expressive activities have both multiplying and unifying possibilities, the

more creativity favors friendly exchanges with imagination and fantasy (Malaguzzi, 2012, p. 51).

Context of the Study

Pistoia is a city of 90,000 inhabitants, located a short train ride from Florence in the region of Tuscany. It is an agricultural and industrial center and a provincial capital. Its main industries included the construction of city busses and subway cars from 1960 to 1994 that were exported also in the United States. More recently the city wealth is supported by the highly developed growing of plants and flowers exported all over Europe and the manufacture of leather and metal goods, glass, textiles, and footwear. The city rose to prominence in the 12th and 13th centuries, and its citizens made important contributions to architecture and sculpture. The Tuscan Region of Italy has been famous for centuries as a rich source of stories, folklore, and fairytales. For example, the great classic of children's literature, *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, written by Carlo Collodi in 1883, emerged from a small town near Pistoia. Most residents of Pistoia know about and are proud of the cultural heritage marked by their region's rich history.

Pistoia is known as one of the Italian cities with a premier and distinctive public early childhood education system (Gandini & Edwards, 2001). In 2010, this municipal system included ten infant centers attended by 500 children (27% of the city's children aged zero to three years); two programs located inside Area Bambini, attended by 40 children (2% of the city's children between 18 months and three years); and thirteen preschools, attended by 1165 children (68% of the city's children aged three to six years). The administrators and teachers in this system proclaim a vision that does not derive from one particular educational theory or approach. Instead, its premises lie in practice, around which all the educators build their reflections and which is the result of continual shared development built over the years and never considered to be completed.

Filastrocca Preschool opened in 1970 under the name of Fornaci ("Furnaces"), the name of the neighborhood in which it was located where there was a large factory that produced and fired bricks. This is a section of the city that contains many new and poor residents from other areas of the country and the world who are relatively disadvantaged and who may need special support with respect to acquiring and passing on to their children the skills leading to educational and economic advancement.

The Fornaci Preschool was totally renovated and enlarged in 1990 and renamed Filastrocca. To name the school, teachers invited all the children who had previously attended the school to send in names and drawings about what to call it. The name, Filastrocca, was a favorite, and *Il Mago* (“the Magician,” or “Wizard”) was chosen as a symbol of the school. Further renovations took place in 2008, including adding a balcony to the Library, or Book Laboratory. (See Appendix I, Filastrocca Floor Plan). The school’s enrollment has increased over the years, and in 2010 accommodated 119 children aged three to five years old, and their 11 teachers. The school is open from 7:30 in the morning to 4:00 in the afternoon, with the pace of the day relaxed and flowing, as is customary in Pistoia municipal preschools (see Appendix II, A Time to Grow).

Method

Research Questions

The central research question of the overall study is: *How does the learning environment at the Italian preschool Filastrocca focus on building children’s language and literacy through imaginative interaction with books and storytelling?* In this paper we consider the following four questions:

- What kinds of opportunities related to books, storytelling, and the imagination does the learning environment of Filastrocca Preschool seek to support and encourage for young children and their families?
- How does this learning environment intentionally reflect the mission of the school in fostering early childhood language and literacy?
- What underlying themes or issues emerge from gathering information about the language and literacy experiences and environmental characteristics at Filastrocca?
- What assertions can we make as we attempt to interpret these themes or issues in relation to “best literacy practices” described in North American educational research literature?

Qualitative Research Design

We viewed conducting a qualitative case study to be an appropriate methodological approach. Case study research focuses on the study of “bounded systems” (Stake, 1995). As suggested above, the selection of the case, Filastrocca Preschool, was based on a purposeful sampling strategy, specifically the selection of an exceptional, or “extreme or deviant case” that sheds

particular light on a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). In this instance, the case is “extreme” in the sense of being a *positive* exemplar of literacy education for young children in Italy. Filastrocca Preschool was noted by our Italian co-authors as providing a unique set of rich learning experiences connected with its special mission to books, storytelling, and the imagination. Case study reports provide rich, narrative description, identification of themes or issues, and assertions, and this appeared to be a suitable method for reporting findings related to the research questions we posed (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995).

Data Collection

Images, documents, data, and artifacts from Filastrocca Preschool covering the decade 2000-2010 are the focus of this research. The study was carried out by an interdisciplinary, intercultural, researcher-practitioner collaboration, led by University of Nebraska researchers (Edwards & Cline); the educational consultant to Pistoia schools (Gandini); the director of the Pistoia municipal early childhood education system (Galardini); a pedagogical coordinator (Giovannini); and the Filastrocca library teacher (Giacomelli). The University researchers compiled the images, documents, data, and artifacts for this study. Visits were made to Filastrocca Preschool by Gandini (every school year since 1978); by Edwards (1990, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2001, 2005, 2010, 2011, 2012), and by Cline (2010), with each visit consisting of several days or longer. (For past studies of Pistoia, see Gandini & Edwards, 2001; Edwards & Gandini, 2001, 2008; note that while some visits precede 2000, this paper is focused on the more recent data). A matrix displaying the documents examined for this study by source is provided in Table 1.

Data Analysis

The method of this qualitative case study will be to conduct an *environmental scan* of Filastrocca Preschool and *textual analysis*, using photos, documents, and interviews; to address the questions of this paper.

