

Foreword

Lella Gandini

As one who has had the privilege of observing and listening to Jason Avery at work in the atelier for children, I can attest to the very positive, welcoming atmosphere there for the way it—and he—sustain the well-being of children and adults who come there. I found the space alive with possibilities for exploration and discovery. There he was in its midst, an attentive, friendly witness, ready to respond supportively, whether to encourage any initiative or calm any uncertainty; he showed his special way of offering to think with materials, all the while observing and recording.

In now reading the stories and viewing the images in these pages of collected documents, I can understand more deeply the meanings of the experiences he has been constructing. I learned that each child has the opportunity to return and thereby to reconnect with a previous experience, discover more, or continue the conversation with Jason and maybe also with other children. This amounts to creating a comfort zone for the joy of constructing learning on a known and familiar base. I realize that what Jason has been carefully crafting is a beautiful and delicate weaving

of a new process of documenting children and adults both visually and verbally. These experiences are of the sort that can sometimes leave exposed threads to be followed up on, or changed, or in any case returned to. Because of this possibility I perceive here a new sense of time, of thinking and of action.

The strategies for beginning, responding to, or returning to a relationship, which are visible and readable in this collection, are many, and they are tailored to each particular child. We meet Leila, Joshua, and Cameron, but also teachers such as Brenda and Lisa, as well as parents and grandparents. Is there hesitation or difficulty for the child or the accompanying parent in this situation? Show me a school, a playground, or a home that doesn't. A piece of material, a word, an invention is made the subject or the mediation of an interaction that can in turn create a connection; it can become discovery, inquiry and a source of satisfaction, often joyful. Is this a new language?

I know I am not the only person who, when seeing the work that Jason was doing and carefully documenting, thought that this work should be made visible and available to others so that more of us could understand the value of his subtle approach to cultivating and capturing children's intelligent, creative initiatives. After all, people who accompany children through their childhood and beyond need to understand how to be their allies, that is, loving guides to be sure, but allies who learn with and from them.

The essays and notes by Karyn Callaghan and Carol Anne Wien, with their knowledgeable and good-humored observations, render the fruition of Jason's work even more essential and accessible to educators and students of children.

A few years back, while on a train between Nara and Kyoto, I gazed at mountains covered with snow, and through the soft fog below saw small houses with roofs of blue tiles. This beautiful sight came back to me as I was starting to write these words and made me think about Veà Vecchi's view of the atelieristi as researchers, present and close by

the children, and involved with light intensity. This is the ideal that Jason fulfills so well. In a sense he returns the research to the children, along with a sense of pleasure. I also thought about Veà's view of the positive power of aesthetics in our lives, prompted by the aesthetic of Jason's documentation—documentation immediately readable by children. The images here represented were captured by Jason's perceptive eyes and wise camera for all of us to contemplate.