



# A program showcase

## Jardim dos Pequeñitos, Santo André, Brazil

by Michael Kalinowski

“For children, the curiosity is encouragement, so that they investigate the world, and this process is very important in their development. They need to figure out who to trust, what danger is, what fun is, setting their own borders. Thus this initial discovery is intense and full of action.”

Herman, 1992

According to Valéria Andreetto, Principal of Jardim dos Pequeñitos (Garden of the Little Ones), an urban school,

“In their everyday life children have an ongoing relationship with the trees and animals (rabbits, peacocks, ducks, chickens, hens, turtles, and fish). In this place, we take advantage of some inherent characteristics of the child, such as playing and having pleasure in discovering things, driven by curiosity . . . the starting point for learning, and what promotes a desire to continue to learn.”

Pequeñitos was born on October 1, 1987 as a Montessori school. After 15 years the program had grown tremendously. Andreetto says, “We were looking for a special physical environment in which there was nature with dimensions that foster imagination, energy, and the spirit of community.” The program now enrolls 300 children in 15 classrooms, with a staff of 102. The program operates from 6:30 am to 7:00 pm.

In the nursery, they receive babies from three to six months old. To Valéria,

“Our babies are producers of culture, values, and rights, the competent authorities in the learning and communication in hundreds of languages. From the beginning they are active and sociable, predisposed to look for the outline of the human face and hear the voice of others, prepared for interpersonal

relationships in many other ways. Babies are also emotional beings, motivated to control and express their experiences, whether pleasant or unpleasant. Babies are biologically prepared to communicate states of anxiety, necessity, and pleasure.”

In addition to child care, the program offers swimming classes, English classes starting at age four, physical education, computer classes, and art classes with an atelierista (in Reggio, that would be an art teacher). They also employ a biologist who joined the World Forum Nature Action Collaborative for Children. Last year, they had their first Nature Education Forum to help the World Forum connect as many children as possible to nature. This year in June, as a result of their own Nature Education Forum, the book *Sustainability: From children to Grown Ups* (UNIC Grafica e Editora, Santo André, 2012) was released. While the school enrolls middle-class and wealthier families, each year the school adopts an institution in need and contributes resources in education to it.

The pedagogical approach of Jardim dos Pequeñitos is based on constructivist theory and the educational approach inspired by Loris Malaguzzi and Reggio Emilia, which aims at valuing the image of the child as being rich in potential. They also follow Emmi Pikler and, to some degree, Rudolf Steiner. In the organization and decor of the facility, they try to create a calm and beautiful environment. Psychomotor activities are based on the work of Bernard Aucouturier in psychomotor education, a pedagogic and therapeutic approach aimed at supporting and aiding an individual’s personal development. It is based on a holistic view of human beings that considers each individual as a unity of physical, emotional, and cognitive actualities, which interact with each other and the surrounding social environment.



Their pedagogical plan includes developing projects of investigation with the active participation of children, parents, teachers, and the community. Curiosity may, for example, take children to a lake where they can touch water, play with it, study what is in it, try to embrace it, pour it — and so through these activities learn a lot about water. At Jardim dos Pequeñitos, teachers hope that this early and intense learning, inspired by natural curiosity, can be maintained throughout life.

Principal Valéria Andreetto has a somewhat unusual training for an early childhood director. While she now has a master's degree in Education, she originally trained as an economist. She has served as President of OMEP (World Organization for Preschool Education) and as a representative of the Interna-

tional Organizing Committee for the World Forum on Early Care and Education (WOFO). She believes that WOFO has been a great motivator and partner in the development of new ideas.

For further information, please contact:  
Valéria Gonçalves Andreetto, Principal  
Jardim dos Pequeñitos  
Rua Adolfo Bastos, 725  
Santo André — São Paulo, Brazil  
55 11 4427-9310  
Email: [pequenitos@uol.com.br](mailto:pequenitos@uol.com.br)  
Web site: [www.jardimdospequenitos.com.br](http://www.jardimdospequenitos.com.br)

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The Program Showcases are developed by Michael Kalinowski as a component of the World Forum on Early Care and Education.

They are intended to highlight the work of particularly interesting, unique, and/or exceptional early childhood programs around the world.

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