In qualitative research, data collection, data analysis and report writing are not “distinct steps.” Instead, it is more appropriate to consider a “data analysis spiral” that includes these processes as interrelated and occurring simultaneously (Creswell, 2007). The data analysis spiral for this study began circling in 2001 when Edwards and Gandini visited Filastrocca Preschool as

part of a videotape project (Edwards, Gandini, Peon-Casanova, & Danielson, 2003). The material collected during that and additional visits were not gathered with the specific purpose of answering the research questions posed for the current study. However, the video records sparked the interest of Cline and Edwards in the topic of language and literacy education in Pistoia, and this interest eventually evolved into this case study focused on the learning environment at Filastrocca. Consistent with case study procedures described by Stake (1995), we drew on multiple sources of data to develop a detailed description of the case. We coded the data, listed the codes, and looked for meaning through “direct interpretation” of single instances and “categorical aggregation” of multiple instances to identify issues. When possible, we utilized *in vivo* coding, a qualitative process in which the language used to label codes and issues reflects the participants’ actual words (Creswell, 2007). We developed interpretations and assertions based on the descriptions and issues.

Verification/Validation Strategies

Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend the use of at least three validation strategies in any qualitative study. This study utilized the strategies of prolonged engagement, triangulation, thick description, peer debriefing, and member checking. The strategy of prolonged engagement includes spending adequate time to build trust and gathering data over a period of time in order to increase the validity of the findings (Merriam, 1988; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). We also used multiple sources of data (Table 1) to substantiate interpretations, clarify different meanings, and thus triangulate the findings in this study (Stake, 1985; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). The use of thick, rich descriptions provides evidence for the transferability and interpretation of the findings (Merriam, 1988); we provide a “substantial body of uncontestable description” of the case (Stake, 1995, p. 110). Peer debriefing involves the process of exposing our claims “to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer’s mind” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308); such debriefings took place through formal presentations of the material at professional conferences. In addition, we asked another researcher (Dr. Susan Etheridge of Smith College) who has spent extensive time studying Filastrocca and other schools in Pistoia to provide her response to our descriptions and analyses. She verified the accuracy of the content of our paper. Finally, all descriptions and claims made in this study have been

extensively member-checked, a process that involves having one or more of the study participants check the accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2012), by the Italian co-authors, to strengthen validity.

The extended time span over which these data were collected may raise the issue of whether practices to be described are generally valid and applicable. Do observations collected in 2001, for example, still represent behavior or practices that would be seen in 2010? The Italian co-authors have taken responsibility for ensuring that the generalizations offered in this paper are as correct and accurate as possible, within the limitations of critical scrutiny and reflection from our various points of view. Certainly, Filastrocca Preschool is an organic institution characterized by change; new children, families, and teachers come every year into the institution, and new strategies are called for to meet child and family needs. Periodic renovations are done to the school, and the design, decoration, and function of some rooms change over time. Most importantly, knowledge has increased on the part of Pistoia educators, about children, development, and learning, allowing for evolution of details of practice. Yet, in the words of the library teacher, speaking of issues of continuity of the Filastrocca school philosophy over time, “I have learned how to enter ever more deeply into the children’s interests and their ways of thinking and feeling. But our structure and approach at the school has remained very much the same in all fundamental ways. I may be more aware of what I do, but the things I do have not changed.” We believe that a continuity of philosophy and approach has driven the design of the learning and literacy environment at Filastrocca over the time period of this study, and it is this dominant pattern that we attempt to describe in this paper.

Findings

The Environment

The entryway

(See Appendix I, School Plan, Space 1). The first thing the visitor notices when entering the school is a giant paper mache figure about ten feet tall, dressed in a flowing purple robe and wearing a pointed hat that nearly touches the ceiling. He carries a magic wand, out of which (in stories and pictures) a rainbow streams. This figure, ready to greet and welcome children and families as they come into the school, is called *Il Mago*, the Magician. A photo from 2006 displays the Magician standing next to a special book. The book is open, revealing a three-

dimensional, miniature figure of the Magician. The little figure appears to be looking at a rainbow covered with snapshots of children's faces that is flowing across the open pages; the representation evokes or symbolizes the magic of reading for children.

The character of the Magician originated from a story written by a group of students in 1990, and with the help of some parents, "brought to life" in his paper mache form for the purposes of a school project. The Magician is considered the school symbol and has been the subject of stories, songs, and art created and shared by the children over the years. One child told Alga, "I go to the wizard school, where the Magician is always there awaiting us with open arms." In school lore, he is a friendly and reassuring wizard, good at fighting dragons and witches and helping children overcome dangers. On the first day of school, one of the educators dressed in the Magician's costume gives a small present to each new child, a little pin with the Magician's portrait. Each child's photograph is taken standing next to the Magician, and what the child says on this special occasion is recorded for the family.

The wall next to the doorway, near the Magician, contains a little square window at child's height and framed in purple woodwork. This is known as the Magician's Window, and through it one can see the parking space in front of the school where parents park their cars to bring their children into the school. The window is charged with the reassuring sense of connection and continuity between home and school because there every morning children and parents say goodbye, and clusters of children gather to look for their families at the end of the day. The framing around this window and all the moldings inside the school are painted in the same rainbow hues of color (purple, pink, blue, and red) associated with the costume of the Magician and the rainbow that streams out of his wand when he is happy. This intentional use of accent colors provides a harmonious visual unity to the school.

The Horse Corner is another important area, found at one end of the entryway. The Horse Corner reflects the goal of Filastrocca educators to maintain a high level of continuity and connection with the surrounding city and community. Every year, the classroom(s) of the four-year-olds, known as the "Horses," conducts a long term study of the work of the sculptor, Marino Marini. Marini (1901-1980) is the most famous artist from Pistoia, and his large, expressive, abstract, and dramatic sculptures of horses, produced in plaster, wood, bronze, or stone, are found throughout the city and in the Marino Marini Museum. The educators of Pistoia assume that preschool children can, in their own way, understand and appreciate art and draw close to a

particular artist, or an artist's work, through their senses and imaginations. At Filastrocca, the four-year-olds make an intense study of Marino Marini, following a format that is not inflexible but rather that varies in detail from year to year, depending on the children's and teachers' interests and capabilities. Typically, the class will go around the city to discover the horses. As a preparation, each of the four-year-olds might choose a photocopy of one of the sculptures, and when they go around the city or the Marini Museum, the children search for "their" horse. After the field trips, when they have found all of their horses, they compose their own descriptions of them in words and various expressive media. They invent stories about their horses and draw, paint, sculpt, and build horses; these are compiled in individual albums for each child and family to keep at the end of the project. Photographs of the ongoing work and samples of the children's products are displayed in albums and posters in the Horse Corner, which features a large wooden horse structure. The families are drawn into this work of the children, and parents may accompany the children on the trips around the city or in their follow-up experiences.



