

Reggio emilia approach analysis



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Children are explorers and love to investigate what is going on around them. Imagine if their whole day was spent in an environment with beauty formed by their own creativity? Having the opportunity to play with natural and open ended materials of their own interests, guidance from educators to construct their learning and thinking on exciting topics, and most importantly having their families be greatly involved in their day, the learning outcomes of each child would be concrete and long lasting. These are the kinds of opportunities provided by educators from the Reggio Emilia Approach, found by researcher and teacher Loris Malaguzzi. “ Creativity seems to emerge from multiple experiences, coupled with a well-supported development of personal resources, including a sense of freedom to venture beyond the known” (Loris Malaguzzi, *The Hundred Languages of Children*, ch. 3, by Carolyn Edwards (1993).

This essay will be discussing what the Reggio Emilia Approach is, and which constructivist theories influence the Reggio Emilia curriculum. It will also uncover the curriculum elements and key programming used in the approach and lastly how its approach supports the six principles of the ELECT document used in Ontario. The topics discussed in this paper will be based on the research found in the book *Authentic Childhood Experiencing Reggio Emilia in the Classroom* by Susan Fraser and also online sources.

First of all, what is the Reggio Emilia Approach? This question arises amongst many people like, researchers in child studies, parents looking for childcare, educators looking to work, the government when looking to see statistics to see what curriculum model has a successful outcome of quality childcare and many more persons who are interested in what different childcare

approaches provide. In relation to this, the Reggio Emilia Approach was found by an early education specialist from a town in North Italy called Reggio Emilia his name was Loris Malaguzzi (1920-1994). Malaguzzi's vision attracts the world through his play and project based curriculum, children play and educators guide their play into projects that interest them.

The approach is a combination of principles that build the child centred environment and curriculum. " Collaboration" is when everyone works together and includes parents, educators, communities and the children; " the image of the child-conceptualizing an image of the child as competent, inventive, and full of ideas" (Fraser, 2000, Page 8). The " environment" is known as the third teacher as it is carefully set up by educators to challenge the child's curiosity and learning. " Documenting" is a display of what the child's experiences are shown through language and creativity. " "

Provocation" is when educators listen carefully to what the children are saying and further guide the thoughts and accomplishments. Plans and investigations are also made by everyone involved, which is known as " progettazione". A unique principle found in the Reggio Emilia approach is the " one hundred languages of children" which means that the children use many different resources and materials to " make symbolic representations of ideas that may arise" (Fraser, 2000, Page 8). The principles from the Reggio Emilia Approach also include uninterrupted play. As a whole it is an exciting learning environment for the children, educators and parents all co-learning together.

As a second point, let's discuss which theories influence the Reggio Emilia curriculum. For instance in a Montessori school the philosophy will be of

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Maria Montessori and the day will be planned out using didactic materials and sequential steps based on her research on child studies. The Reggio Emilia Approach is not just based on one philosophy like the Montessori but it is actually based on a number of different philosophers. including Jean Piaget's theory for the sequences of cognitive development, Lev Vygotsky theory for the social aspects of learning and the importance of play, Jean Dewey's theory for the role of play, human nature and "viewing the child in the context of the family and society" (Fraser, 2000, Page14), Hugh Gardiner's theory of multiple intelligences, Urie Bronfenbrenner's theory on the environment, Barbara Biber's theory included collaboration and positive self image, and there may be more. As a result of having so many philosophies combined in the Reggio Emilia Approach, it is known to be a model, focusing on the whole child, development, environment, play, family involvement, self image controlled by educators really understanding how to guide children to express their feelings, and how children use their multiple intelligence and symbolic language.

The third topic this paper is addressing, what are the curriculum elements and key programming used in Reggio Emilia Schools? Curriculum is what the children learn from and the experiences they have when being cared for in a child care centre. Key programming is the goals and schedules that a school may have.

