



We at Building Blocks School believe that our vision for early childhood education is reinforced by the Reggio philosophy.

Since 2005, the Building Blocks Preschool Daycare Center educators have been strongly inspired by the philosophy and characteristics of the schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy and continue to be involved in a serious study of the Reggio Emilia Approach to early education.

Notable among the many features of this approach are:

- A deep respect for the potential of all young children.
- Communication and collaboration among the three partners of education - - children, parents and educators.
- Amiable, rich environments, which are engaging, welcoming, organized, beautiful and supportive of the work of children and educators.
- Voices of children, parents and educators made visible through various forms of documentation (Reflections, panels, binders, etc.).
- Relationships considered essential for the well-being and learning of children and adults.
- Children and educators constructing knowledge together through exploration and problem solving.
- Emergent curriculum and small group work based on the negotiation between children's and educator's interest.
- The use of many expressive "languages" to represent ideas, questions, and learning, such as clay, paint, wire, drama, play, music, graphic arts materials and many more.

A few questions and Answers

What is it? This system of education is both a philosophy of child growth and a rationale for guiding such growth. It is based on the child's developmental needs for freedom within limits and a carefully prepared environment which guarantees exposure to materials and experiences through which to develop intelligence as well as physical and psychological abilities. It is designed to take full advantage of the unique ability of children to develop their own capabilities. The child needs adults to expose him to the possibilities of his life, but the child himself must direct his response to those possibilities.

Is it for all children? The Reggio Emilia philosophy has been used successfully with children in early childhood and from all socio-economic levels, representing those in regular classes as well as gifted, learning and emotional disabled. Taken from a quote from

Reggio Inspired: *"Children have the rights to be recognized as subjects of individual, legal, civil and social rights; as both source and constructors of their own experience, and thus active participants in the organization of their identities, abilities, and autonomy, through relationships and interaction with their peers, with adults, with ideas, with objects, and with the real and imaginary events of intercommunicating worlds. All this, while establishing the fundamental premises for creating better "citizens of the world" and raising the quality of human interaction, also credits children, and each individual child, with an extraordinary wealth of inborn abilities and potential, strength and creativity. Irreversible suffering and impoverishment of the child is caused when this fact is not acknowledged.*

Starting from this point of reference, we recognize the right of children to realize and expand their potential, placing great value on their ability to socialize, receiving their affection and trust, and satisfying their needs and desires to learn. And this is so much truer when children are reassured by an effective alliance between the adults in their lives, adults who are always ready to help, who place higher value on the search for constructive strategies of thought and action than on the direct transmission of knowledge and skills. These constructive strategies contribute to the formation of creative intelligence, free thought, and individuality that is sensitive and aware, through an ongoing process of differentiation and integration with other people and other experiences. The fact that the rights of children are recognized as the rights of ALL children is the sign of a more accomplished humanity."

Reggio approach to learning. Loris Malaguzzi, founder of the programs in Reggio Emilia, has taught us that children express their thoughts and feelings through 100 Languages, the spoken word certainly, but also through gesture, music, constructing, dramatic play, dance, paint, clay, and drawing to name a few. Exploring these languages prepare children for their future journeys. Hands-on and authentic experiences guide the curriculum for children to discover. Children are encouraged to use their senses as they explore the world around them. Through early literacy experiences, children learn to appreciate language, gain new vocabulary, and learn to use new words and concepts. Simple participatory songs and finger plays are important introductions to speech patterns, motor skill development, and math concepts.

Is it good to have multi age grouping? Multi age grouping is research based and proven as a positive learning environment for children in an early childhood program, we also have adopted the Co-teaching philosophies.

In Looping Through the Years: Teachers and Students Progressing Together, educators identified some of those advantages, including:

- the promotion of stronger bonds between parents and teachers, teachers and students, and students and students;
- greater support for children who need stabilizing influences in their lives;
- a greater knowledge of students' strengths and weaknesses, allowing for increased opportunities for teachers to tailor curriculum to individual needs;
- increased opportunities for shy students as well as others to develop self-confidence;
- reduced anxiety about the new school year; and
- a gain of almost a month of teaching time from the second year on, when the typical transition period at the beginning of the year is virtually unnecessary.