The hallways

(Appendix I, Spaces 4, 16). Filastrocca has long, wide hallways connecting its classrooms and educational spaces. Far from being empty, these hallways are full of interesting places to linger, such as the Puppet Theater, cozy reading areas, block construction areas, and the Horse Corner.

The Puppet Theater, a feature found in most of the preschools in Pistoia, can be moved around the school at will. It is used by different groups of children to take part in shows performed by guest puppeteers, teachers, and children themselves.

The areas inviting children to stop and read, or to build and play with blocks and fantasy props such as castle walls, are features that change over the years to reflect current needs. These areas are used by children after lunch or during times of the day when they are not occupied in their own classrooms.

A platform leads up to a large window that opens up to the outdoor garden, or playground. When unlocked, children can go out the window into the playground, which contains a large wooden play structure called Castle of the Magician, paths for riding vehicles, and large grassy play areas. There are growing plants which children help the teachers to water and care for.



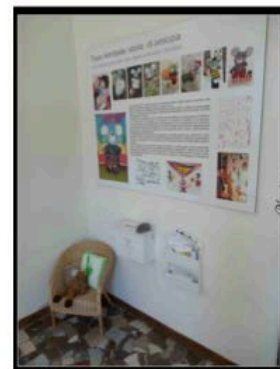
The rooms of affective reference, the children's classrooms

(Appendix I, Spaces 8, 10, 22-24). The children are organized into three or four same-age groups of about 25 children (roughly, three-, four-, and five-year-olds), and they stay together with their group for three years, looping together through the classrooms of the school. Their two teachers move with them. Each group is known by an animal name. At the start of the school year, each class chooses its name, but the traditional choices are the prevailing favorites: “Kittens” for three-year-olds, “Horses” for four-year-olds, and “Lions and Lionesses” for five-year-olds. These chosen animals can be seen here and there around the classroom, but never in stereotyped or commercial formats. For instance, every lion is a unique and creative representation, whether rendered in clay, stuffed toy, or paint; the figures contribute to the friendly, whimsical, and familiar atmosphere. The classrooms also reflect the identities of the children, in the photographs on the attendance poster, the mirrors placed around the play centers, and their names on the crafts they have made. The classrooms always contain evidence of projects and the children's ongoing work. For example, the four-year-olds' classroom may contain prints of paintings by the artist, Marino Marini, that children have discussed, as well as documentation of other projects exploring conceptual themes through interaction with books and expressive materials. All of the classroom spaces are large and spacious, with tile floors, area rugs, high ceilings, and many windows.

The three-year-old classroom has certain features that help the youngest children begin to feel part of the class and of their new school, and to tell stories to one another. For example, at a meeting with parents before the start of school, the teachers give each set of parents a box with the request that the family decorates it at home and brings it back the first day. These boxes reside in a cozy little closet outside the classroom and accessible to the children. When teachers peer into these boxes, they see that they contain little objects and treasures that children have brought from home—a doll, car, ribbon, or book. From the first days of class, children are allowed to go out and get these objects to share with their companions. Soon the boxes become a place to put things the children find and make: a piece of colored paper, a drawing made for their mother, the first presents from friends. Often when children arrive at school they have things to put in the box and about which to tell their friends. In this way, the cozy closet and personal boxes promote the goals of peer exchange and communication.

Furthermore, on the first day of school, the three-year-old children meet a puppet character named Hannibal Mouse, who typically becomes quite important to them. Hannibal appears on the hand of a teacher as the children sit around the circle of small chairs, where morning meeting is held every day and where teachers invite children to talk and exchange stories about many matters, including Hannibal Mouse and other imaginary friends. Hannibal is a little grey stuffed hand puppet who wears clothes made by children and parents. Speaking through the teacher, Hannibal tells stories of his daily life, occasional misfortunes, and many adventures with his wife, Caroline. The teachers use this puppet to create moments of joy, surprise, and reassurance, and to draw out shy and fearful children, who are often more willing to speak to Hannibal than to other people.

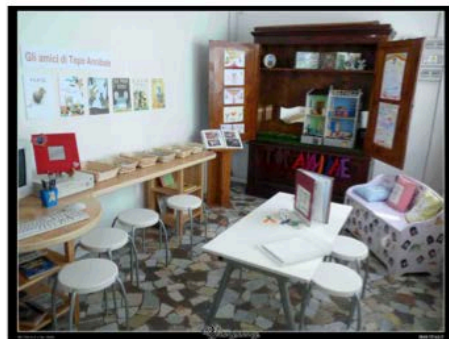
From the first day of school, Hannibal appears at a routine time during morning group meeting. He does not dominate or overwhelm the curriculum but is a special part of it, from the children's point of view. Hannibal knows the names of the children and their brothers and sisters, and he becomes a friend who is part of the collective memory of the group and who is able to involve the children emotionally. The fantasy life of many children and families is enriched by Hannibal, and children come to school saying they have found traces, such as "the house of Hannibal" in the woods, in a trunk, or in a bush. They enlist their parents to make clothes and presents for Hannibal and send him notes (at first dictated by the children, but later in their own writing). In the three-year-olds' classroom, there are photos and drawings of Hannibal to be seen, and on the wall there is a documentation poster labeled *Hannibal Mouse: Stories of Friendship* over a pair of communication boxes for sending and receiving letters (parents sometimes write notes to their children, "from Hannibal").