Traditionally a lot of early childcare centres would plan what toys and activities the children would play with and then help and teach the children how to use them or how to do an activity and then a report may be written to

show parents how the child is getting along according to the child's development stage.

In the Reggio Emilia Approach the curriculum is very different to traditional teacher taught curriculums. It is planned by what the children are interested in while playing and engaging in activities of their choice.

Assessment is used to plan what to do in the classroom based on a child's interests. Its role in the project process is to learn the children's behaviours, to discover children's interests, to revisit projects with the children, to gain knowledge on the children's capabilities and as a tool to study children. The Reggio Approach suggests that by assessing projects over and over again, children understand their own questions. It also stresses that parents, children and educators are co-learners.

Additionally the rationale for educators is to assess alongside the children. Educators facilitate rather than directing the children. Educators assess by observing and stepping in or stepping back whenever they need to. They also ask important questions that challenge the children to figure things out by their own curiosity.

Documentation is also used to plan the Reggio Approach. Here there are many different methods of documentation from simple note form to “ the more sophisticated electronic equipment, such as digital cameras, webs, audio recorders, and video recorders” (Fraser, 2000, Page 83) depending on what kind of observations are being made. The different observational techniques are running records which are the method used more often, time sampling, art displays, event sampling, anecdotal records, tape recording,

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sequences of photographs, displays of projects, and video tapes. In the Reggio Approach documentation is used as soon as something happens, The diary of Laura a diary taken from a Reggio Centre in Italy states that teachers work closely with the children taking notes, recording observations they think have meaning toward the learning of that child.

Documentation is done when needed there's not only specific timings, notes can be taken at any time, Documentation is done to further assessment and planning towards projects that children want to start or are already working towards.

The Reggio Emilia Approach does not have an organized planned curriculum it is actually very spontaneous and is built according to individual or group interests of the children. To emphasize that the curriculum is spontaneous and is planned on the interest of the children educators use different methods of observations at any time. There are many ways to observe in the Reggio Approach. Note taking is one way to observe, they also use diaries to write reflections on observations, photography, videos, audio, written, watching play and careful listening to conversations. Parental observations are taken at home and noted. The rationale for the parent assessments are that they know their children best and children are carefully observed on how the environment is used. The Reggio Emilia Approach suggests that children speak one hundred symbolic languages and they use observations to determine and understand what these languages are. To clarify, observations are used for assessment, documentation, planning and implementing the curriculum. With this in mind the educator's role is to guide the natural curiosity and learning of the children, and the environment

is known as the third teacher. “ The children are little researchers. They can and want to communicate with the surrounding world” (Reggio Emilia Philosophy, [www. education. com](http://www.education.com)).

There are many factors that have to be taken into account when it comes to the role of observations and implementing. “ The decision to carry out observations is usually the result of a question that has arisen about a child or a group of children and their behaviour or activities in the centre”. (Fraser, 2000, Page 81) Similarly, other factors have important roles in implementing the learning process, for example time is important. Children need lots of time to work on ongoing projects. In the Reggio Emilia Approach there are no time limits on projects. Children work on projects as long as they are still interested. Space and layout is carefully set up for dramatic play, water play, block play, physical and manipulation, art and creativity, outdoor play, and quiet time area. This encourages social skills, problem solving skills, making personal choices and team work methods. “ Teachers carefully organize spaces for small and large group projects and small intimate spaces for one, two and three children”. (About Reggio Emilia philosophy, [www. education. com](http://www.education.com)) The environment is made to look beautiful and inviting.

Another factor in implementing the curriculum process is that the resources that are provided by the educator, another important role of the educator. Materials are carefully chosen they can be natural materials, toys, games, water play, creative materials, open ended materials, blocks, puzzles, books, sand toys, or even dress up clothes for dramatic play. Children use the materials so they can play and further their learning. To manipulate and start

the process of projects the educators use positive language and encouragement to help children learn how to express their emotions.

