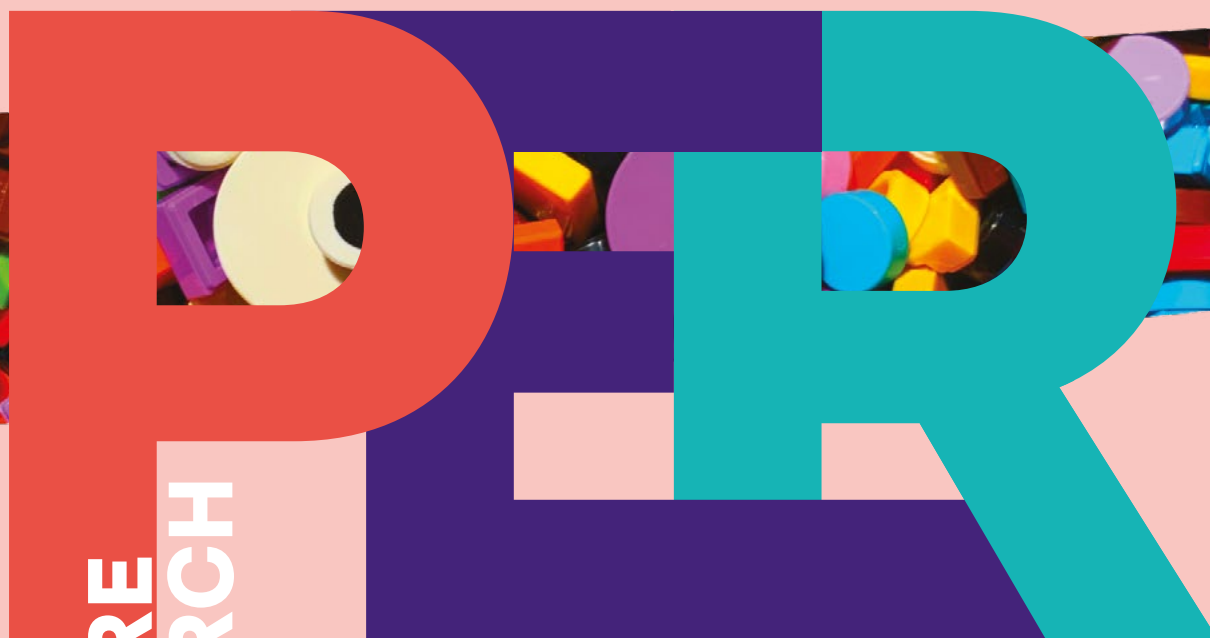




Fondazione
Reggio Children
Centro Loris Malaguzzi

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**PLAY
EXPLORE
RESEARCH**

**Nurturing wellbeing: the intersection
of Play, Education and Research**

Seminar proceedings

Hanoi — Vietnam



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Nurturing wellbeing: the intersection
of Play, Education and Research

Seminar proceedings

Hanoi — Vietnam

Aesthetics of education

Directed by Annamaria Contini
and Lorenzo Manera

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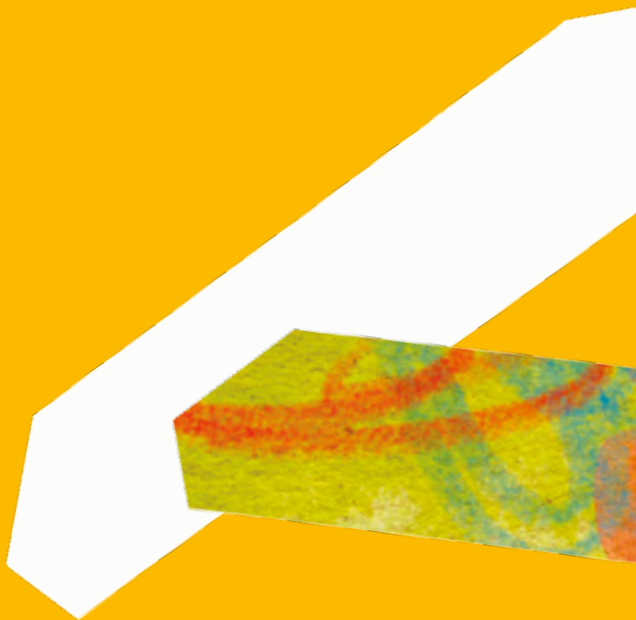
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Preface





In Hanoi, the main event of the P.E.R. Play Explore Research project took the form of a two-day seminar, conceived as a space for dialogue and shared reflection on education. The seminar brought together international and local perspectives, creating an opportunity to deepen mutual understanding and to explore common areas of interest within the framework of the project.

The collaboration with the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI) through the Italian Embassy in Hanoi proved to be particularly valuable in identifying and engaging local partners. Special acknowledgment is due to the Hanoi National University of Education (HNUE), whose contribution was fundamental to the success of the seminar. HNUE not only ensured an impeccable organization at the local level, but also enriched the seminar with meaningful academic and pedagogical content, reinforcing the quality and depth of the discussions.

The days preceding the seminar were dedicated to visits and meetings in Hanoi, offering important opportunities to become acquainted with the local context, educational landscape, and cultural environment. These moments of exploration and encounter supported a deeper understanding of the territory and laid the groundwork for the seminar's dialogue.

Among these activities was a visit to Uni-Italia at the Italian Embassy in Hanoi, including a meeting with Professor Tran Hong Hanh, Head of Uni-Italia in Vietnam.

A particularly significant moment of the visit was the formal meeting at Hanoi National University of Education, during which the President of HNUE welcomed the Fondazione Reggio Children delegation and a formal agreement, marking an important step in consolidating collaboration and opening new possibilities for shared research, was officially signed.

Additional visits to the Faculty of Early Childhood Education and to the university branches reinforced the sense of reciprocity and collaboration that characterized the entire experience, situating the seminar within a broader process of relationship-building and mutual learning.





TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC SƯ PHẠM HÀ NỘI
HANOI NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION



Fondazione
Reggio Children
Centro Loris Malaguzzi

QUỸ REGGIO CHILDREN - TRUNG TÂM LORIS MALAGUZZI
FONDAZIONE REGGIO CHILDREN - CENTRO LORIS MALAGUZZI

LỄ KÝ KẾT THỎA THUẬN HỢP TÁC

MOU SIGNING CEREMONY



Introduction



Dr. Pham Thi Ngoc Quynh

Acting Director, Institute for International Education and Training,
Hanoi National University of Education



Across education systems worldwide, growing attention is being paid to children's well-being, the quality of learning environments, and the long-term implications of educational policies in an era marked by rapid technological change and social uncertainty. The international seminar *"Nurturing Wellbeing: The Intersection of Play, Education and Research"*, hosted by Hanoi National University of Education (HNUE) and Fondazione Reggio Children – Centro Loris Malaguzzi ETS, brought together policymakers, researchers, educators, and international partners to engage in a timely dialogue on how education systems can better respond to these challenges, starting from early childhood and extending across the educational continuum.