Special and multipurpose spaces

(Appendix 1, Spaces 9, 13-15, 17, 18, 25). Interest in Hannibal is not confined to the three-year-olds' classroom. Older children maintain their interest in him, which is supported in progressively more mature ways. Off the main entrance hall is a small room dedicated to Hannibal Mouse, an elaborate writing center with a computer, desk and tables with stools, and baskets with writing tools. On the wall above is a display of covers of mouse story books (under a banner, *The Friends of Hannibal Mouse*), nearby a pedestal bearing a photo album documenting various Hannibal Mouse encounters at school, and a beautiful, old-fashioned cabinet containing artifacts (such as a large doll house) and drawings by children. On a table sit writing materials and a half-finished book, inviting children to add and contribute to a collective work. On the wall is seen a drawing of the Writing Center, as seen through the eyes of one of the children. All of this is evidence of a collective imaginary world which is shared by a whole school community and which promotes goals of language and literacy, as well as storytelling and the imagination.

Other rooms, smaller than classrooms, provide opportunities for children from any classroom to come in small groups. One room invites movement activity. Another offers space to investigate creative and artistic materials and learn specific techniques, for example, of painting. There is a room outfitted like a Little House where a small group of children can engage in fantasy and role play using many appealing props recognizable from real life. Another room is a mysterious and fascinating place containing many of the props (cauldrons, cloaks, witches' hats, dragon masks) that are relicts of past dramatic performances and can be used by children in small groups to invent and act out stories containing magical elements.



Perhaps the most dramatic of the special spaces invites children into explorations of light and shadow, usually in the presence of a teacher. The room has curtained windows and can be partially darkened; the floor is covered in a restful blue carpet and throw pillows. On a stand rests an overhead projector, and accessible containers full of pieces of transparent paper and shadow puppets children have made, representing people, animals, and objects from real life and imaginary stories. Children use the materials to create dramatic narratives on the wall, perhaps to act out their wishes or fears. In this space, children may also use a slide projector to review photos of experiences they have had, and then recombine these images in imaginative ways. On the walls hang teacher and child co-constructed booklets documenting past experiences that have taken place in this room, and children and teachers use these for discussion as they launch their next experiences.

The library, or book laboratory

(Appendix I, Space 27). The library, or book laboratory, has been functioning at Filastrocca since about 1994. This library was designed by the original library teacher (Alga Giacomelli, who retired in 2011). The library teacher manages the library and implements the curriculum that includes the invention of stories and the design and illustration of books by children. The library's official name is *Sfogliando l'Arcobaleno*, or *Paging (Leafing) through the Rainbow*, but the children refer to it as the Rainbow Library. This motif is a strong image for the children; as one told Alga, "The Rainbow is like us. We are all different colors, but then together, we are all one big library." The rainbow motif (associated with the wand of the Magician) is carried over to the brightly colored bookshelves that line the room (used to identify the categories of books), and other visible traces throughout the space. The book shelves are thought of as "houses" for the books, and the decorative scheme, like most of the design and organizational elements of the library, was suggested by children. For example, they wanted openings in the bookshelves so they could look through and see their friends. Child-sized chairs arranged in a circle serve as a place for the library teacher and the children to gather and discuss books. A silvery striped disco ball hangs from the center of the ceiling over the rainbow circle, and refracts light in a dazzling way that shoots color around the upper reaches of the room.

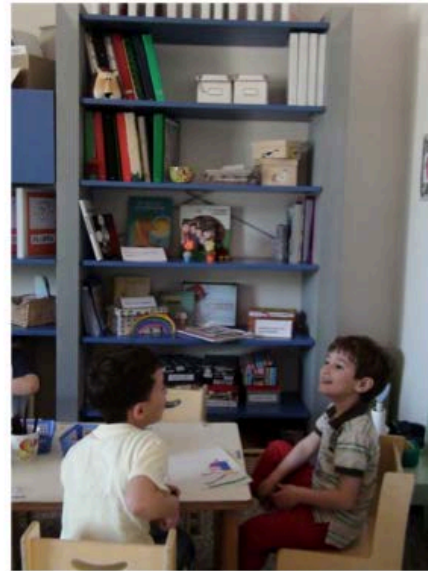
A constructed figure with red string hair and a giant book-pile body (*La Donna del Libri*, or the "Book Lady") stands in one corner. This figure was constructed from piles of books

donated by children's parents. Red string hair frames her face, which is also a book that has been painted by the children. This Donna is not the original version. An older photo shows the original Book Lady standing with the children's sketched plans set at her feet. That first construction was born from a conversation among children about what the lady (Biblioteca Arcobaleno) could look like. Their musings were prompted from the sounds of the library's name interpreted as a person's name: Biblioteca ("Library," feminine ending, *a*) as her first name and Arcobaleno ("Rainbow") as her last name. The two photos of different versions of the Book Lady suggest how different cohorts of children were inspired to imaginatively co-create their vision of their beloved library as a friendly, perhaps kindly, woman.



Many carefully prepared areas invite book browsing, bookmaking, painting and drawing, and fantasy or symbolic play. The library thus contains not only books but also the creative materials (resources for designing their own book covers and pages) and the "characters" (dolls, puppets, toys) that come out of the books. Arrangements, props, and resources change over the course of time, but retain a thematic continuity. Several shelves display child-made books, such as a book telling a story about the Magician, indicating his enduring saliency in the children's collective emotional life. Documentation panels display photographs and children's products, with explanatory text, of past projects related to books, storytelling, and dramatic enactments. At one end of the room, steps lead up to a balcony with a high wall from which a child can peer out over the whole Library. This, again, was an idea contributed by the children, along with the plan

to introduce arches, a stone floor, and a bell tower, like the central piazza of Pistoia. Painted wooden boards the colors of the rainbow make up the wall of the balcony, and the balcony area is wide enough to contain several play areas and little rooms with toys and props (such as a large castle) that invite individual or small group play and fantasy.



