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The Reggio Emilia Approach... The Hundred Languages

Podejście Reggio Emilia... tysiąc języków

SUMMARY

A child has hundreds of possibilities to explore the world: drawing, making music, painting, clay modelling, dancing, constructing, crying, playing with shadows. Respect for the talents of the child and the way a child develops is a starting point of this approach and it is up to adults to offer a rich environment, opportunities and materials and to create situations that allow children to further develop these opportunities. Reggio Emilia pays attention to all the languages and supports them even when children grow up.

Keywords: Reggio Emilia approach; child education

More than fifty years ago, the pedagogue Loris Malaguzzi developed an approach in the town and surrounding areas of Reggio Emilia in northern Italy. The Reggio Emilia approach is not a method but an innovative and inspiring approach which values the child as rich, strong and active, curious about the world and longing for relationships and communication with others. Every child brings with them deep curiosity and potential and this innate curiosity drives their interest to understand their world and their place within it. Children can express their ideas, feelings and thoughts in many different ways, he/she can do that in hundreds of languages (Edwards, Gandini, Forman [eds.] 1998).

Respect for the talents of the child and the way the child develops is a starting point of this approach and it is up to adults to offer a rich environment, opportunities and materials and to create situations that allow children to further develop these

opportunities. Spatial design, creativity and communication are the main ingredients in the offer. Small groups experiment, communicate and shape learning processes by constructing and representing. Observing, researching and documenting are important, indispensable tools for understanding the child's perception of the child (Giudici, Rinaldi 2001).

THE REGGIO EMILIA APPROACH... THE HUNDRED LANGUAGES

My name is Bernadet Tijnagel, a teacher trainer at the HAN University of Applied Sciences since 2000. For this period I worked for many years in primary education, mainly with young children aged 4 to 7. In this period I read about the philosophy of Reggio and my curiosity was provoked. In 1995, I went to Reggio Emilia for the first time with a study tour and it was a really refreshing and very inspiring experience. The way in which one taught in Reggio was a complete surprise; a terrific view that could be found back in the greatest detail in practice. It was amazing to see the respectful and positive way in which the development of the rich child was followed, not looking for what is lacking, but for what the child is good at. No children with special needs, but children with special rights (Berg et al. 1997)!

THE REGGIO EMILIA APPROACH

In educational terms, the northern Italian town of Reggio Emilia has a firmly established worldwide reputation for forward thinking and excellence in its approach to early childhood education. It is an educational philosophy based on the image of the child, and of human beings, as possessing strong potentials for development and as a subject of rights who learns and grows in the relationships with others. Each child, like each human being, is an active constructor of knowledge, competencies and autonomies by means of original learning processes. The learning process is fostered by strategies of research, comparison of ideas, and co-participation; it makes use of creativity, uncertainty, intuition, curiosity; it is generated in play and in the aesthetic, emotional, relational, and spiritual dimensions. It is based on the centrality of motivation and the pleasure of learning (Edwards, Gandini, Forman [eds.] 1998).

After World War 2, parents decided to create high-quality preschools to ensure a better future for their young children. In the beginning, by their own the support. This caught the attention of a young teacher named Loris Malaguzzi, who was moved by their commitment and decided to join them in their efforts to find a meaningful education for their children. Malaguzzi became more and more convinced that education is narrowly related to the way you think about children. An impression of a child is not derived from a certain theory, but from the child itself. A child is competent,

strong, rich and active. A child has a lot of capacities in itself. Children are born with a strong urge to know and to understand. They are curious about the world, they are longing for relationships and communication with older people. From their birth they learn to cope with their social and physical world; with everything culture offers them (Edwards, Gandini, Forman [eds.] 1998). With this impression of a child, the people of Reggio Emilia have tried to build up a school, a school as a coherent system.

FIRST PEDAGOGUE: THE CHILD

“A child has a hundred languages but they steel ninety-nine”, said Malaguzzi. A child has hundreds of possibilities to explore the world: drawing, making music, painting, clay modelling, dancing, constructing, crying, playing with shadows... But when a child becomes older his communication is losing its strength and riches. Reggio pays attention to all the languages and supports them even when children grow up (Katz, Casarone 1995).

The Hundred languages

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 marvelling 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.
(Loris Malaguzzi)

The Reggio Emilia approach uses an “emergent curriculum”, a part of the curriculum is planned and another part is open. The planning consists of preparation and organisation of the space, the environment, materials, concepts, situations and reasons for learning. The curriculum is based on interaction, communication, experimenting, constructing and representing. The preparation and organisation is aimed at these five basic elements. What is open and gradually takes shape in discussion with children and adults is: the generation of ideas, the knowledge that is acquired, the questions that can be investigated, how one is going to do this and in what way experiences and thoughts can be represented. No aims in the shape of the desired results are planned, as this would stunt the riches of the child and would sooner restrict a learning process than extend it. The processes are observed and recorded. These observations in their turn are the basic for further study and planning (Tijnagel 2013).

Drawings, clay work pieces, in short all work pieces in the Reggio schools look splendid. They give evidence of originality, complexity and are very “rich” and de-

tailed. The work pieces usually are no end products, but are part of a process. It is the visually shaped “language” of the child and they are often a start for deepening (Giudici, Rinaldi 2001).

Working in the group has been organised around themes. These themes stem from the ideas and fantasies of the children. Sometimes the themes come spontaneously as a result of certain events and sometimes they stem from a – what are we going to do – discussion. During such a – what are we going to do – discussion all kinds of ideas are put forward and discussed. Finally, a project is opted for where all children and group leaders are enthusiastic about. Step-by-step the project is worked on further and is further explored. Throughout the 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. It is not arranged beforehand how much time the project is going to take (Katz, Cesarone 1995).