The seminar was grounded in a shared understanding that education is not merely a technical process of knowledge transmission, but a deeply human, cultural, and political endeavor. Drawing on international experiences, particularly from Italy through the Fondazione Reggio Children (FRC), alongside perspectives from Vietnam and other international partners such as VVOB, the discussions highlighted the need to reconnect educational policy with children lived experiences, rights, and holistic de-

velopment. Central to this dialogue was the recognition of play as a foundational mode of learning, wellbeing as a core educational outcome, and evidence-informed policymaking as a bridge between educational values and sustainable system-level reform.

HNUE's role in convening this seminar reflects its broader framework as a national teacher education university and an emerging regional hub for policy dialogue, research, and international cooperation in education. By creating a space where academic research, school-level practice, and policy perspectives could interact, the seminar aimed to move beyond abstract debates and toward actionable insights. The three plenary sessions synthesized in this publication address complementary dimensions of this shared agenda: learning through play as a driver of wellbeing, educational policies that safeguard every child's right to quality education, and the emerging challenges shaping the future of education in the context of digital transformation and artificial intelligence.

Together, these plenary reflections offer policymakers, educators, and international stakeholders a set of comparative insights and policy-relevant considerations for designing education systems that are equitable, humane, and responsive to the evolving needs of children and societies.

Beyond academic exchange, the seminar also reaffirmed a set of shared policy questions that resonate far beyond the immediate context of Vietnam. Participants collectively reflected on how education systems can ensure equity across diverse communities, bridging urban-rural divides and addressing the needs of minority and disadvantaged children; how cultural traditions can be sustained while engaging constructively with rapid dig-





ital and social transformation; how teachers, the true agents of change, can be empowered through appropriate training, wellbeing support, and professional recognition; and how regional and global solidarity can be strengthened to uphold children's rights as a universal priority.

These reflections are closely aligned with Vietnam's long-term educational vision toward 2045, which aspires not merely to improve international standing, but to the creation of an education system where every child learns with joy, creativity, and dignity. Within this broader horizon, the seminar positioned play, wellbeing, and evidence-informed policy as strategic levers for sustainable educational reform. By convening diverse stakeholders, from international organizations and development partners to universities, schools, and local authorities, HNUE reaffirmed its role as a platform for policy dialogue and knowledge exchange, contributing to regional and global conversations on the future of education. The plenary insights presented in this publication thus represent not an endpoint, but a set of shared commitments and directions for continued collaboration and policy innovation.

Institutional remarks





Marco Della Seta

Italian Ambassador to Vietnam

Ladies and gentlemen,
It is a privilege to be with you today for this seminar, which forms part of the global journey of the P.E.R. Play, Explore, Research project, promoted by Fondazione Reggio Children, in partnership with The LEGO Foundation.

Allow me first to recall what Fondazione Reggio Children represents. Established in 2011, the Foundation emerged from the educational experiences of the schools and preschools of the Italian town of Reggio Emilia, known worldwide as the Reggio Emilia Approach.

Over the years, this approach has become one of Italy's most admired contributions to childhood education, promoting networking, solidarity, research, and creative learning. The Foundation continues to carry this legacy forward across the world. In 2023, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Fondazione Reggio Children to promote Italian language and culture, and to reaffirm the universal right to play, recognized in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of

the Child. Indeed, play is not a secondary activity; even in the most difficult circumstances, it remains a natural way for children to grow, imagine, and hope.

The P.E.R. project seeks to strengthen the vital connection between play and learning, while fostering a global platform where teachers, researchers, and organizations can come together to exchange ideas.

Since its launch in November 2023, P.E.R. events have taken place across all continents, providing opportunities for dialogue and professional growth. Each stage – from São Paulo to Johannesburg, from Denver to Nairobi – has explored the intersection of play, research, and education as a source of creativity.

Today, Hanoi is the sole Asian destination for this project, and it is a particular pleasure to see it realized in partnership with the Hanoi National University of Education.

The seminar we open today reflects the very spirit of P.E.R. It is not only a program of plenary sessions and workshops; it is an

invitation to experience learning in a playful and collaborative way. It reminds us that education is never a one-way transfer of knowledge, but rather a process of discovery, creativity, and shared responsibility.

Initiatives such as P.E.R. also demonstrate that cultural diplomacy is not confined to art or language: it extends into education, where it becomes a powerful instrument of connection. Through projects like this, Italy affirms its belief that nurturing curiosity, creativity, and dialogue among the youngest generations is also a way of nurturing lasting relations of trust and cooperation among nations.

In conclusion, I would like to express my gratitude to Fondazione Reggio Children, to The LEGO Foundation, and to the Hanoi National University of Education for their vision and commitment. I am confident that today's seminar will not only enrich our reflections but also strengthen the ties between Vietnam, Italy, and the global community dedicated to education.

Thank you.



Nguyễn Văn Trà

**Associate Professor, Vice
Principal of Hanoi University
of Education**

Honored guests, colleagues, educators, and friends,

Good morning.

On behalf of Hanoi National University of Education, it is my great honor and pleasure to warmly welcome you all to this meaningful seminar: *“Nurturing Wellbeing: The Intersection of Play, Education and Research.”*

Today, we are proud that Vietnam joins this journey, adding our voice, our experiences, and our aspirations to this international conversation. This is not only an academic gathering but also a significant educational event that has drawn the attention of many stakeholders, diplomatic missions, research institutions, international organizations, universities, leaders of preschools, and local authorities from across Vietnam. We are deeply honored to welcome 250 distinguished delegates to this seminar, a testament to the importance of today’s dialogue.

At Hanoi National University of Education, we deeply share the vision of P.E.R.:



to place childhood at the very center of education, and to empower educators, parents, and communities to recognize play as a powerful pathway for learning and wellbeing. This aligns strongly with our mission to cultivate future teachers, strengthen research in education, and foster innovative practices that respond to the needs of society.