The Rainbow Library is used by all of the children in the school, in groups, at different times and in different ways, and becomes well-known to their families, as well. However, it is the Lions, the oldest classroom (five- to six-year-olds) who feel responsible for it and who help manage it. It is these older children who sort the books at the beginning of each year and who place them in color-coded “houses,” on the book shelves. The classification for shelving was also invented by the children (“Red” for scary books, “Orange” for books about toys, “Yellow” for animals, “Green” for the woods, “Blue” for water, “Mauve” for magic, and “Purple” for culture and diversity). The oldest children also are in charge of assisting the library teacher in running the book lending program, which depends on a user-friendly system of “reader response” and check-outs guided by a few simple rules. The reader responses involve a grading scale invented by the children, with red hearts (from one to five) given to books the reader liked, and black hearts (one to five) given to books that were disliked. The rules to manage the library arise from discussion with the children and are printed on a sign for all to see that is also contained in the Parent Handbook (Comune di Pistoia, 2004; see Table 1). Here is the 2004 version of the Rules:

- On Friday you borrow a book.
- On Monday you return the book.
- At home you read it with your dad, your mom, your grandma. . .
- You take care of the book, you put it away on a shelf and you read it, you don’t throw it in the air, you don’t throw it on the floor, you don’t tear the pages, you don’t write on it, you don’t argue with your little brother over the book.
- You look at the pictures with your mom and dad and they read the words to you.
- If you don’t return the book on Monday, you do not borrow a book that Friday and you return the book as soon as possible.

Children come in classroom sub-groups to the Library about once a week. The meeting usually begins with a ritual where two children have their turn to wear a heart sticker that signifies friendship and happiness for being together and that distinguishes them for the day. Their role is to help the other children and to stamp a red heart on the others’ hands, to let their parents know they have been to the Library that day. Once the children arrive, they sit in a circle and discuss one or more books, and then scatter to different corners of the Library to work on books they are making, or to invent next stages of stories they act out in dramatic play using little boxes of props containing all of the elements of a story, or engage in other activities planned by

the teachers. Re-presenting stories they have just heard allows children to practice the vocabulary and also allows teachers to assess what children did and did not understand about the story.

Besides the book lending program, the Library is involved in many other initiatives, including preparation of lists of books most preferred by the children to be distributed to the parents, evenings held at the school to discuss and debate the importance of books in children's lives, publication of articles and cards on the theme of books, and initiatives and exchanges that involve other schools.

Analysis of Issues/Themes

Rediscovering and preserving traditions

The Tuscan Region of Italy has for centuries been a major source of stories such as folklore and fairytales, and many residents from Pistoia share this cultural heritage marked by their region's rich history. This regional history serves as a backdrop for Filastrocca preschool and is reflected in Filastrocca's decades-old initiative that involves grandparents and families helping to collect, share, and preserve nursery rhymes, traditional tales, and local games of the region. The focus is not limited to the history of Tuscany, however. More recently, the educational project has been extended to encourage Muslim families in the preschool community (a population that is growing as a result of immigration) to collect and share traditional stories from their own culture. Filastrocca serves a large proportion of children from economically and socially disadvantaged families who may have limited experience with literary products and practices of contemporary mainstream Italy. The Rainbow Library represents a systematic effort by the school to encourage families' involvement in their children's education even if their experiences with books is limited. It has offered a special opportunity, "[For the families] To bring something that they had" and give it back to the next generation, enriched with new meaning (Giacomelli, 2006 Professional Public Lecture, see Table 1).

The booklet, *First Days at Filastrocca* (Comune di Pistoia, 2001, see Table 1), created to provide families with an explanation of what they should expect for their children as they transition into the preschool, explains to parents that storytelling is an integral part of preschool activities and encourages families to share stories at home. The booklet describes a school custom in which the children enjoy listening to a traditional Italian folktale, *The Crystal Rooster*, told by the teachers with the assistance of little finger puppets (made especially for

this purpose). The booklet also provides a written version the tale for families to share at home.

“The many aspects of storytelling”

The emphasis on storytelling at Filastrocca appears to reflect a value on a particular and ancient cultural art form, as well as a view that the sharing of stories affords many language and literacy opportunities. An interview with the library teacher provided an extensive description of what she called the “many aspects of storytelling.”

Storytelling is something that in our school has been going on for a long time. There are many reasons for it. One of them is to help the children in their capacity to listen and understand. The kids know these stories well, and they also tell them at home, even though they are sometimes long and difficult stories with a lot of characters. And there is a stimulus to listen and retell the story and therefore also serves as a stimulus to tell stories about experiences of their own. So there are many aspects to this storytelling. One of them is this moment of tranquility in which there is also contact with an adult. Or also there are times when telling a story serves as a beginning to an activity, so for instance, as a stimulus to draw characters and represent them. It's also like a coming together, a way to involve the parents, because many times children ask parents to give them stories to bring to school. Or even sometimes to invite grandparents to come into the school to tell stories. So, it's also a way to connect with home because a child hears a story told at home by parent or grandparent and then hears the same story told here by a teacher. So there are many aspects to the storytelling (Giacomelli, 2001 Recorded Interview).

This description illustrates the wide range of functions attributed to reading. These include social, emotional, and learning goals. Story-telling is described as an opportunity for adults and children to connect, for children to experience “tranquility,” and a way to encourage continuity between the home and school environment.

