

# THE INTERNATIONALI- ZATION OF THE REGGIO EMILIA PHILOSOPHY

*A INTERNACIONALIZAÇÃO DA FILOSOFIA EDUCACIONAL REGGIO EMILIA*  
*LA INTERNACIONALIZACIÓN DE LA FILOSOFÍA EDUCACIONAL REGGIO*  
*EMILIA*

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**Abstract:** This article presents the history and framework of the Reggio Emilia philosophy, an educational approach to early childhood education that places children as the main participants and protagonists of the curriculum. It also showcases the growing influence of the Reggio Emilia philosophy around the world, through key regional and national organizations. The association of the Emilia fundamental values of the Reggio Emilia with the globally competent soft skills helps this philosophy to overcome the growing need worldwide. Ultimately, the internationalization of this approach has inspired teaching practices all over the world. Within different nations, organizations that advocate the application of Reggio Emilia principles in various schools has grown, prompting a need to educate children so that they will develop emotionally and cognitively, in making thinking visible.

**Keywords:** Reggio Emilia Philosophy; Empathy; Emotional Intelligence; Global Competence; Habits of Mind; Teacher Reflection; Documentation

**Resumo:** Este artigo apresenta a história e a estrutura da filosofia Reggio Emilia. É uma abordagem educacional para a educação infantil, a qual coloca as crianças como os principais participantes e protagonistas do currículo. O artigo também mostra a crescente influência da filosofia de Reggio Emilia em todo o mundo por meio de organizações regionais e nacionais. A associação dos valores fundamentais de Reggio Emilia lida com habilidades sensíveis globalmente competentes, o que contribui para que esta filosofia supra as necessidades crescentes em todo o mundo. Em última análise, a internacionalização desta abordagem inspirou práticas

de ensino em todo o mundo. Dentro de diferentes nações, organizações que defendem a aplicação de Reggio Emilia em várias escolas têm crescido, solicitando a necessidade de educar as crianças para se desenvolver emocionalmente e cognitivamente no fazer pensar visível.

**Palavras-chave:** Filosofia Reggio Emilia; Empatia; Inteligência Emocional; Competência Global; Hábitos da Mente; Reflexão do Professor; Documentação.

**Resumen:** Este artículo presenta la historia y la estructura de la filosofía Reggio Emilia. Es un enfoque educacional para la educación infantil que coloca a los niños como los principales participantes y protagonistas del currículo. El artículo también muestra la creciente influencia de la filosofía de Reggio Emilia en todo el mundo por medio de organizaciones clave regionales y nacionales. La asociación de los valores fundamentales de Reggio Emilia trabaja con habilidades sensibles globalmente competentes, lo que contribuye para que esta filosofía satisfaga las necesidades crecientes en todo el mundo. En último análisis, la internacionalización de este abordaje inspiró prácticas educativas en todo el mundo. Las organizaciones que defienden la aplicación de Reggio Emilia en las escuelas han crecido en diversos países, mostrando la necesidad de educar a los niños para desarrollarse emocionalmente y cognitivamente en el hacer y pensar visible.

**Palavras chave:** Filosofia Reggio Emilia; Empatia; Inteligencia Emocional; Competencia Global; Hábitos de la Mente; Reflexión del Profesor; Documentación.

## INTRODUCTION

**H**ow could a small village in Northern Italy have influenced the educational views of so many countries? The Reggio Emilia curricular approach is based on a philosophy that places children at the center of the curriculum, as the main developers. What guides this philosophy is mainly a social constructivist approach, which views children as strong and capable of co-constructing their own understanding through the engagement of meaningful dialogue and experiences with each other (Edwards, Gandini & Foreman, 1998). By reciprocally respecting each individual's perspective and carefully listening to children's contributions to learning, children respect not only each other, but also the entire community (Edwards et al., 1998; Rinaldi, 2006; Wink & Putney, 2002). The Reggio Children Network is the international network developed to highlight countries around the world that have been interacting frequently and continually with the network (Reggio Children, S.r.L., n.d). This network is the result of a project that sustains a profound and meaningful dialogue on the shared responsibilities of its members, with the intent to nurture and support the identity of Reggio Children and the International Center Loris Malaguzzi. Each country and city has its own unique identity, which represents the different realities in which the Reggio Children International Network seeks to promote the Reggio Emilia philosophy.