We are especially grateful for the support of Fondazione Reggio Children – Centro Loris Malaguzzi ETS and The LEGO Foundation, whose leadership and inspiration have made this project possible. We also extend our appreciation to the Embassy of Italy in Hanoi, whose presence today affirms the value of educational cooperation and cultural dialogue between our two countries. This seminar is not only a space to share knowledge and practices but also a platform to build lasting partnerships between researchers and practitioners, between local schools and global networks, and between Vietnam and the world.

With that, I wish our seminar great success, and I look forward to fruitful discussions and collaborations over the next two days. Thank you very much!

Cristian Fabbi

CEO of Fondazione Reggio Children

P.E.R. Play Explore Research in Vietnam unfolds within a country marked by deep historical continuity, rapid socio-economic transformation, and a strong sense of collective identity. To speak about quality in early childhood education in this context is to engage in a cultural and political action that recognizes children as citizens of today, families as knowledge-holders, and education as a space where the past, present, and future of a society are continuously negotiated.

Vietnam's early childhood education system has achieved remarkable quantitative expansion over recent decades. Access has increased, institutional coverage has widened, and early education has been firmly positioned within national development strategies. Yet, as in many rapidly developing contexts, the central challenge has shifted from access to meaning: from the question of whether children attend early education settings to the question of what kind of educational experience they inhabit once inside them (UNICEF: Viet Nam 50-Year Progress on Children and Future Prospects, 2025). Within the



mission that Fondazione Reggio Children decided to develop, in its strategic plan, quality is approached as a dynamic relationship between policy, pedagogy, culture, and everyday practice. It emerges from dialogue and collective responsibility rather than from prescription alone.

***Quality beyond standards:
from regulation to orientation***

In many education systems, quality policy is equated with standards, benchmarks, and measurement. While regulatory frameworks are necessary to ensure minimum standards they are insufficient to create meaningful educational experiences for young children. In the Vietnamese context, where respect for authority and centralized planning coexist with strong local traditions and community life, the risk is that quality becomes reduced to formal compliance rather than lived practice (UNICEF *Global Report on Early Childhood Care and Education*, 2025).

The P.E.R. approach proposes a shift from standards to practices. Quality policies, in this perspective, create conditions that allow educators with children and families to explore, research, and construct meaning

together. Policy becomes a framework that protects time, space, and professional autonomy, rather than a tool of control.

Respecting local culture as a foundation of quality

Vietnamese culture with its roots in millennial values and traditions influences how children are perceived, how adults relate to authority, and how learning is understood. Any attempt to define quality in early education that ignores these dimensions risks producing alienation rather than improvement. Respecting local culture does not mean idealizing tradition or resisting change. It means starting from what exists: from family practices, community rhythms, local narratives, and shared values.

At the heart of any quality framework lies an implicit image of the child. The P.E.R. approach presents the child as competent in learning and capable of meaning-making from the earliest years. In the P.E.R. seminar/experience in Vietnam, educators are not positioned as implementers of predefined curricula, but as cultural mediators and researchers of everyday life.

Families and communities as partners in quality

In Vietnam, family involvement in chil-

dren's lives is strong and continuous. Grandparents, extended families, and community networks play a central role in care and education. Quality early childhood policy must therefore embrace a broader ecological view.

In the experience of Fondazione Reggio Children, families are not seen as recipients of expert knowledge, but as partners in educational processes. Their stories, expectations, and concerns contribute to shaping meaningful learning environments. Respecting local culture means creating spaces where family knowledge is recognised and valued

Policy frameworks that encourage participation and transparency help bridge the gap between institutions and communities. They also contribute to building trust, a fundamental yet often overlooked dimension of quality.

Educators as cultural mediators and researchers

A P.E.R.-inspired quality policy recognises educators as cultural mediators and researchers of everyday life: time for observation, discussion, and documentation are essential components of educational work. It values professional judgment and supports collaborative forms of learning among educators. In doing so, it aligns pol-

icy with the complex realities of early childhood practice.

Observation and documentation are central to the P.E.R. approach, not only as pedagogical practices but also as tools for policy learning. By making learning processes visible, documentation allows educators, and policymakers to reflect on what quality looks like in practice.

Documentation can serve as a bridge between local experience and national strategy. It provides concrete narratives that complement quantitative data, offering a richer understanding of children's everyday lives in educational settings.

A quality policy that integrates qualitative evidence alongside indicators is better equipped to respond to complexity and diversity. It moves away from abstract models and toward grounded decision-making.

Toward a culturally grounded concept of quality

In a time of rapid change, early childhood education offers a unique space to imagine futures that are not disconnected

from their roots. By investing in culturally grounded quality policies, Vietnam can continue to strengthen its early education system while preserving what gives it meaning and identity.

A vision of quality that is both ambitious and rooted. It calls for policies that protect children's right to meaningful learning experiences, while respecting the cultural, social, and historical fabric of Vietnamese society.

Such a framework does not seek uniformity, but coherence. It aligns values, practices, and policies around a shared commitment to children's well-being and belonging. It understands quality as a living process, continuously negotiated through dialogue between policymakers, educators, families, and children themselves.

The P.E.R. approach does not provide a model to replicate, but a way of thinking to inhabit. In Vietnam, this way of thinking finds fertile ground in traditions of collective responsibility, respect for learning, and deep attention to human relationships. Quality, in this sense, becomes a shared journey.



Phase I - Contextual Analysis



Understand the cultural and educational landscape.

Field visits, interviews, document reviews.

Identify cultural, historical, and anthropological foundations.

Define national values.



Plenary sessions





Learning through play: how it can boost wellbeing at school and beyond. Experiences compared

This plenary session explored learning through play as a foundational educational principle that directly shapes children's wellbeing, engagement, and long-term development. Drawing on international perspectives, particularly experiences inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach shared by experts from Italy's Fondazione Reggio Children (FRC), alongside Vietnamese research and practice, the session positioned play not as a peripheral activity, but as a core pedagogical and policy concern.

A central message of the discussion was that play-based learning is inseparable from children's rights and from broader conceptions of educational quality. International frameworks increasingly recognize play as both a right and a condition for meaningful learning. However, participants noted that while many education systems formally endorse learning through play, its implementation often remains fragmented or symbolic. In practice, curricular overload, assessment pressures, and rigid instructional models frequently constrain children's opportunities for exploration, creativity, and social interaction.