The book as a “pleasure object”

Because of the centrality of the Rainbow Library to the mission of the school, books take on a special emotional value at Filastrocca. In an interview, the library teachers described books in terms of their affective power and potential for bringing children and parents together:

For sure, we began with the idea that kids at home should have something at home that came from school. So, we found that the best thing was the book ... something from the school that they take home that helps unite the kids with their parents. Because reading at home with the parents is really a special time (Giacomelli, 2001 Recorded Interview).

Books are almost personified, as objects of affection and pleasure:

Above all, the book we thought is an interesting friend. Something that can unite the children. [...] a friend who helps us to get near, who in the long run, they [the children] think is more of a pleasure object than a duty (Giacomelli, 2001 Recorded Interview).

Videotaped observations (collected 2001) of the library teacher and a group of preschoolers reading and discussing *The Very Busy Spider*, a segment of which appears in Appendix III, seemed to indeed point to the book and activity as a source of pleasure. Children smiled and laughed as the teacher animatedly read the text and used humorous, high pitched voices for the animals' dialogue. The children excitedly contributed comments and asked and answered questions. They eagerly participated in making their own “spider thread” out of saliva. They also enthusiastically acted out the making of spider webs, circling their index fingers in the air to show how the spider first makes her web with “small, small, small” circles and then “big, big, big” circles.

Literacy: Sharing the community

Teachers provide many occasions for children to come to know, feel part of, and represent the beloved piazzas, buildings, parks, and artworks of their community. One example is the annual long term study in which the four-year-old children (“Horses”) engage in an intense exploration of the work of the locally esteemed artist, Marino Marini, as described earlier. This project provides opportunities for rich interactions with language and literacy. Beyond this, we suggest,

the project involves young children in authentic cultural discourse and experiments with literacy that connect them to their community.

Magical atmosphere

The name of the school and character of the Magician, and his arch enemy, the Black Witch, evoke the magical atmosphere and the fiction characters with whom the children interact. They remind anyone entering the school of the work done throughout the years with the grandparents and the families, revisiting, recreating, and reenacting imaginative stories, often containing magical elements. The puppet friends, such as Hannibal Mouse, also contribute to and represent Filastrocca's magical atmosphere.

The Parent Handbook (Comune di Pistoia, 2004) includes quotations from former students about what they remember most from their preschool years. One individual reminisced about the Rainbow Library: "The magic room! Surely the magic room with its treasures, characters and formulas that invited them to play with the stories. I'm back as a 'witch' to find again the atmosphere of certain magic moments." A parent recounted that her youngest child who attended Filastrocca had more imagination and was more open minded than the family's older children who had different educational experiences..

Assertions, Reflections, and Conclusions

Filastrocca seeks to be a "welcoming" school that pays attention to the needs of children and seeks to promote their total well-being while maintaining a specific focus on books, storytelling, and the imagination. The educators use the physical environment, games, daily routines, rituals, affectionate interactions with school personnel, and dramatic encounters with imaginary friends like the Magician, to gain children's trust and establish an atmosphere full of confidence and respect, in order to foster a harmonious development. The familiar relationships established among the children and their sharing of experiences foster a common group life that is affectionate and relaxed, yet stimulating and involving to children. Furthermore, from the first encounter, the school also introduces the parents and families to the way of life inside the school so that they can actively participate with consciousness.

The school environment embodies the philosophy of the school and helps it convey its messages (West, 2008). For instance, the spaces confirm and promote a sense of belonging and

shared purpose to explore books and stories. The hallways, classrooms, and special spaces such as the Room of Light, are evocative places full of little signs of the children and documentations relating their encounters with the world of books, storytelling, and the imagination. The spaces speak about the children and invite them to view themselves and their peers and become self-aware. They also reflect the children's images through their self-portraits and stories that maintain and reinforce their unique characteristics. In Alga's terminology, they are "shelter" spaces that reinforce a sense of belonging, but they are not closed. Their permeability promotes exploration and adventures outside the classroom and welcomes others to come in. They foster learning that is not instrumental nor stereotyped, and development that is integrated across cognitive, emotional, and social levels.

The school environment conveys many messages combining words and images about the value for positive relationships between adults and children. These promote emotional goals as well as language and literacy. For example, several banners containing the word "friends" suggest that friendship is an important experience in the life of children. The design of different spaces in the school promotes the activity, competence, autonomy of peer groups, and children's desires to be together and make new discoveries in the company of friends. The presence of puppet characters—the Magician, Hannibal Mouse, and others—are not there simply to be cute but rather to invite children to explore their thoughts and emotions through oral and written discourse.

It is clear that Filastrocca Preschool has many of the features that North Americans commonly look for in a "literacy-rich environment." In addition to having a plentiful supply of books and pictures, the classrooms are rich in environmental print (e.g., Cronin, Farrell, & Delaney, 1999) with many literacy props for dramatic play (Justice & Pullen, 2003; Neuman & Roskos, 1993) that allow children to recreate stories they have heard and imaginatively invent their own. The children have access to writing materials and tools of all kinds, as well as tools that promote communication, such as message boards and mail boxes, and there are display areas and containers to share and store the children's work. The walls document how teachers take advantage of both planned instructional times and teachable moments to hold extended conversations which provide children with new information and vocabulary and help them think about things beyond the immediate here and now, skills relevant for the demands of early literacy activities (Snow, Tabors, & Dickinson, 2001). In classrooms and the Library, the

children participate in interactive book reading (Mol, Bus, & de Jong, 2009); the school staff encourages parents to share books with their children at home (Bus, Van Ijzendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995), and children create many books of their own. All these opportunities combine to promote the children's concept and language development and their readiness for primary school.

