Fundamentals of Reggio Emilia

This is a blog post on the fundamentals of the Reggio Emilia approach to childcare. This post is based on the fundamentals as outlined by the website aneverydaystory. In this series we have expanded on the original concepts and added our own take to the fundamentals of Reggio Emilia.

Children are Capable of Constructing their Own Learning

*This means that children are all different with unique interests that should be supported through their education*

The Reggio Emilia Approach is an important perspective in early childhood education because it emphasizes the individuality of all children. There are a plurality of ways in which children understand the world, and these understanding change with age, demographic, environment and task. Therefore, it is vital to always regard children as capable when it comes to learning. A well-rounded educator is able to observe the different ways in which children are able to express not only what they know, but also what they have yet to learn, and then respond to those expressions with appropriate and stimulating programming. The goal of this programming should be to provide support for kids to discover things on their own.

Children Form an Understanding of Themselves and Their Place in the World Through Social Interactions With Others

*Humans are social beings by nature and at a young age it is important to develop social skills, collaborative capabilities and understanding of others*

The process of learning from a very young age is inherently social. Think of an infant and their parents, the interaction between caregiver and child provides not only the love and support required to develop healthy attachments, but also the sensory and social inputs for learning fundamentals, most notably language, as children imitate sounds and actions displayed by those around them. As a child grows older, the social aspect of learning morphs into something different but it never goes away. Humans are naturally social, and children are no exception. It is important for them to practice collaboration skills, develop empathy, and an understanding of others, learn how to regulate their own emotions in interpersonal situations, and use those around them as resources in their educational endeavours. Teachers are an important part of the social education in children’s early years, but so are peers as children go through the process of teasing out their own values and approaches to...
friendship, teamwork, treating others with kindness and respect, and finding out who they are and what they like.

Children Are Communicators
*They are inquisitive and their mode through which they communicate their curiosities is often play*

The Reggio Emilia Approach views the child as not only incredibly capable, but also extremely communicative. This means that children are inquisitive and able to share their interests and understandings of what they are experiencing and learning. The role of the teacher in this regard is to create an environment with a number of opportunities to explore and share their ideas. Educators should also be attentive to what children share when communicating their educational experiences.

The Environment is the Third Teacher
*The natural environment serves a great purpose in children’s development of other skills and understanding of how the world works*

This item is one of the main pillars of the Reggio Emilia Approach. The natural environment provides a wealth of incredibly relevant educational tools. If children’s learning can take place in the real world, the benefits are much greater. Although the natural environment is an important factor in early childhood education, so is the physical environment created by educators. A good environment according to the Reggio Emilia Approach carefully uses colour and space to create an open learning environment. Children’s work should be displayed in this space, and toys, books, provocation tables, and supplies should be available to children so that they can direct their learning through play. A well organized room also provides a sense of stability, predictability and safety that helps facilitate engagement. Lastly, the environment should be understand in a social/emotional context. It is important for educators to create a social climate which is safe, welcoming and supportive so that children are enthusiastic about their education, collaborating with their peers, and trusting their teachers.

The Teacher is a Mentor and Guide
*This means that the teacher plays an important role in encouraging children's natural interests and inclinations*

In the Reggio Emilia Approach, the teacher plays the role of facilitator. Educators are meant to provide opportunities for children to explore their interests and abilities. The goal for the teacher is to show children how to direct their own learning. Reggio Emilia advocates for children having an active role in the education process. In this way, Reggio Emilia curriculum is incredibly fluid and requires flexibility and constant collaboration among educators and students.

An Emphasis on Documenting Children’s Experiences

At Parkland, we do this by taking photos of the various activities children engage in here.

Documentation is central for reinforcing children’s accomplishments and building their confidence as capable learners. Documentation can take a number of forms including displaying work on the walls of a classroom, taking photos during activities, and even sending this photos to parents so that they are able to discuss their education and extend it at home with their families. Documentation can be used as a bridge between teachers and parents to help build a community that supports the education of children and opens up dialogue between educators, students, and parents/caregivers.

The Hundred Languages of Children

This principle is one of the most important parts of the Reggio Emilia Approach as it emphasizes the individual differences in how children may express their intelligence and understanding of new concepts. There is no single right way; there are a hundred languages in which children communicate their development.

The Hundred Languages of Children is a key concept in the Reggio Emilia Approach to Early Childhood Education. It emphasizes that children are capable and active learners that can express themselves in a multitude of ways. Below is a poem written by Loris Malaguzzi regarding the hundred languages of children and a video from Rye Nursery School explaining this concept even further.

The Hundred Languages by Loris Malaguzzi (translated by Lella Gandini)

No way. The hundred is there.
The child
is made of one hundred.
The child has
a hundred languages
a hundred hands
a hundred thoughts

a hundred ways of thinking
of playing, of speaking.
A hundred always a hundred
ways of listening
of marveling, of loving
a hundred joys
for singing and understanding
a hundred worlds
to discover
a hundred worlds
to invent
a hundred worlds
to dream.
The child has
a hundred languages
(and a hundred hundred hundred more)
but they steal ninety-nine.
The school and the culture
separate the head from the body.
They tell the child:
to think without hands
to do without head
to listen and not to speak
to understand without joy
to love and to marvel
only at Easter and at Christmas.
They tell the child:
to discover the world already there
and of the hundred
they steal ninety-nine.
They tell the child:
that work and play
reality and fantasy
science and imagination
sky and earth
reason and dream
are things
that do not belong together.
And thus they tell the child
that the hundred is not there.
The child says:
No way. The hundred is there.
Poem Sourced from: http://www.innovativeteacherproject.org/reggio/poem.php