

Reggio Emilia: An Early Childhood Approach to Teaching and Learning

EDT 660: Introduction to Educational Research
Reggio Emilia Description and Critique
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Immediately following World War II, a young Italian journalist named Loris Malaguzzi returned to his hometown of Reggio Emilia, Italy only to discover the town

nearly destroyed and the people void of hope. A man of wisdom, energy and optimism, Malaguzzi decided to devote his talents to the education of young children. With enthusiasm and dedication, the townspeople and parents built the first city-run school. Malaguzzi then gathered an extremely dedicated and talented group of teachers who believed as he did that all children are born with the capabilities and fortitude to learn and share their inherent knowledge, even from a very early age. More than forty years later, educators from around the world have flocked to Reggio Emilia to witness first hand an educational experience of practice and reflection that is continuously readjusted to meet the needs of young children. The purpose of the paper is to explore the Reggio Emilia Childhood Centers in which a collaboration between children, educators, parents and the community constantly collect data, question, analyze and reflect upon how to support and nurture young children's development into lifelong learners and problem solvers. The following principles are all an integral part of the Reggio Emilia system of teaching young children, but should be considered as a tightly connected, coherent philosophy, in which each point influences and is influenced by all the others.

The educators in Reggio Emilia speak first and foremost about the image they have of the child. The child is seen as an active, participatory citizen of their community, both large and small. The child is considered a "present citizen," having rights as free-thinking individuals presently and not something we to prepare them for in their future. With this belief then comes the respect of the learning community in letting the children decide for themselves the direction and intensity of their learning.

The emphasis is placed on seeing the children as unique individuals with rights rather than simply needs. They have potential, plasticity, openness, the desire to grow, curiosity, a sense of wonder, and the desire to relate to other people and to communicate. (Edwards, Gandini, Forman, 1998, p. 114)

In keeping with this belief, an emergent curriculum, or progettazione, is used in deciding what will be taught or learned. An emergent curriculum is one that builds upon the interests and curiosities of the children. Project topics are selected on the basis of an academic interests or social concerns of the children. Teachers listen and observe carefully to the talk and play of the children to find out what topics to study next. In this way, the children have some control over the things they are going to learn and study, thus becoming “powerful, active, competent protagonists of their own growth” (Edwards et al., 1998, p. 180). Based on the children’s responses, teacher then decide which materials to introduce and the questions and opportunities to use to help the children further explore this topic. While some manipulation is allowed by the teacher, projects often move in unanticipated directions as the children identify additional problems to solve. Projects are not given any set ending date, but are instead left open-ended and are often long term. Projects revolve around the reciprocal nature of teacher-directed and child-initiated activity. Because curriculum decisions are based on the concerns and needs of the children, small groups of children of varying abilities and interests, including those with special needs, work together on projects.

As children proceed in the in study of topics and projects, they are encouraged to show their understanding through one of many graphic, or symbolic languages, which may include drawing, writing, dramatics, painting, shadow play, music, dance,