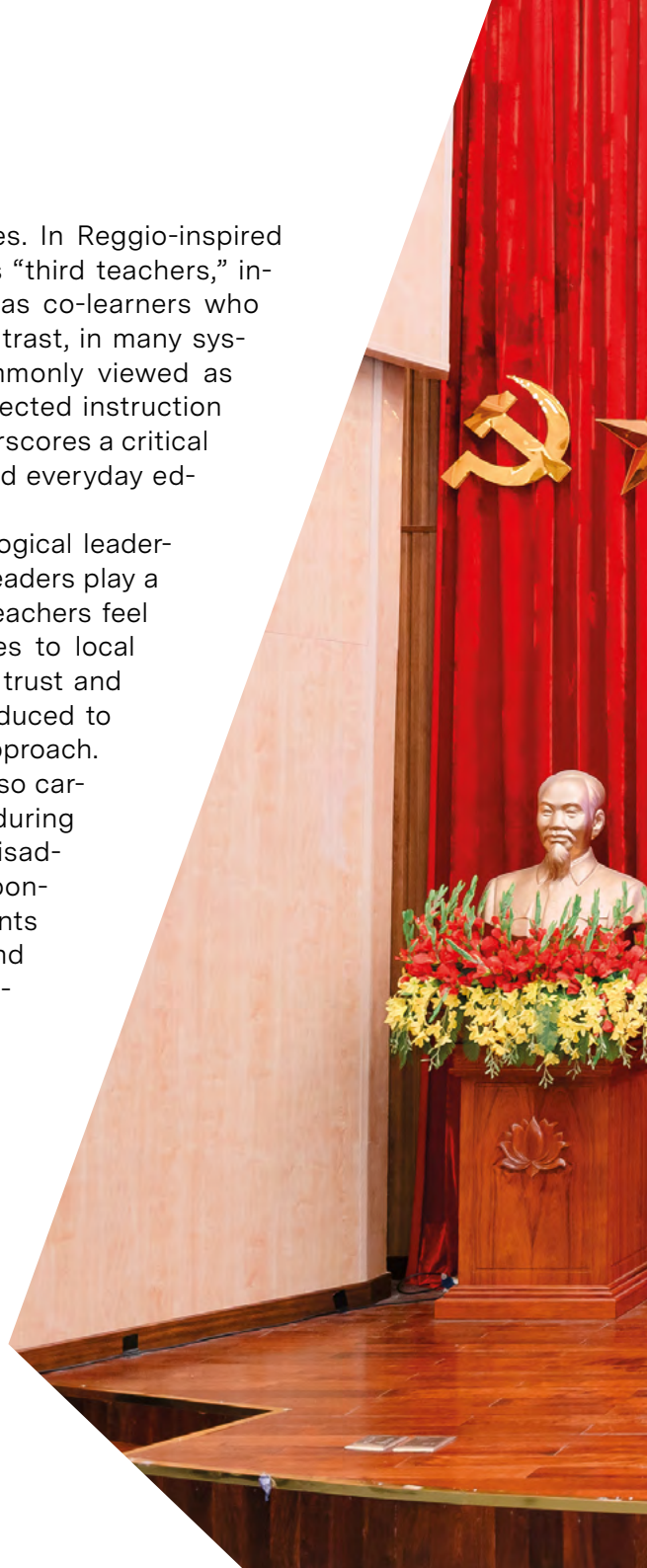
Comparative experiences highlighted the importance of learning environments

and teacher roles in realizing play-based approaches. In Reggio-inspired contexts, environments are intentionally designed as “third teachers,” inviting inquiry and collaboration, while teachers act as co-learners who observe, document, and reflect with children. By contrast, in many systems – including parts of Vietnam, play is still commonly viewed as supplementary to “serious learning,” with teacher-directed instruction dominating classroom practice. This disconnect underscores a critical policy gap between stated pedagogical intentions and everyday educational realities.

The plenary further emphasized the role of pedagogical leadership in enabling play-based learning at scale. School leaders play a decisive role in shaping institutional cultures where teachers feel supported to experiment, reflect, and adapt practices to local contexts. Without leadership that values professional trust and reflective practice, play-based learning risks being reduced to isolated activities rather than a coherent educational approach.

From a policy perspective, learning through play also carries significant equity implications. Evidence shared during the session demonstrated its positive impact on disadvantaged children and its contribution to gender-responsive and inclusive learning environments. Participants stressed that continuity between early childhood and primary education is particularly important, as transitions often mark a sharp decline in play-oriented pedagogies.

The session concluded that policies promoting learning through play must address curriculum design, teacher education, school leadership, parental communication, and assessment practices in an integrated manner. Only through such systemic alignment can play become a sustained driver of wellbeing and learning rather than a rhetorical aspiration.



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With the support of

The LEGO Foundation

Project P.E.R. Play Explore Research Vietnam

Nurturing Wellbeing:
the intersection of Play, Education and Research

September 27-28, 2025
Hanoi - Vietnam

Co-organized with



Institutional partner



In collaboration with



**Advancing educational policies
to ensure the right to quality education
for every child**

This plenary session focused on how educational policies can more effectively uphold every child’s right to quality education by bridging the gap between policy intentions and lived educational experiences. Speakers emphasized that ensuring educational rights requires more than regulatory compliance; it demands policy frameworks that are responsive, evidence-informed, and grounded in practice.

International and Vietnamese experiences presented during the session illustrated the limitations of top-down policy models that prioritize standardization over contextual relevance. In contrast, speakers from Italy and Vietnam advocated for approaches in which policy development is informed by classroom practice, systematic observation, and documentation of children’s learning processes. Such bottom-up perspectives recognize schools as dynamic systems and teachers as key contributors to educational knowledge, rather than mere implementers of external directives.

School-level policy ecosystems emerged as a central theme. Case studies from early childhood institutions demonstrated how coherent policies, covering teacher professional development, learn-

ing environments, leadership practices, and community engagement, can collectively enhance educational quality. These experiences highlighted that policy effectiveness depends on alignment between institutional values, governance structures, and the wellbeing of teachers and learners alike.

The session also addressed challenges related to resource constraints and regional disparities. Participants noted that while policy goals may be shared nationally, their implementation varies significantly across contexts, particularly between urban and rural areas. In this regard, technology was discussed as a potential enabler for professional collaboration, teacher training, and monitoring, provided its use is guided by clear pedagogical and ethical principles.

