

Running Head: REGGIO EMILIA

A description and critique of the Reggio Emilia Approach.

EDT 660-Introduction to Educational Research

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November 16, 2004

Reggio Emilia Approach

Dramatic forces of change have altered the culture of Italy since its unification in 1870. As a culture changes, its institutions, if they are to continue to serve those who created them, must inevitably change too. Consolidation, war, fascism, poverty, and more war, combined with the breakdown of the national government, realignment with the Church, new interpersonal relationships, and new work relationships forced into question fundamental assumptions of the function, relationships, and effectiveness of the “old order” institutions. Educational institutions, devastated by World War II, were being reborn. Not only reborn, but in the Northern Regions of Italy, where a long history of child activism prevailed, rethought.

Children—especially vulnerable to the effects of war and social disorder—grow and flourish in a stable environment. A peaceful society must be able to educate their children to avoid repeating the mistakes of their ancestors. An educational institutional framework to achieve these goals would have to be flexible enough to adapt to constant change and function without specifics on how best to educate and nurture children. One framework, created nearly 40 years ago, attempts this. It is in operation in the northern region of Italy near the city of Reggio Emilia. The purpose of this study is to explore the Reggio Emilia Early Childhood Center experiment and describe the ongoing collaboration between children, educators, parents, and the community as they constantly collect data, question, analyze, and reflect upon how to best support and nurture young children’s developmental needs.

Philosophical Underpinnings

The best way to view the Reggio Emilia approach is by analysis of the tenets of their philosophy and their inextricably woven interdependencies. There are four cardinal

beliefs that all interact and guide every facet of the Reggio experience, namely, (a) an intense belief in the *power and present citizenship of children*; (b) a humble admission that all is not known about teaching and learning and that the teacher must, therefore, be a *constant researcher*; (c) an understanding that the *space of education* is vitally important and worthy of great considerations; and finally, (d) that a system of *interrelated relationships* must exist between the community, families, teachers, and children.

Power and present citizenship of children.

Mussolini and the fascists held that the government was more important than the individual was. As fascism failed, the founders of the Reggio Emilia approach looked to the other extreme of importance—that of the individual, more specifically, the child. They saw the impact of war on children and the child's innate resilience. They recognized that children are not just a collection of needy individuals but rather were part of the ever-changing fabric of their community and capable of incredible growth and learning even under extreme and horrible circumstances. Thus was born the notion that children are *present citizens*. As citizens, they deserve to be treated with rights accorded to all citizens.

How then, would one create a system to acknowledge and take advantage of the strengths of the child while at the same time ensuring what ever system that was created could adapt and grow as children's needs changed? First, the deep belief that the child is capable and strong implies that they, themselves, can and should take a role in their own education. They become *protagonists* in their own learning (Edwards, Gandini, Forman, 1998). At one time, they are both the most important leading player and a supporting character in their development. By focusing on small groups and problem solving—with