

Reggio Emilia Approach

By Andrew Loh, Dec 2006

Hailed as the best pre-schools in the world by Newsweek magazine in 1991, the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education has attracted the worldwide attention of educators, researchers and just about anyone interested in early childhood education best practices. Even the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)'s revised version of developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) guidelines also included examples from Reggio approach. Today, Reggio approach has been adopted in USA, UK, New Zealand, Australia and many other countries.

Loris Malaguzzi (1920-1994) founded the 'Reggio Emilia' approach at a city in northern Italy called Reggio Emilia. The 'Reggio' approach was developed for municipal child-care and education programs serving children below six. The approach requires children to be seen as competent, resourceful, curious, imaginative, inventive and possess a desire to interact and communicate with others.

The 'Reggio' vision of the child as a competent learner has produced a strong child-directed curriculum model. The curriculum has purposive progression but not scope and sequence. Teachers follow the children's interests and do not provide focused instruction in reading and writing. Reggio approach has a strong belief that children learn through interaction with others, including parents, staff and peers in a friendly learning environment.

Here are some key features of Reggio Emilia's early childhood program:

The role of the environment-as-teacher

- Within the Reggio Emilia schools, the educators are very concerned about what their school environments teach children. Hence, a great attention is given to the look and feel of the classroom. It is often referring to the environment as the "third teacher"
- The aesthetic beauty within the schools is seen as an important part of respecting the child and their learning environment
- A classroom atmosphere of playfulness and joy pervades
- Teachers organize environments rich in possibilities and provocations that invite the children to undertake extended exploration and problem solving, often in small groups, where cooperation and disputation mingle pleasurably.
- Documentation of children's work, plants, and collections that children have made from former outings are displayed both at the children's and adult eye level.
- Common space available to all children in the school includes dramatic play areas and work tables for children from different classrooms to come together.
- Here is a link to view some of the [environmental pictures](#)

Children's multiple symbolic languages

- Using the arts as a symbolic language through which to express their understandings in their project work
- Consistent with Dr. Howard Gardner's notion of schooling for [multiple intelligences](#), the Reggio approach calls for the integration of the graphic arts as tools for cognitive, linguistic, and social development.
- Presentation of concepts and hypotheses in multiple forms such as print, art, construction, drama, music, puppetry, and shadow play. These are viewed as essential to children's understanding of experience.

Documentation as assessment and advocacy

(Rather unique in Reggio approach)

- Documenting and displaying the children's project work, which is necessary for children to express, revisit, and construct and reconstruct their feelings, ideas and understandings.
- Similar to the portfolio approach, documentation of children's work in progress is viewed as an important tool in the learning process for children, teachers, and parents.
- Pictures of children engaged in experiences, their words as they discuss what they are doing, feeling and thinking, and the children's interpretation of experience through the visual media are displayed as a graphic presentation of the dynamics of learning.
- Teachers act as recorders (documenters) for the children, helping them trace and revisit their words and actions and thereby making the learning visible.

Long-term projects

- Supporting and enriching children's learning through in-depth, short-term (one week) and long-term (throughout the school year) project work, in which responding, recording, playing, exploring, hypothesis building and testing, and provoking occurs.
- Projects are child-centered, following their interest, returning again and again to add new insights.
- Throughout a project, teachers help children make decisions about the direction of study, the ways in which the group will research the topic, the representational medium that will demonstrate and showcase the topic.

The teacher as researcher

- 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.
- 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 and stimulate thinking
- Teachers are committed to reflection about their own teaching and learning.
- Classroom teachers working in pairs and collaboration, sharing information and mentoring between personnel.

Home-school relationships

- Children, teachers, parents and community are interactive and work together. Building a community of inquiry between adults and children.
- For communication and interaction can deepen children's inquiry and theory building about the world around them
- Programs in Reggio are family centered. Loris's vision of an "education based on relationships" focuses on each child in relation to others and seeks to activate and support children's reciprocal relationships with other children, family, teachers, society, and the environment.

Reggio approach is not a formal model with defined methods (such as Waldorf and Montessori), teacher certification standards and accreditation processes. But rather, the educators in Reggio Emilia speak of their evolving "experience" and see themselves as a provocation and reference point, a way of engaging in dialogue starting from a strong and rich vision of the child. In all of these settings, documentation was explored as a means of promoting parent and teacher understanding of children's learning and development.

While this article concentrate on Reggio Emilia approach on early childhood education, it did not play down on the other approaches such as Waldorf and Montessori. Each approach has its own strengths and weaknesses as well as areas of difference.

What makes the Reggio Emilia approach stand out? In a nutshell, Reggio approach articulates children to acquire skills of critical thinking and collaboration. All preschool operators ought to benchmark against the Reggio Emilia schools. Here is the contact link to look for [preschool](#) that based on Reggio approach.

This article aims to serve as an introduction to Reggio approach; you are encouraged to do your research on the Internet. Alternatively, there are four recommended books on Reggio approach:

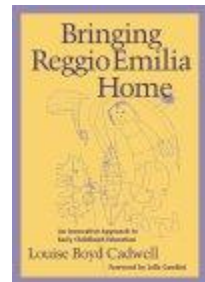
[The Hundred Languages of Children: The Reggio Emilia Approach - Advanced Reflections](#)

The book is a comprehensive introduction covering history and philosophy, the parent perspective, curriculum and methods of teaching, school and system organization, the use of space and physical environments, and adult professional roles including special education



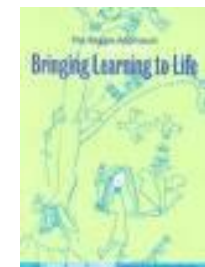
[Bringing Reggio Emilia Home](#)

This book is good for parents who like to have more in-depth understanding on Reggio Emilia principles and may be inspired to implement Reggio approach at home.



[Bringing Learning to Life: A Reggio Approach to Early Childhood Education \(Early Childhood Education, 86\)](#)

"Bringing Learning to Life" is a practical view of the everyday learning that can happen in a classroom. If you don't know about the Reggio Emilia Approach, after reading *Bringing Learning to Life* you would.



[Working in the Reggio Way: A Beginner's Guide for American Teachers](#)

Working in the Reggio Way helps teachers of young children bring the innovative practices of the schools in Reggio Emilia, Italy, to American classrooms. Written by an educator who observed and worked in the world-famous schools, this groundbreaking resource presents the key tools that will allow American teachers to transform their classrooms, including: Organization of time and space, Documentation of children's work, Observation and questioning, Attention to children's environments.