From a policy standpoint, the plenary reinforced the importance of adaptive frameworks that respect cultural diversity while maintaining a strong commitment to children’s rights. Ensuring the right to quality education requires continuous dialogue among policymakers, educators, researchers, and communities, as well as mechanisms for piloting, evaluation, and revision based on empirical evidence. Policies that fail to engage with practice risk remaining aspirational, whereas policies rooted in evidence and participation are more likely to produce sustainable change.



FRC
Mr. Nguyen Van Kien
Chinese - Vietnamese interpreter

FRC
Ms. Ro

Project P.E.R. Play Explore Research Vietnam

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HANOI

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The educational challenges of the future

The plenary session on the educational challenges of the future addressed the profound transformations reshaping childhood, teaching, and learning in an era of rapid technological change. Central to the discussion was the expanding role of artificial intelligence (AI) and digital technologies, and the need for education systems to govern these developments in ways that protect children's wellbeing and developmental integrity.

Participants cautioned against framing AI solely as a technical innovation. Instead, AI was discussed as a deeply ethical and pedagogical issue with far-reaching implications for how children relate to knowledge, nature, and one another. While acknowledging the potential of AI to support personalized learning and teacher practice, speakers expressed concern that excessive reliance on digital tools may contribute to children's disconnection from physical environments, reduced social interaction, and difficulties in emotional self-regulation.

Comparative insights from research and practice highlighted a growing tension between technological acceleration and the preservation of childhood as a space for exploration, play, and relational learning. This tension is particularly acute in early child-

hood education, where learning is inherently embodied and social. Participants emphasized that digital technologies should not replace these experiences but rather be carefully integrated in age-appropriate and pedagogically meaningful ways.

Teacher capacity building emerged as a critical policy priority. Teachers require not only technical skills, but also ethical awareness, reflective competence, and institutional support to make informed decisions about when and how to use AI. Moreover, regional inequalities in access to training and resources risk widening existing gaps unless addressed through targeted policy interventions.

The plenary concluded that the future of education should not be defined by technology alone, but by a renewed commitment to human values, cooperation over competition, empathy alongside innovation, and wellbeing as a central educational goal. Effective governance of AI in education must therefore be grounded in child-centered principles, interdisciplinary research, and sustained dialogue among policymakers, educators, and communities.

Dr. Pham Thi Ngoc Quynh, Acting Director, Institute for International Education and Training, Hanoi National University of Education



P.E.R. workshops
as living spaces
for experimentation
and dialogue





Within the framework of the P.E.R. project, the workshops represented a concrete expression of the project's objectives, translating shared principles into lived educational experiences. By fostering spaces of co-research and experimentation, the workshops supported professional development grounded in reflection and relational practice. They contributed to strengthening connections between educational policy and everyday pedagogical work, between local contexts and international perspectives, and between theory and practice. In this sense, the workshops functioned as laboratories for exploring how education nurtures a culture of collaboration and shared responsibility among educators, teachers, researchers, institutions, and communities.

The workshops developed within the Play Explore Research seminar in Hanoi were conceived as spaces of pedagogical research and shared reflection. Participants were invited to be part of processes of inquiry and collective co-construction of meaning, and the collaboration with local partners ensured them the opportunity to engage in context-based experiences.

The diversity represented by the different workshops' proposals addressed several themes, from the topic of educational quality and policy, to the creation of sustainable educational systems, the role of

the body and sensory experience in the learning processes, and the focus on the expressive and communicative qualities of both natural and regenerated materials.

A special mention is due to the workshop dedicated to the Italian language, developed with the intention of promoting Italian language and culture and conceived from an initial intuition and provocation by the School Office of the General Consulate of Italy in Johannesburg, South Africa, following the conference-action held in October 2024. The workshop co-designed by a team of Fondazione Reggio Children staff and PhD students was piloted for the first time in Hanoi, where it met encouraging participation and strong interest.

Within this workshop, language and communication were explored as multisensory and cultural experiences. Approaching language through sound, imagination, and listening, it invited participants to reflect on language not merely as a system of rules, but as a living expression of culture..

Overall, the workshops contributed to creating a shared space of co-research, where policy, research, pedagogy, creativity, materials, and community were interwoven. Enriched by the local and international context of Hanoi, the workshops affirmed education as a collective, evolving practice, one that is deeply rooted in relationships, attentive to context, and oriented toward the construction of sustainable educational communities.





Building the pillars of a quality education policy

by *Fondazione Reggio Children*

What are the fundamental pillars for a quality education policy? Which elements are crucial to ensure the resilience of the educational policy? How often should an educational policy be updated to maintain its effectiveness over time?

Together, we will explore the essential components for developing a quality education policy. In the course of the activity, the key factors that ensure the resilience and durability of educational policies will be analysed, and the frequency with which they should be updated to remain effective and relevant will be discussed.



(En)joy dancing

by *Fondazione Reggio Children*

How is our well-being linked to the relationship we have with our bodies and the freedom we can find in movement? Is it possible to experience joy simply by dancing to the rhythm of our sensations?

Moving to feel the world through our body.

Moving to listen to our senses and perceptions.

Moving to be present to ourselves.

Movement is a physical expression that transcends culture and goes beyond differences in age, gender, language.

A workshop to discover the joy of movement, dancing to the rhythm of our feelings, our ideas, our relationships, exploring how dance can reveal new parts of ourselves.

Dancing in a movement community, to find joy for no reason.



We could ask the tree

by *Fondazione Reggio Children*

What is a code and how does it show up? How many and how diverse codes can we identify in our daily spaces? How can we create new ones from our analysis and translation of those already existing?

Read, interpret, discover the world... re-searching codes and mysterious modes of communication around us to invent new ones through a range of expressive languages.

Storytelling with materials

by *Fondazione Reggio Children*

What stories do materials tell? And what stories do waste materials tell? Are they different stories? Are we able to listen to these stories and bring them to light? Can we give voice to things? Can we make a leaf dance? Or act out a bottle? Or tell the story of a piece of paper thrown away?

Stories are everywhere. Even things that have no voice can tell a story. Objects and materials contain stories that can be heard and woven into our own. What stories do the things we consider useless, such as waste materials and garbage, tell us? And how can these messages change our community for the better?





Exploring the sounds of the Italian language

by *Fondazione Reggio Children*

Is it possible to imagine a path of approaching the Italian language through sound and imagination? What does the sound of a word evoke in sensory terms?

How do the senses contribute to the interpretation of the sound of a word?

Does a reciprocity exist between the sound of spoken language and the culture of a community?

