

Participation is an invitation

17 July 2017

Dear AREA members

As Mathapelo Mathibela would say “I greet you in the image of the child”. I know that unfortunately not all of you managed to get to this year’s conference in Johannesburg so I am sure you will be interested to get some feedback about it.



It’s hard to believe that a month has passed since the 2017 Africa Reggio Emilia Alliance conference. To all of you who were there, thank you for your time, your commitment, your passion. We’ve been going through your conference feedback, which has been overwhelmingly positive. Thank you for the compliments and constructive comments. A common theme is how many of you would appreciate the opportunity to connect and workshop the Reggio approach – to learn by doing and experiencing the approach in action. Ideally it would be wonderful to have had opportunities for this to happen at the conference but exam timetables, limited venues and human resources prevented this.

With this in mind, [here are details](#) of some opportunities to connect coming up through AREA – including a workshop with Tiziana Filippini, whom many of you will remember from last year’s conference. I realise that since these events are all in Gauteng, some people will

not be able to benefit from them – so discussions are under way for workshops in Port Elizabeth, Cape Town, KwaZulu-Natal and Upington.

If what is included below isn’t right for you, get in touch – whether with AREA, or with teachers you met during the conference. Start a conversation, deepen a connection. Create a reading group or a support group in which you can share books, ideas, information, inspiration and lessons learnt along the way. Speak to others who have done this, like those members of ECD forums who travel as a group to attend AREA workshops.

In many ways, creating the ecosystem or “the great forest” we all yearn for relies on each of us doing what we can, where we are – just like the residents of Villa Cella, who built their school brick by brick, men and women together, because they wanted a new and different place and future for their children.

If you're already forming clusters in your area, or are inspired to take action based on what you heard at the conference – and would like to invite participation and collaboration from other teachers and early childhood activists who are inspired by the Reggio philosophy of education, please do let me know, so I can share these details with the wider AREA network.

And if you want to participate in the [Great Forest project of the AREA rights exhibition](#), don't forget to join the WhatsApp group by contacting Lindi Bell on 082 879 8303 or myself on 082 852 6424. This was and still is, such an incredibly significant project and from the number of people seen photographing it, I know that many of you are of the same opinion. Something else that was really remarkable was the exciting display of various schools' documentation of children's learning which reflected an openness to venture, to risk, and a determination to explore a different way of educating children.

Creating the schools, communities and democratic spaces we hope for – for us and for our children – takes time. On those days when you feel uncertain or uncomfortable, take courage. Be brave. Don't be afraid to try, to take risks, to make mistakes, to learn. It's what we ask of our children. It's what is asked of us as teachers and children's co-researchers in turn.

Regards

Tessa Browne

PS: I've written up a few things that stood out for me and some others during the conference and [included them here](#), just in case they help jog your memory or kickstart conversations in your own schools. Credit for this collection of thoughts goes to our speakers – Marina Castagnetti, Harold Göthson, Thandi Chaane, Mathapelo Mathibela, Lauren Howden-Cross, Lindi Bell, Nneamaka Enechi.

Resources

- [A snapshot of the 2017 AREA conference](#)
- [Thoughts, questions and reminders](#) emerging out of the 2017 conference