

THE REGGIO EMILIA APPROACH

*"... a hundred world's to discover
a hundred world's to invent
a hundred world's to dream."*

Loris Malaguzzi, founder of the Reggio-Emilia method

At the heart of the Reggio philosophy is the belief that children are full of curiosity and creativity; they are not empty memory banks waiting to be filled with facts, figures and dates. Reggio-inspired curriculum is flexible and emerges from children's ideas, thoughts and observations. The Reggio goal is to cultivate within children a lifelong passion for learning and exploration.

The Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education is based on over forty years of experience in the Reggio Emilia Municipal Infant/toddler and Preschool Centres in Italy. It places emphasis on children's symbolic languages in the context of a project-oriented curriculum. Learning is viewed as a journey; and education as building relationships with people (both children and adults) and creating connections between ideas and the environment.

International recognition of the Reggio preschools exploded in 1991, when a panel of experts commissioned by Newsweek magazine identified the preschools of Reggio Emilia as one of the "best top ten schools in the world" (Newsweek 1991). Today, leading educationalists and institutions are increasingly adopting the Reggio Emilia approach for their preschool programs. In recent years, notably, Google and the World Bank have become prominent advocates for this approach to early childhood education.

Reggio Emilia has won numerous awards in 1992; Reggio Schools were awarded the Danish Lego Prize. Also in 1992, an analogous award was made to Reggio Municipal infant-toddler centres and preschools by the Kohl Foundation in Chicago. In 1994, the Hans Christian Andersen Prize was awarded. In the same year, similar recognition was given by the Mediterranean Association of International Schools. In 1997, the Municipal Preschools and Infant Toddler Centres at Reggio Emilia started a collaborative project with the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

The Reggio Approach is based on a comprehensive philosophy, underpinned by several fundamental, guiding principles:

- The child as protagonist, collaborator, and communicator
- The teacher as partner, nurturer, guide, and researcher.
- Cooperation as the foundation of the educational system.
- The environment as the "third teacher."
- The Parent as Partner
- Documentation as communication

Emergent Curriculum: You might have read in our prospectus about Emergent Curriculum. That term has been used at Campus Kindy for a number of years now. An emergent curriculum is one that builds upon the interests of children. Topics for study are captured from the talk of children, through community or family events, as well as the known interests of children (puddles, shadow, dinosaurs, etc.). Team planning is an essential component of the emergent curriculum. Teachers work together to formulate the possible directions of a project, the materials needed, and possible parent and/or community support and involvement.

Project Work: Reggio is known for what are called Projects. They are nothing like the type we might associate with school. Projects that emerge from the children's enquiries are in-depth studies of concepts, ideas, and interests that arise from the children. Considered as an adventure, projects may last one week or could continue throughout the school year. Throughout a project, teachers help children make decisions about the direction of study, the ways in which the group will research the topic, the medium that will demonstrate and showcase the topic, and the selection of materials needed for the work.

Representational Development: Consistent with Howard Gardner's notion of schooling for multiple intelligences, the Reggio Emilia approach calls for the integration of the graphic arts as tools for cognitive, linguistic, and social development. Presentation of concepts in multiple forms -- print, art, construction, drama, music, puppetry, shadow play etc etc etc -- are viewed as essential to children's understanding of experience. At Campus Kindy our dance/movement teacher (Monique) and our art teacher also known as an atelierista in Reggio (Janet) are equipping children with multiple representational skills.

Collaboration: Collaborative group work, both large and small, is considered valuable and necessary to advance cognitive development. Children are encouraged to talk, critique, compare, negotiate, hypothesize, and problem-solve through group work. Within the Reggio Emilia approach, different approaches toward the same investigation are all valued, and thus children are given access to many tools and media to express themselves. The relationship and collaboration with the home, school and community all support the learning of the child.

Teachers as Researchers: The teacher's role within the Reggio Emilia approach is complex. Working as co-teachers, the role of the teacher is first and foremost to be that of a learner alongside the children. The teacher is a teacher-researcher, a resource and guide as she/he lends expertise to children (Edwards, 1993). Within such a teacher-researcher role, educators carefully listen, observe, and document children's work and the growth of community in their classroom and are to provoke, co-construct, and stimulate thinking and peer collaboration. Teachers are committed to reflection about their own teaching and learning.

Features of The Reggio Emilia Approach

Teacher Role:

- to co-explore the learning experience with the children.
- to provoke ideas, problem solving, and conflict resolution.
- to take ideas from the children and return them for further exploration.
- to organize the classroom to be accessible and interesting to the child.
- to organize materials to help children make thoughtful decisions.
- to document children's progress: video, audio recording, photos, portfolios.
- to help children see the connections in learning and experiences.
- to help children express their knowledge through projects.
- to have a dialogue about their projects with parents and other teachers.
- to foster the connection between home, school and community.

Projects:

- can emerge from children's ideas and/or interests.
- can be provoked by teachers.

- can be introduced by teachers knowing what is of interest to children: shadows, puddles, tall buildings, construction sites, heavy equipment, nature, etc.
- should be long enough to develop over time, to discuss new ideas, to negotiate over, to induce conflicts, to revisit, to see progress, to see movement of ideas.
- should be concrete, personal from real experiences, important to children, should be "large" enough for diversity of ideas and rich in interpretive/representational expression.

Media:

- explore first: what is this material, what does it do, before "what can I do" with the material.
- should have variation in colour, texture, pattern: help children "see" the colours, tones, hues; help children "feel" the texture, the similarities and differences.
- should be presented in an artistic manner--it too should be aesthetically pleasing to look at--it should invite you to touch, admire, inspire.
- should be revisited throughout many projects to help children see the possibilities.

For more information on the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education, visit:

- Official Reggio Emilia web site: www.reggiochildren.it
- Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reggio_Emilια_approach
- Details on Method: http://www.worldedreformat.com/pub/reggio_approach.pdf