What does it do for the child? Among the concepts emphasized in the Reggio approach to teaching are the image of the child as competent, powerful, and full of potential; the importance of the physical environment of classrooms and schools; the importance of photographs, children's work samples, and teachers', children's and parents' words to document, communicate and enhance the process of learning; and the importance of teacher-teacher and parent-teacher collaboration (Edwards, Gandini & Forman) The Hundred Languages of Children. This program encourages relationships with teachers, school and family. It encourages self discipline, self knowledge, as well as enthusiasm for learning, an organized approach to problem-solving and a love for a life time of learning.

Reggio Emilia Approach to Early Childhood Education

The following overview of the Reggio Emilia Approach was taken from a packet of information available at *The Hundred Languages of Children* traveling exhibit:

Hailed as an exemplary model of early childhood education (Newsweek, 1991), the Reggio Emilia approach to education is committed to the creation of conditions for learning that will enhance and facilitate children's construction of "his or her own powers of thinking through the synthesis of all the expressive, communicative and cognitive languages" (Edwards and Forman, 1993). The Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education is a city-run and sponsored system designed for all children from birth through six years of age. The Reggio Emilia approach can be viewed as a resource and inspiration to help educators, parents, and children as they work together to further develop their own educational programs. The Reggio Emilia approach is based upon the following principles:

Emergent Curriculum: An emergent curriculum is one that builds upon the interests of children. Topics for study are captured from the talk of children, through community or family events, as well as the known interests of children (puddles, shadow, dinosaurs, etc.). Team planning is an essential component of the emergent curriculum. Teachers work together to formulate hypotheses about the possible directions of a project, the materials needed, and possible parent and/or community support and involvement.

Project Work: Projects, also emergent, are in-depth studies of concepts, ideas, and interests which arise within the group. Considered as an adventure, projects may last one week or could continue throughout the school year. 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 and the selection of materials needed to represent the work.

Representational Development: Consistent with Howard Gardner's notion of schooling for multiple intelligences, the Reggio Emilia 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 of representation -- print, art, construction, drama, music, puppetry, and shadow play -- are viewed as essential to children's understanding of experience.

Collaboration: Collaborative group work, both large and small, is considered valuable and necessary to advance cognitive development. Children are encouraged to dialogue, critique, compare, negotiate, hypothesize, and problem solve through group work. Within the Reggio Emilia approach multiple perspectives promote both a sense of group membership and the uniqueness of self.

Teachers as Researchers: 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 (Edwards, 1993). 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, co-construct, and stimulate thinking, and children's collaboration with peers. Teachers are committed to reflection about their own teaching and learning.

Documentation: 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.

Environment: Within the Reggio Emilia schools, great attention is given to the look and feel of the classroom. Environment is considered the "third teacher." Teachers carefully organize space for small and large group projects and small intimate spaces for one, two or three children. 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.

Features of The Reggio Emilia Approach

Teacher Role:

- to co-explore the learning experience with the children
- to provoke ideas, problem solving, and conflict
- to take ideas from the children and return them for further exploration
- to organize the classroom and materials to be aesthetically pleasing
- to organize materials to help children make thoughtful decisions about the media
- to document children's progress: visual, videotape, tape recording, portfolios
- to help children see the connections in learning and experiences
- to help children express their knowledge through representational work
- to form a "collective" among other teachers and parents
- to have a dialogue about the projects with parents and other teachers
- to foster the connection between home, school and community

Projects:

- can emerge from children's ideas and/or interests
- can be provoked by teachers
- can be introduced by teachers knowing what is of interest to children: shadows, puddles, tall buildings, construction sites, nature, etc.
- should be long enough to develop over time, to discuss new ideas, to negotiate over, to induce conflicts, to revisit, to see progress, to see movement of ideas
- should be concrete, personal from real experiences, important to children, should be "large" enough for diversity of ideas and rich in interpretive/representational expression

Media:

- explore first: what is this material, what does it do, before what can I do with the material
- should have variation in color, texture, pattern: help children "see" the colors, tones, hues; help children "feel" the texture, the similarities and differences
- should be presented in an artistic manner it too should be aesthetically pleasing to look at it should invite you to touch, admire, inspire
- should be revisited throughout many projects to help children see the possibilities