Playing with the sounds of the Italian language means stepping into a world made of rhythm, echoes, and vibrations. Italian is not just a system of rules or meanings, but a soundscape to be explored with curiosity and wonder. A single word is enough to spark an image, inspire an idea, awaken a suggestion. It is a journey that begins with listening: what colors does a sound carry with it? What emotions does a syllable awaken? What secret music lies hidden in every word?

When Nanjing meets Reggio: dialogues between cultures and educational approaches

by *Experimental Kindergarten Nanjing*

In what ways can two cultures come to-



gether, and how do they shape and reflect in the educational approaches they adopt for early childhood?

Is it possible to build a common ground for reflection and to use it as a starting point for creating a new vision of education?

An in-depth exchange on the Reggio Emilia Approach and the encounter with Nanjing Experimental Kindergarten (China). This session offers an opportunity to reflect collectively on the dialogue between cultures, pedagogical perspectives, and practices, and to consider how such encounters can enrich educational work across diverse contexts.



**Becoming part of the land:
community, identity and the Earth.
Encounters with local materials
nature reborn**

by Aurora International School of the Arts

This workshop invites us into an ongoing dialogue with the natural materials of our place. Through touch, transformation, and imagination, we rediscover how the land holds and shapes our identity and collective wellbeing. As educators, we see ourselves as researchers, facilitators, and companions in the search for new possibilities in learning.

Together with children, we walk a path of co-research and collaboration, where inquiries open doors and discoveries become shared treasures.

At the heart of our practice is a profound connection with community, the environment, and the local materials that shape our daily encounters. These explorations—born from our coexistence with nature's materials—are the living core of teaching and learning in our school. Each material brings opportunities to explore your own creative skills, rethink the aesthetics found in nature, and the amazing assortment of patterns found in the environment. Over time you start to understand the changes in the landscape, your environment, community and challenge yourself to use this

knowledge and materials in your visual art learning spaces in the workplace.

An open invitation to get their hands dirty through the manipulation of clay, scrapping of charcoal, paint between their fingers and mark making which will flow through the process. Participation is welcomed into encounters with charcoal, clay, dyeing, oil pastels, and wire, exploring these mediums through varied techniques and possibilities. This workshop is not only about natural materials exploration but also about visual arts and how visual arts holistically integrated into early childhood education, fostering not only artistic skills but also cognitive, linguistic, social, and emotional development. Visual arts through natural materials exploration can foster mindfulness where children are fully immersed and present in communities.

What do you think when you first see these materials? What conditions or contexts help us (and children) to feel or be more creative? In what ways can local materials support a deeper connection between children, their community, and the environment?

How can children's creativity and imagination be nurtured through encounters with materials, nature and the environment? How does visual arts education nurture well-being and promote mental health

and emotional resilience for children and their community?

How do natural materials contribute to a more meaningful, place-based learning experience in early education? How do children describe their experiences using natural materials like clay, charcoal, or leaves in art and play?

How do these materials support the well-being of communities?

After the workshop, what are your reflections, considerations and questions?

Playful learning with special needs children

by HNUE

What is the role of play activities in the development of children with special needs? What should be taken into consideration when implementing play activities to promote the development of children with special needs? Which forms of play-based learning are most appropriate for children with special needs? How do environmental factors (classroom setting, learning materials, peer support, teacher support, etc.) influence children's participation? What adjustments are necessary to ensure inclusivity and equitable learning opportunities for all children?

This session deals with different top-

ics, including an introduction to the neurodevelopmental foundations of activity in children; experiencing sensory-motor activities, hand-based games, and fabric play; experiencing *Ehon* picture book reading; experiencing fabric theater; and an introduction to and explanation of fabric theater, focusing on materials, implementation, and ways of organizing activities for children.

Zaone – the material for Play-Play for the Earth

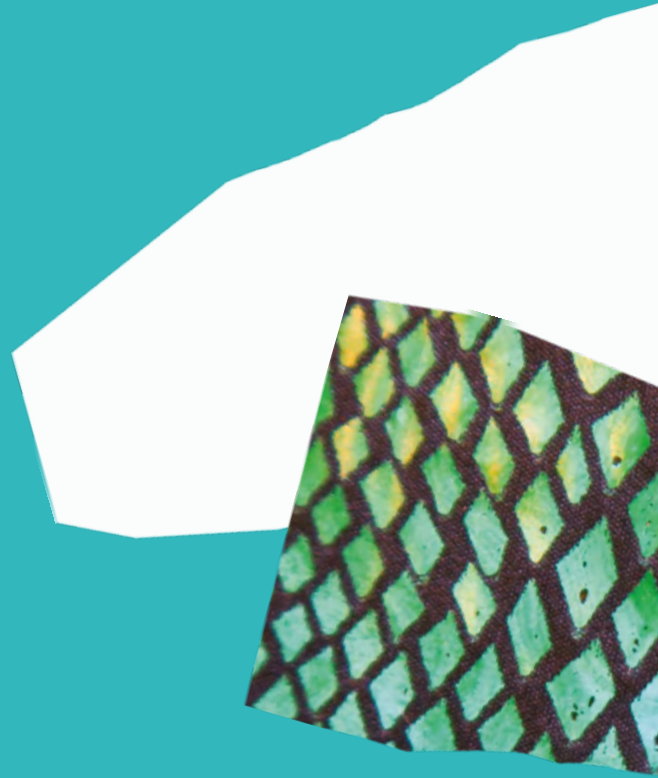
From materials to relationships: building caring and resilient communities through play and reflection

- Can the experience of working with materials expand into a communal experience that connects people?
- How can working with materials help us reflect on our relationship with the surrounding world?
- Can creativity help communities address the challenges they face?

Playing with materials invites ecological reflection and an awareness of relationships. Through play, participants directly experience what it means to be connected, and explore how this can be integrated into research and educational practice.



P.E.R. partners presentation





VVOB – Education for development, Belgium – Vietnam

VVOB – Education for development is a Belgian non-profit development organisation working towards inclusive quality education in nine countries in Africa, Asia and South America. Through capacity development of ministries of education, we strengthen the professional development of teachers and school leaders in a sustainable way.

In close partnership with Vietnam's Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), VVOB Vietnam supports teachers and school leaders to create environments which promote reflection, innovation and inclusivity with the goal of improving learning outcomes for all students. To realize its objective, VVOB focuses on capacity development of its strategic and operational partners: ministries of education and institutions facilitating professional development of teachers and school leaders.