SECOND PEDAGOGUE: THE ADULTS

Children, teachers, parents and community are interactive and work together. Adults play a very important role in the child’s development. The parents frequently come to school for talks, meetings, help in the garden and do odd jobs in the school. Discussions with several parents usually take place in large or small groups on children’s development, on projects and view. In this way one can support each other (Tijnagel 2013).

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 he lends expertise to children. They must be able to see the right opportunities for interventions. This means not waiting, but observing and communicating actively, investigating together with the children and especially listening very well. Listening to know what and how children think and experience. Listening and trying to understand the “hundred languages” of children. Group leaders see children as active, strong, rich and forceful, developing themselves in dialogue and interaction with others. They are participants and supervisors and they still have the wish to learn (Giudici, Rinaldi 2001).

One of the most important tasks of the group-leaders is: listening, observing and writing down. The process is made visible by means of video recordings and texts underneath all photographs and group-leaders, children and parents can watch discussions and activities. The interaction between children strongly influences the development. Observing this interaction gives the group-leader an insight into what the children are occupied with and what interests them. Thus, he tries to understand the “hundred languages” of children, acting as recorders/documenters for the children, helping them trace and revisit their words and actions and thereby making the learning visible (Giudici, Rinaldi 2001).

The *pedagogista* is a coordinator and educational and pedagogic adviser and affiliated with several childcare centres. He communicates with all adults to further develop and to guarantee the philosophy of the system and he organises the training and meetings for the group leaders about themes such as educational theories and teaching methodology.

In every childcare centre is an *atelierista*. The *atelierista* is someone with an artistic background who strongly influences the whole curriculum. He teaches the child how to express and to use the “hundred languages” to increase its communication opportunities with the world. The so-called visual symbol languages play an important role beside the spoken language (Edwards, Gandini, Forman [eds.] 1998).

To let the “hundred languages” of children be expressed well, each school, apart from the big group rooms, has a studio as well. This studio has a central place in the school and is equipped for working creatively, with various tools and materials. The studio has the following functions: creating a place where children can learn how to master different techniques of visual symbol languages such as painting, working clay and drawing, it helps adults in understanding the processes of how children learn and how children discover solutions in expressive, cognitive and symbolic freedom by means of communication (Tijnagel 2013).

THIRD PEDAGOGUE: THE ENVIRONMENT

The environment is very important, it is sometimes called the “silent language surrounding the child” (Filippini, Giudici, Vecchi 2008).

The schools in Reggio Emilia have been built in the middle of residential areas and even in the middle of the town-centre, situated in a spacious park-like environment. These parks have been marked out and are only used by the schools and there are play equipment, fields and terraces.

The school building has a lot of glass to promote the openness, both inside and outside the building. Therefore, you can look from the hall into the different classrooms and the other way round. The hall is equipped with all kinds of materials inviting the children to play, for example, mirrors, big play objects like castles, boats, shops and spacecraft. Children from all groups make use of the hall.

The group rooms are not “walled in”, so that the children can move freely in the school. Teachers organize environments rich in possibilities and provocations that invite the children to undertake extended exploration and problem solving, often in small groups, where cooperation and disputation mingle pleasurably (Ceppi, Zini 1998).

The first thing that strikes you when you enter a group room is that attention has been paid to the design of the whole room. Not every child has a table and a chair of its own and the space they take is used to make more corners. Children can experi-

ment with light and shadow and in the classrooms you can see overhead projectors, light-boxes of white Plexiglas with a TL-tube below. As communication is an important component in the Reggio Emilia schools, splendid finds for this can also be seen in the classrooms, for example, the pigeonholes. Each child has its own pigeonhole and can expect mail in it, in whatever form, from another child or from the group leader (Berg et al. 1997).

Education is the right of all, of all children and as such is a responsibility of the community. Education is an opportunity for the growth and emancipation of the individual and the collective; it is a resource for gaining knowledge and for learning to live together; it is a meeting place where freedom, democracy and solidarity are practiced and where the value of peace is promoted. As an active and dialoguing part of the community life of the city, the schools are constantly engaged in developing a close relationship with the territory, interacting and collaborating with the entire system of cultural, educational, and economic offers of the city. As educating communities, these subjects contribute to the integral growth, development, and education of the children and constructing the conditions of wellbeing such that each individual can enjoy a rich, original, and harmonious experience of life (Berg et al. 1997).

In a nutshell, the Reggio approach articulates children to acquire skills of critical thinking and collaboration. It is not a teaching method that can easily be copied but rather an approach, not static but continues to grow and evolve. The philosophy of Reggio can be a source of inspiration for any teacher regardless of country or culture, now and in the future.

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STRESZCZENIE

Dziecko ma setki możliwości odkrywania świata: rysowanie, ekspresja muzyczna, malowanie, modelowanie z gliny, taniec, konstruowanie, płacz, bawienie się cieniami. Szacunek dla talentów dziecka i sposobu, w jaki rozwija się, jest punktem wyjścia charakteryzowanego w pracy podejścia. Zależy ono od dorosłych, którzy oferują bogate środowisko, możliwości i materiały oraz tworzą sytuacje, które pozwalają dzieciom wykorzystywać organizowane możliwości. Reggio Emilia zwraca uwagę na wszystkie języki dziecka i wsparcie nawet wówczas, gdy dzieci dorastają.

Słowa kluczowe: podejście Reggio Emilia; edukacja dzieci