Educators plan team meetings to discuss the observations and planning. Parents are always welcome to join or help make decisions. Meetings are used to plan what materials need to be taken out, how the environment should be set up, what is needed for projects that are emerging and also what things need to be changed.

The Reggio Emilia Approach is very similar to the emergent curriculum. A lot of the factors used in Reggio are used in the emergent curriculum, but the emergent curriculum emphasizes development and interest and Reggio emphasizes on interest.

The final point to discuss in this paper is about how the Reggio Emilia Approach uses all six principles of the ELECT document.

In the Reggio Emilia Approach there is a link to the first principle of the ELECT document which is “ Early child development sets the foundation for lifelong learning, behavior and health” An example of this is that diaries are shown to parents, each project is based on being child centered and play based which means that it has to be developmentally appropriate, each assessment is done to figure out the interests of the child and each child is observed to their own developmental stage and long term projects are used so educators can see how children are growing and are developing their learning. Also there are various philosophies used in the Reggio Approach one in particular linked to the different stages and sequences of development are the philosophy of Piaget.

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The second principle of the ELECT document is “ Partnerships with families and communities strengthen the ability of early childhood settings to meet the needs of children”. The link to the Reggio Emilia Approach to the second principle are that parents work as co learners with educators and children in the Reggio Emilia approach and photographs are displayed around the centre for the children to have a reminder of home.

The third principle of the ELECT document is “ Respect for diversity, equity and inclusion are prerequisites for honoring children’s rights, optimal development and learning:”. The next link to The Reggio Emilia Approach is parents are important, one influence is the philosophy of Bronfenbrenner, “ everyone involved -children, parents and teacher pay an integral part in what is known as the circle of we” (Fraser, page. 102) Reggio centre’s respect and support families, cultures and all diverse situations, in addition to this, the Approach also brings families together, learning about the different families, cultures, food and dressing up.

The fourth principle of the ELECT document is “ A planned curriculum supports early learning”. This principle is met by the projects that take place in the Reggio schools, projects are worked on in depth and detail, the child centered approach and children’s interest plan the curriculum. “ The Reggio Emilia Approach can be defined therefore as “ contextual”, that is, it is determined by the dialogue among children, teachers and the environment surrounding them” (The Reggio Emilia Approach – Truly listening to young children, www. oecd. org).

The fifth principle is “ Play is a means to early learning that capitalizes on children’s natural curiosity and exuberance”, this principle is linked to the Reggio Emilia Approach The Reggio Approach is play based and has the same philosophy to the ELECT and the Emergent which is that children learn and grow through different types of play.

“ The word “ play” is not a frequently used word in The Reggio Approach, although as seen above, spontaneous play and play valued as “ meaningful learning” figure among the goals for learning and development. (The Reggio Emilia Approach – Truly listening to young children, [www. oecd. org](http://www.oecd.org)), in addition to this the Reggio Emilia Approach also states that play is used to depict 100 different languages through symbolic languages.

The last principle, principle six is “ Knowledgeable, responsive early childhood professionals are essential”. This principle is also linked to Reggio Emilia’s Approach, as Reggio Centers have teachers with extensive staff development; teachers make goals for them self and teachers also learn alongside the children enhancing their understanding of children. Another example of this principle is that the educators of Reggio schools sometimes are not qualified but learn from the other teachers and through each daily experience with the children.

In conclusion to this paper it shows that it can take a number of philosophy’s to create a high quality model, and that not just one philosophy is better than another, but each philosophy actually compliments one another, similarly it proves that children don’t necessarily need to be taught by a teacher but can learn by having the opportunity to construct their own

learning through a child centered approach. In addition this paper also shows that the role of play, culture, parents, educators, the environment, observations, assessment, documentation, and planning are all very important to implement a child's learning to make up a model like the Reggio Emilia Approach. Finally this paper proves that the Reggio Emilia Approach follows an emergent curriculum that can link to all six principles of the framework provided by the ELECT document.