In Vietnam, VVOB works to improve quality education in the early childhood (ECE) and primary (PE) sectors focused on playful learning, language rich learning environments, and blended learning.

ZAONE – The Material for Play – Play for the Earth, Korea

ZAONE is a Korea-based nonprofit or-

ganization that transforms unused byproducts generated in corporate production processes into educational materials, aiming to address environmental challenges and educational inequality simultaneously. By redeploying industrial waste and surplus materials, ZAONE reduces environmental burdens while creating learning opportunities that help future generations understand and creatively respond to the social issues of the climate crisis era.

ZAONE develops educational programs that go beyond conventional environmental education by connecting resource circulation with children's rights and quality learning experiences. Through hands-on engagement with materials that would otherwise be discarded, children are encouraged to explore, question, and imagine new possibilities. These experiences nurture creativity, emotional stability, cooperation, and a sense of agency, while also fostering awareness of sustainability and interdependence with the surrounding world.

Rather than focusing only on caring for children, ZAONE practices education that also cares for the Earth. The organization promotes the values of resource circulation and sustainability within local communities by building partnerships with educators, schools, and social welfare institutions. Through these collaborations,

ZAONE expands access to meaningful learning experiences for children from diverse social backgrounds, including those from low-income families and migrant communities.

ZAONE participated in the P.E.R. Play, Explore, Research seminar held in Hanoi, Vietnam, and facilitated a workshop titled "From Materials to Relationships: Building Caring and Resilient Communities through Play and Reflection." In the workshop, participants explored how experiences with materials can go beyond simple activities to connect people with one another, and how personal memories and lived experiences can expand into shared learning within a community.

The workshop invited educators to engage directly with materials, reflect on their own stories, and connect them with others' experiences. Through this process, participants examined how material-based exploration can support relationships, dialogue, and collective imagination. ZAONE views these practices as essential to building caring and resilient communities where learning is shaped through interaction, diversity, and shared meaning.

By linking environmental responsibility with educational practice, ZAONE continues to develop models of learning that integrate creativity, sustainability, and community. The organization seeks to contribute

to a future in which education empowers individuals to care for one another and for the planet, fostering social resilience through play, reflection, and meaningful connection.

Aurora International School of the Arts, Vietnam

Aurora International School of the Arts Viet Nam embodies an educational philosophy deeply inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach, envisaging the school as “an integral living organism, a place of shared lives and relationships among many adults and very many children” (Loris Malaguzzi). Established in September 2015 and officially opened in March 2016, Aurora integrates Vietnam’s rich cultural heritage, local materials, and traditional values with a profound respect for nature and ecological identity. Aurora provides a continuum of life-long learning opportunities for children aged one to fifteen years, spanning Nursery, Preschool, Primary, and Middle School levels.

The mission is to inspire and develop each child’s potential through learner-led investigations conducted within a natural, nurturing, and sustainable setting. From the smallest hands of one-year-olds to the bold steps of fifteen-year-olds, Aurora offers a journey of becoming an endless

story told through the “100 languages” of children. Learning journey is a living poem, shaped by the questions children ask and the stories they create through their hands, minds, and spirits. At Aurora, children are not merely learners but creators, thinkers, and explorers. They are the protagonists of their own stories, crafting knowledge through endless play, thoughtful reflection, and joyful collaboration.

This is a place where culture is honored; nature is revered, and the pulse of creativity beats strong, an ever-changing mosaic of growth, connection, and possibility. We were delighted to join the PER Seminar in Vietnam in September 2025, where the theme “Becoming Part of the Land: Community, Identity, and the Earth” invited us into a profound exploration of our roots and connections. Every natural material holds a story, a spark of creativity waiting to be kindled. They invite us to pause and rediscover the quiet beauty woven through the earth and the intricate patterns that surround us.

As we engage deeply with these elements, we notice the subtle shifts in landscape, environment, and community, gifts that inspire us to bring new life into our visual arts spaces. Through charcoal, clay, dyes, oil pastels, and wire, paired with varied techniques, this workshop reaches beyond the surface of materials. It reveals

how visual arts, intricately woven into early childhood education, nurture not only artistic expression but also the growth of mind, language, heart, and community. Working with natural materials invites mindfulness, a chance for children to be truly present, deeply connected to their world. The environment becomes a third teacher, an ever-present source of inspiration and imagination. Through this process, children’s artistic growth intertwines with a deeper bond to the land, their community, and themselves.”

Nanjing Experimental Kindergarten, China

Nanjing Experimental Kindergarten was founded in 1955. Initiated by Mr. Chen Heqin, revered as the father of early childhood education in China, it was jointly established by the Jiangsu Provincial Education Commission and Nanjing Normal University. In 1982, it was officially named Nanjing Experimental Kindergarten by the Jiangsu Provincial Education Commission. Over its 71-year history, the kindergarten has consistently adhered to the experimental spirit of “daring to practice, reforming and innovating,” steadfastly following a path of curriculum sinicization, scientification, and modernization. In 1983, in collaboration with the Early Childhood Education Re-

search Office of Nanjing Normal University, the kindergarten pioneered nationwide research on the “Kindergarten Integrated Curriculum.” In 2018, a series of achievements from this comprehensive curriculum research won the first prize of the National Teaching Achievement Award, and in 2021, it was selected by the Ministry of Education as one of the first batch of outstanding teaching achievement promotion projects.

Nanjing Experimental Kindergarten successfully conducted an innovative workshop at the P.E.R. Seminar. They created an immersive environment where participants experienced the integration of our comprehensive curriculum with the Reggio Emilia philosophy from a child’s perspective. This embodied the concept of “the hundred languages of children” and facilitated a meaningful cross-cultural exchange of educational wisdom.

Themed “*When Jinling Culture Meets Reggio Emilia*,” the workshop used a concept-case-practice framework to showcase our school’s localized practices as a Reggio partner within the Sino-Italian “2025: Humanity & Nature” project.

