

THE REGGIO EMILIA APPROACH

Karen Haigh, 2018

The Reggio Emilia Approach to early education uses a social constructivist philosophy along with the use of symbolic representation to support understanding. Learning is based on context and community, relationships and collaboration, communication and dialogue, as well as reflection and meaning. The learner's capacities and potential are recognized, supported, and extended.

Howard Gardner comments about the Schools of Reggio Emilia, "**Nowhere else in the world is there such a seamless and symbiotic relationship between a school's philosophy and its practices. In Reggio, the teachers know how to listen to children, how to allow them to take the initiative, and yet how to guide them in productive ways**" (Edwards, Gandini, and Forman, 1993).

Principles of the Reggio Approach (taken from *Indications: Preschools and Infant Toddler Centres of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia*)

- **Children as active protagonist** of their growth and development
- **The hundred languages** - hundreds of ways of thinking, expressing, understanding, and encountering
- **Participation** is a value and strategy in which the children, parents, and educators are stakeholders in the educational project. It is embedded in daily experiences.
- **Listening** - ongoing process that cultivates reflection and openness towards oneself and others where dialogue and change occur
- **Learning as a process** of individual and group construction
- **Educational research** - Involves knowledge building tension that is recognized and valued. Research between children and adults is a priority practice of everyday life.
- **Educational documentation** that gives value to and makes explicit, visible, and accessible the nature of the individual and group learning process for children and adults
- **Progettazione** - Involves organizing and designing teaching and learning experiences, the environment, opportunities to participate, and professional development NOT through predefined curricula. A strategy for learning that respects the learning process.
- **Organization** - shared responsibility where identity, stability, and security are a priority for children
- **Environment, spaces, and relations** - organized to foster interaction, autonomy, exploration, curiosity, and communication as children and adults research and live together
- **Professional Development** - building understanding and awareness of the meanings and methods of education and is seen as a priority
- **Assessment** - Involves a process where scholastic life including the children's learning, professionalism of personnel, and the quality of service is reviewed in order to better understand, recognize, and negotiate meanings and intentionality of the education project and is seen as a public action of dialogue and interpretation.

Looking at Traditional and Progressive-Reggio Based Approaches to Learning

| ELEMENT | MORE TRADITIONAL | MORE PROGRESSIVE (Inquiry-Based, Collaborative Learning with Reggio Emilia Influence) |
|-----------------------|--|--|
| Environment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Floor plan w/basic interest areas - Much plastic - Much catalogue furniture - Bright colors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Floor plan w/basic interest areas - Identity, families, & experiences portrayed - Careful attention to detail such as interesting objects, varied levels, transparency, light, nature, texture, etc. - Less furniture and more home-like furniture - Use of more neutral colors so attention given to children & their work - Connections to home, nature, and authenticity - Welcoming entranceway |
| Documentation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Children's artwork to be decorated & displayed - Used as evidence of learning w/focus on quantitative information | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collections of children's experiences & ideas portrayed w/attention to detail & design for portrayal of the learning experiences, processes, & strategies - Children's work is studied & valued as a major means to find children's interests & intentions in order to expand them - Children's work is the means for teacher development & learning - Children's work shows and shares the learning process - Used as evidence of learning w/focus on qualitative information |
| Languages & materials | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Let children merely play & explore w/ materials OR direct children on what to make, or what to do. - Rely on verbal communication - Children's work looks the same | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Explore quality & attributes of materials and then use materials for expression and construction of ideas - Rely on and value many types or modes of communication - Provoke children to explore, create & communicate w/various materials while building understanding as all work is unique |
| Emergent curriculum | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Children's learning is based on what others want them to learn - Emphasis on "telling children information" - Knowledge is to be "put in children" [banking model] (Ladson-Billings, 1994) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learning is driven by meaningful and contextual interests of children and teachers - Emphasis on observing & listening to children - Knowledge is "pulled out of children" [mining model] and expanded (Ladson-Billings, 1994) |
| Image of the child | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The child needs to be given information to learn. - The child assimilates or absorbs knowledge given. - The child needs to be directed on what to learn | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The child is full of ideas, interests, & experiences - The child constructs knowledge after hearing various perspectives and/or having experiences. - The child knows what to learn |