Beyond all these expected features of the literacy-rich environment, however, there is also something more. While the use of puppets, book lending, and storytelling are by no means unique to Filastrocca, they are combined in an innovative and unique way to create a coherent, legible school environment. Visitors to Filastrocca Preschool are struck by the special emphasis on the imagination of children that gives a beautiful and unique flavor, a flair and vibrancy, to their approach to literacy. The educators have chosen to emphasize a social, collective dimension to children's creativity that involves the surrounding community and integrates the traditions of the region, while downplaying a more academic focus on skills, which they believe would be rigid and restrictive. The learning environment of Filastrocca embodies the idea that imagination and a collective creativity give the possibility of a very intense and personal communication among children and between children and adults in the development of language and literacy. Filastrocca's environment is responsive to Dooley and Matthews' (2009) assertion that the role of meaning making, or comprehension, in children's literacy development is underemphasized among researchers and in practice. As part of their model of "emergent comprehension," they describe interactions with caregivers and peers as the context in which children learn to also interact with objects, including books, and make meaning. It is through these shared experiences over time that children come to expect text to have purpose and meaning (Dooley, 2011). Consistent with Dooley and Matthews' (2009) suggestions, Filastrocca teachers adopt an approach to supporting children's literacy development that focuses not on basic skill (e.g., decoding) preparation but emphasizes the role of meaning making through creative activity in the context of relationships.

What insight might North American early childhood educators gain from Filastrocca Preschool? We view adding a sense of magic and imagination as a way to flavor and enrich most any language and literacy environment. However, we also suggest that Filastrocca might serve as an inspiration for educators to "rediscover" the stories and histories of their own towns, cities, and regions, and the traces in memory and tradition of both their native and immigrant

families, celebrating the possible diversity in traditions. Educators could dig into the historical and cultural storehouses of their own families and communities as vehicles for implementing innovative instructional practices in the same way that Filastrocca Preschool has intentionally used storytelling traditions as a vehicle for providing language and literacy experiences. Offering children the opportunity to share in, and therefore construct meaning from, these collective creative experiences has the potential to serve as an impetus for their language and literacy development, their sustained love of books and imaginative processes.

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Table 1*Data Sources and Type of Information*

| Information/Source | Description | Date Collected or Created |
|---------------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| Interviews | Recorded Interviews with Giacomelli | 2001, 2010 |
| | Recorded Interviews with Galardini and Giovannini | 2001 |
| | Recorded Interview with Filastrocca family, the Burchiettis | 2001 |
| Classroom Observation | 133-minute videotaped library observation | 2001 |
| Documents | Booklet for parents, <i>First Days at Filastrocca</i> | 2001, 2010 |
| | Filastrocca Handbook for Parents | 2004 |
| | Professional Public Lecture by Giacomelli: <i>To recognize others and oneself: The school as a space of identity</i> | 2006 |
| | Professional Public Lecture by Giacomelli: <i>Encounter with letters and writing, across books and the imagination</i> | 2010 |
| | Brochure (describing the school) | 2010 |
| | Booklet, <i>Le Storie di Topo Annibale (The Stories of Hannibal Mouse)</i> , with introduction by Giacomelli. | 2009 |
| | Booklet, <i>Le Parole dei Grandi (Words of the Big Children)</i> | 2007/2008 |
| Artifacts | Pictures/videos of classroom artifacts, puppets, toys, and wall displays | 2001, 2008, 2010 |

Appendix I. Floor Plan of Filastrocca

Plan of Filastrocca Preschool, 2009



Plan of Filastrocca Preschool, 2009

- 1 Entryway (including the figure of the Magician, Magic Window, and Horse Corner)
- 2 Children's cubby area for taking off and storing clothes, personal possessions
- 3 Adults' dressing area for removing and storing clothes, personal possessions
- 4 Hallway
- 5 Storage
- 6 Kitchen
- 7 Storage
- 8 Classroom of the four-year-olds
- 9 Multipurpose space
- 10 Classroom of the three-year-olds
- 11 Restroom for children
- 12 Restroom for adults
- 13 Special space—Symbolic play
- 14 Special space—Exploration of light
- 15 Special space—Constructive play
- 16 Hallway and multipurpose space (including the platform with window to the outside)
- 17 Special space—Motor activity
- 18 Special space—Expressive activity
- 19 Teachers' room
- 20 Restroom for children
- 21 Restroom for adults
- 22 Classroom/eating area (could serve four- or five-year-olds)
- 23 Classroom/eating area (could serve four- or five-year-olds)
- 24 Classroom of the five-year-olds
- 25 Special space—Hannibal Mouse—Writing and dramatic play
- 26 Changing area for the youngest children who still wear diapers
- 27 Rainbow Library—the book laboratory
- 28 Restroom for children
- 29 Restroom for adults
- 30 Storage

NOTES: The designation of spaces in Filastrocca Preschool is somewhat fluid and undergoes change from year to year, depending, for example, on the number and age distribution of children and on the educational preferences of the teachers.

Located inside the three wings of the preschool is a large outdoor courtyard with trees, garden, play structures, and open spaces, where all groups of children play. On the fourth side of the rectangle (indicated by hatch marks) is a meeting facility that belongs to the city educational administration; it is used for professional development gatherings by various groups.

Appendix II. An Example of a Typical Day for Preschool Children

7:30 - 8:30 a.m. Welcoming and free play, with one teacher present for each age group in a room organized for play for the three-, four-, and five-year-olds.

9:00 - 9:30 a.m. Breakfast in the home classrooms, with the children taking turns to be the “waiters” who hand around the dishes and the food bowls from the serving cart.

9:30 - 10:00 a.m. Group play and circle time to see “who is here.” Reading of notes from the Daily Diary and adding new notes.