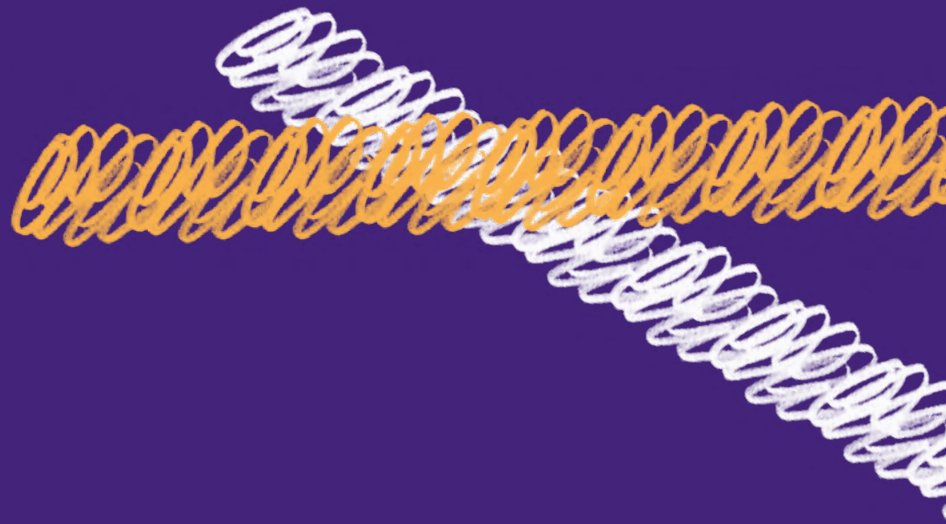
Focusing on traditional culture projects inspired by the Reggio Emilia Approach, the workshop demonstrated a complete practical journey:

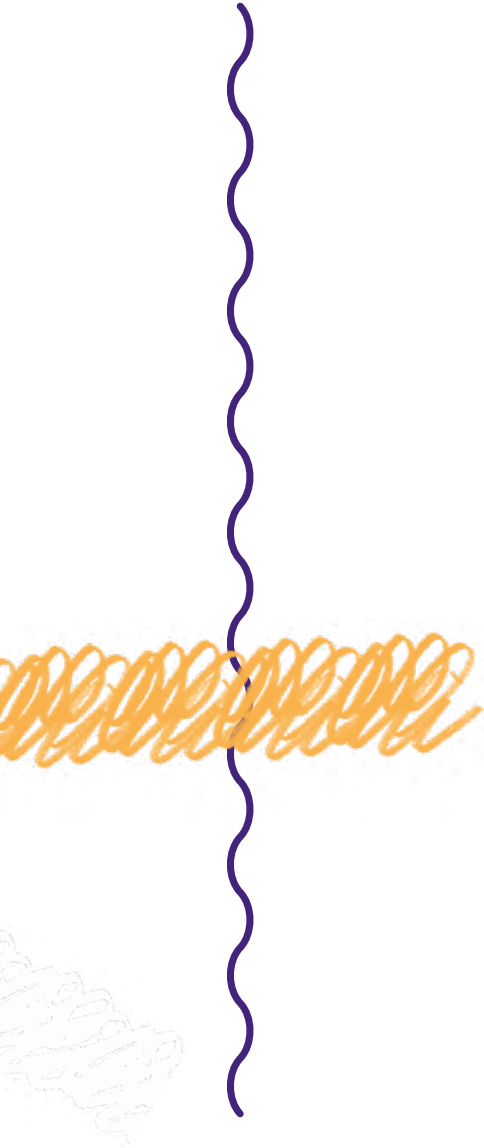
1. A deep project emerged from children’s

- interest in mugwort, exemplifying “following the child.”
2. We shared the co-research process with Reggio experts, highlighting mutual learning in teaching and documentation.
 3. Videos showed children exploring mugwort through diverse “languages,” prompting pedagogical reflection.
 4. A hands-on sachet-making session blended the Reggio workshop approach with Chinese culture.
 5. The child-initiated “Mugwort Protection Garden” showed the evolution from interest to ecological stewardship.
- This practical narrative demonstrated the power of merging Reggio principles with local practice, offering valuable insights from China’s educational context.



Conclusions





The P.E.R. Play Explore Research seminar held in Hanoi represented a significant moment of convergence between international and local perspectives on educational policy and pedagogical practice. Across plenary sessions, workshops and informal exchanges, the seminar put at the centre the idea that dialogue and shared inquiry are essential approaches for addressing the complexity of contemporary educational challenges.

A key outcome of the seminar was the acknowledgement that *play and playfulness* are a core dimension of educational quality. Play was not discussed as an isolated strategy or age-specific activity, but as a broader pedagogical stance characterized by motivation and relational engagement. The discussions emphasized that playfulness, when embedded in everyday educational practices, enables learners and educators alike to navigate uncertainty and complexity.

Quality education emerged as a multi-dimensional and culturally situated concept. Educational quality was framed as a dynamic balance between policy frameworks, pedagogical practices, learning environments, and children's lived experiences. In this sense, quality education requires policies that are effective and evidence-informed, but also attentive to local cultures and identities. As highlighted during the

seminar, early childhood education in particular offers a unique space to imagine futures that are not disconnected from their roots. By investing in culturally grounded quality policies, it is possible to continue to strengthen each country's early education system while preserving what gives it meaning and identity.

The workshops provided concrete examples of how a playful and inquiry-based approach can be enacted in practice. Conceived as spaces of co-research and experimentation, they made visible how environments, materials, movement, language, and artistic processes can function as catalysts for collaborative and reflective learning.

The seminar also addressed the challenges posed by rapid technological change, particularly the increasing presence of artificial intelligence in education. Participants stressed that a playful approach to learning offers an important counterbalance to purely instrumental uses of technology, helping to preserve education as relational and ethical.

Equally significant was the role of partnership and international cooperation. The collaboration between Hanoi National University of Education, Fondazione Reggio Children, national authorities, and international partners created conditions for mutual learning and for the co-construction of

educational visions that are locally grounded and globally connected.

The Hanoi seminar reaffirmed education as a deeply human, cultural, and political endeavor. It highlighted the playful approach to learning and culturally grounded quality education as strategic levers for navigating change while safeguarding children's rights and wellbeing. The reflections gathered in these proceedings do not represent final answers, but shared orientations and commitments that invite continued research, policy dialogue, and meaningful collaborative action toward more equitable and sustainable education systems.



**Watch the final video of the P.E.R.
Play Explore Research seminar in Hanoi**

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Nurturing Wellbeing,
the intersection of Play, Education and Research

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The *P.E.R. – Play, Explore, Research* project by Fondazione Reggio Children-Centro Loris Malaguzzi, made possible by the collaboration with The LEGO Foundation, is a global platform for exchange and research for teachers, educators, researchers, families and administrators to promote playful approaches to learning for children, young people and adults.

This series of publications brings together the contributions that characterised each individual conference-action in the seven countries involved in the project, starting with the launch of the P.E.R. project in Italy, in Reggio Emilia, in November 2023.