

Foreword Lessons from Reggio

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Through a decade of collaboration and association around the Making Learning Visible project and through the friendships that have evolved in that time, we at Project Zero* have learned many lessons. These lessons have influenced virtually every aspect of our ways of being in the world, but certainly our understanding of schools, our teaching, our ways of working in collaborations, even how we are with family and friends.

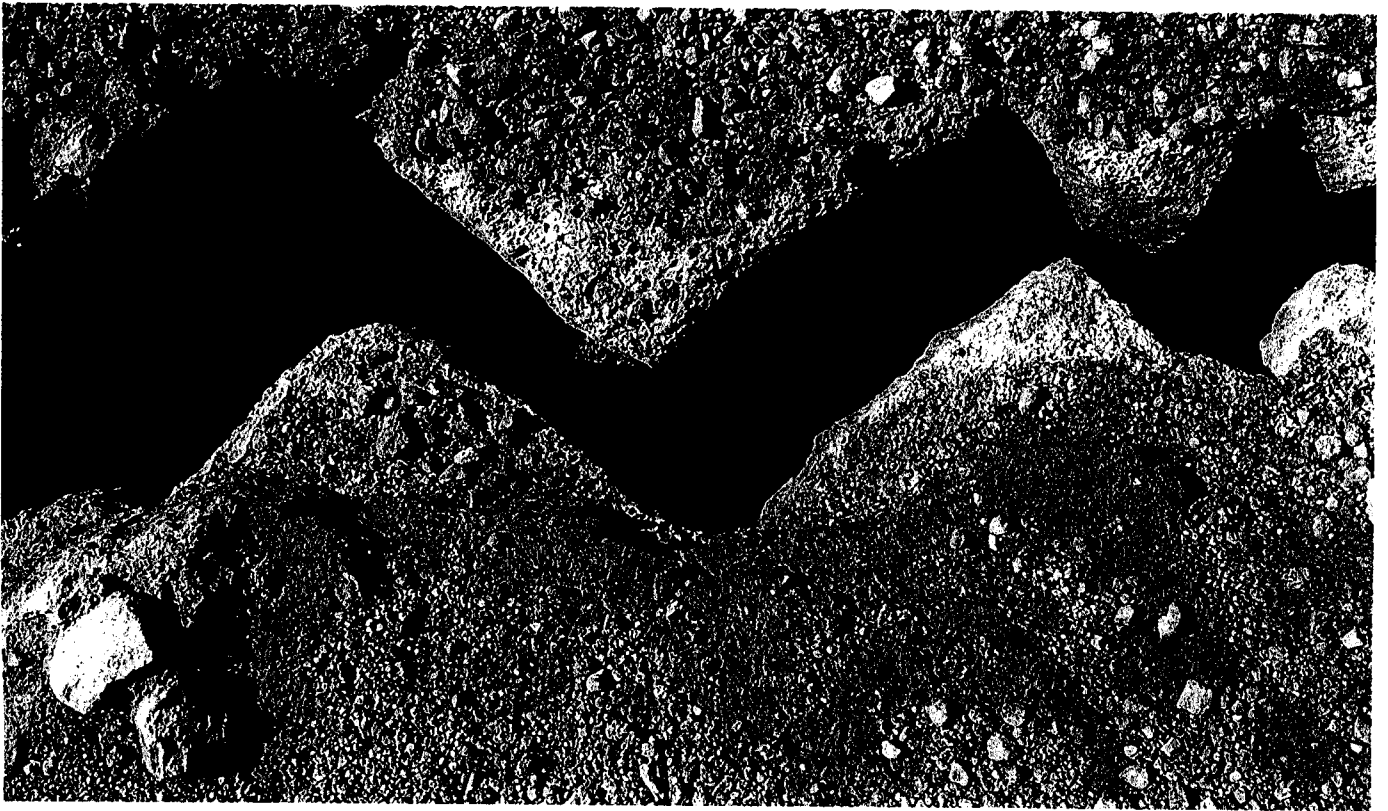
The need for accountability in American education has been the cornerstone for the standards-driven reform movement of the 1990s and continues to dominate our educational thought and practice. We are, in this moment in the United States, so deeply invested in the idea of psychometric and “scientific” justifications for our educational practices that we seem to have forgotten there could be any other justification paradigm. We seem to have forgotten there could be any other way to hold ourselves accountable.

Some days I wonder if the path we’re on is leading somewhere, or nowhere...is just difficult and long, or truly impossible. I would probably be far more confused—and despondent—if the Reggio experience didn’t remind me of another possibility.

Reggio educators accept responsibility for their decisions and choices, for providing an account of what they are doing, and why, and what then happens in the school. They don’t pass the assessment of their choices on to someone else or to a test to determine. They embrace a tradition of philosophical justification that is far older than psychometrics, one that explains educational choices by tracing decisions back to basic questions about our image of the child, the teacher, the school.

In this psychometric age, philosophic justifications of educational practice are generally characterized as soft, vague, or lacking in rigor. Yet anyone who visits the schools in Reggio quickly recognizes there is no lack of rigor in what they do. Indeed, there is virtually no aspect of the classroom or school environment too small for deep and rigorous examination. Every moment of the day, every detail of the physical environment, every dimension of

*Project Zero, a research group at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, has investigated the development of learning processes in children, adults, and organizations since 1967.



relationships in the school is considered, debated, refined. Choices are examined in relation to the ideas that animate them and the actual experiences of children and teachers in the classroom. This is endless work. What is decided today is reconsidered next year, next week, or the next day.

Ironically, as attractive and inspiring as the Reggio schools are to so many American educators, most of us believe we don't have the time to think through our practice as they do. I don't think it is a problem of time so much as commitment to the deep level of rigorous thought and debate that infuses daily life in the Reggio schools. Perhaps we hesitate as we approach this alternative paradigm of accountability because we know instinctively that it is a difficult path, demanding much of those who follow it.

Yet it seems always better to be on a difficult—even extremely difficult—path than a path that, in my heart, I believe won't lead where I want to go. The challenge and beauty of coming to know the experience in Reggio is to confront the possibility that I could work—as they have—with others to create the reality I would like to live in...whatever the demands of that creative act.