10:00 - 11:30 a.m. Specific activities connected with the current projects taking place in the home classrooms and the rooms organized for specific activity centers.

11:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. Clean up; group meetings to talk about the morning that is finishing; hand washing and toileting.

12:00 - 1:00 p.m. Lunch in the home classrooms.

1:00 - 1:30 p.m. Free play and/or circle time to talk together or tell a story.

1:30 - 2:00 p.m. Designated groups of children go to the Rainbow Library.

1:30 - 3:00 p.m. Rest time for children aged three- and four-years-old who did not go home after lunch.

1:30 - 2:30 p.m. Listening to music, telling of fairy tales, quiet play, and other activities for five-year-old children.

2:30 - 4:00 p.m. Activities in the home classroom, hall, and painting room for the five-year-old children.

3:00 - 4:00 p.m. Free play in small groups in the hall and in the painting room, for children three- and four-years-old.

Appendix III

Segment of Class Reading and Discussing *The Very Busy Spider*

Alga and her class of preschoolers at Filastrocca Preschool are gathered in a circle reading and discussing the “The Very Quiet Spider” by Eric Carle. The group is composed of the oldest children (“Lions”) aged five- to six-years-old. After Alga finishes reading the text about the spider on the first page, Antonio spontaneously asks, “Why does he get stuck like that?” “Do you remember Antonio? Let’s show them we can make a thread,” Alga prompts. Antonio and several other children put their hands to their mouths, collecting saliva between their thumbs and pointer fingers. Once they have enough saliva, they hold out their hands, displaying their ability to create a thin “threads” of saliva that strings between their thumbs and pointer fingers. (Based on their quick responses to the teacher’s request to make spider web threads, it would appear that these children have done this before!). The children smile and laugh as they make their own spider web thread. The children are still collecting saliva between their fingers when Alga says, “But Ugo was saying something important. He was saying that the spider’s saliva is a special saliva. Right? Tell us why it is a special saliva.” “Because we can’t do what a spider does,” responds Ugo. “We cannot make a spider web,” Alga further explains. This prompts a discussion among the children and teacher, with their comments sometimes overlapping. “We are kids,” says one child. “Let’s do what kids know how to do,” suggests Alga. “We can’t do what the animals do,” says Ugo. “We’ll do what men and children know how to do. Even the animals don’t know how to do what we know how to do,” says Alga. Several children excitedly respond with their comments, prompting Alga to say, “Let’s speak one at a time, otherwise we can’t hear Dante. What did you want to say?” “Yes to everyone, we can do like this,” Dante responds, making a funny face, sticking out his tongue. Several children laugh and imitate Dante. Alga, too, laughs, and then says, “But, like spiders do, you don’t know how to.” “Or like a bunny,” says Dante. “Or like a bunny,” Alga repeats. “But, Antonio showed us before that he knows how to be a little bit like a spider. A little piece of thread. Little, little,” says Alga, pointing to Antonio and motioning how to make thread between her thumb and pointer finger (yet not using saliva). “Me too!” respond several children and a little chatter goes on.

Photographs

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- 1.1 The Magician, with children. Courtesy Municipality of Pistoia
- 1.2 The Magician, and his miniature representation standing on a book. Courtesy Municipality of Pistoia.
- 1.3 Entryway, with mother and child. Courtesy Municipality of Pistoia
- 1.4 Entryway, with mother and child saying goodbye through the Magician's Window. Courtesy Municipality of Pistoia

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- 2.1 Hall, showing seating area and wall posters. Courtesy Yinjing Shen.
- 2.2 Hall, showing children reading together. Courtesy Municipality of Pistoia.
- 2.3 Garden, and platform, seen from outside. Courtesy Yinjing Shen
- 2.4 Horse Corner, dedicated to explorations of Marino Marini. Courtesy Yinjing Shen.

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- 3.1 Classroom, showing the print-rich environment. Courtesy Ann Watt
- 3.2 Classroom, showing Marino Marini prints on the wall. Courtesy Ann WattClassroom,
- 3.3 Classroom, showing communication box and Friendship poster. Courtesy Yinjing Shen

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- 4.1 Writing Center dedicated to Hannibal Mouse. Courtesy Yinjing Shen
- 4.2 Writing Center, as drawn by one of the children. Courtesy Ann Watt
- 4.3 Writing Center, closeup of child-made book. Courtesy Keely Cline
- 4.4 Room of Light. Courtesy Municipality of Pistoia.]

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- 6.3 Donna Libri, The Book Lady. Courtesy Yinjing Shen.
- 6.4 Donna Libri, when first created, with children's designs. Courtesy Municipality of Pistoia

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- 5.1 Circle of chairs in Library. Courtesy Yinjing Shen.
- 5.2 Library teacher reading with children. Courtesy Municipality of Pistoia.
- 5.3 Two boys drawing together in the Library. Courtesy Ann Watt.
- 5.4 Library desks and shelves, as seen from a child's perspective. Courtesy Yinjing Shen
- 6.1 Child-made book, telling a story of the magician. Courtesy Yinjing Shen.
- 6.2 Library checkout area. Courtesy Ann Watt



The 2012 “Learning In and Out of School: Education across the Globe” conference was hosted by the University of Notre Dame’s [Kellogg Institute for International Studies](#) and cosponsored by the [Department of Anthropology](#) and the [Institute for Educational Initiatives](#), with generous support from [The Henkels Lecture Fund: Institute for Scholarship in the Liberal Arts](#), the [College of Arts and Letters](#), and the [Office of Research at the University of Notre Dame](#).

The conference, organized by Kellogg Faculty Fellow and Professor of Anthropology Susan Blum, witnessed inspiring discussion and collaboration between leading scholars of education from several disciplines and nations.

For more information: kellogg.nd.edu/learning