The purpose of this article is to explore and highlight how the Reggio Emilia Philosophy is expanding its reach around the world. This article is divided into two sections. The first gives the history and key concepts of the Reggio Emilia philosophy. The second focuses on the influence of the Reggio Emilia philosophy worldwide. The researchers have used the Reggio Children Network map to guide the analysis of the internationalization of the Reggio Emilia Philosophy that is currently taking place (See Image 1).



**Image 1** - *Reggio Children International Network Map*

## SECTION I

### HISTORY

This philosophy was developed by Loris Malaguzzi who was born in Italy in 1920. The Reggio Emilia approach actually began in 1946, when Malaguzzi started his first postwar psychology course in Rome which led to the building of his first preschool (Malaguzzi Founder, 2001). This philosophy emerged right after World War II, when parents and teachers of Reggio Emilia, in collaboration with the city, decided that they wanted to create a place where children could be children, and valued and respected as citizens of the country with their own rights to reach their full potential: cognitively, socially, physically, emotionally and adaptively, regardless of their physical or mental abilities and their similarities or differences (Edwards et al., 1998). Women, in particular, were very keen to develop such a place for children. Having become successful advocates for the rights of children, these women helped to establish public preschools in 1968 and infant-toddler centers in 1971. Because of the aspirations of this group of people,

numerous public preschools and infant-toddler centers emerged that embraced this educational pedagogy with social services (Gandini, 2008). Malaguzzi (1998) added: If children had legitimate rights, then they also should have opportunities to develop their intelligence and to be made ready for the success that would not, and should not, escape them. These were the parents' thoughts, expressing a universal aspiration, a declaration against the betrayal of children's potential, and the warning that children first had to be taken seriously and believed in (p. 59). Malaguzzi's vision of the Reggio Emilia schools was continually evolving. His philosophy however, remained constant, as he perceived that what children learn does not follow automatically from what is taught. Rather it [the philosophy] is in large part due to the children's own doing as a consequence of their activities and our resources (Early Childhood Today, May/June, 2001).

The Reggio Emilia philosophy is specifically linked to the environment, whereby the focus is on observation and documentation. Boyd Cadwell (1997) insightfully observed that this approach was heavily influenced by educational psychologists, including John Dewey, Uri Bronfenbrenner, Erik Erikson, David Hawkins, Jerome Bruner, Howard Gardner, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Maria Montessori and the father of Reggio, Loris Malaguzzi. John Dewey's contribution to the Reggio Emilia philosophy was his view of learning as an active process as he believed that knowledge was constructed by children through active participation and experimentation. Additionally, a link can be found with Dewey's belief that the school is a place of democracy in which children and teachers all live together and learn respectfully from one another (Rinaldi, 2006). The Reggio philosophy was also influenced by Urie Bronfenbrenner's social-ecological approach. Bronfenbrenner believed that children and adults grow and develop in an ecological system, which includes interactions among various factors such as their immediate family, the school, the community, and the wider society. He stated that all these factors together affect the development of children. Additionally, if one of these layers is altered for any reason, the development of that particular child will be affected (Edwards et al., 1998). David Hawkins' contribution to the Reggio Emilia philosophy stems from his belief that the educational system misrepresents the nature and potential of children. Scholars, researchers and teachers who have studied children closely have discovered the potential and strength of children instead of their limits and weaknesses. Children

should be allowed to learn using their strengths, and their present knowledge, which in turn will help them develop new knowledge (Edwards et al., 1998).

Jerome Bruner's contribution to the Reggio philosophy is the principle of negotiation, which can only happen when educators become active participants. Through reflections that move towards theory, educators can form theoretical assumptions that will be later be seen in practice, in order to create meaning. Negotiation is the key to creating collective understanding of knowledge (Edwards et al., 1998). Gardner points out that intelligent behavior changes from culture to culture. His theory of multiple intelligences (MI) includes Linguistic intelligence, Logical-Mathematical intelligence, Spatial intelligence, Bodily-Kinesthetic intelligence, Musical intelligence, Interpersonal intelligence, Intrapersonal intelligence, Naturalist intelligence (and more recently, the proposed Spiritual intelligence). The relationship between Gardner's MI theory and the Reggio philosophy is that children in Reggio preschools are allowed to express their learning through many different languages, and it mainly focuses on the interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences also known as Emotional Intelligence theory (Goleman, 1995; Edwards et al., 1998).

What inspired Malaguzzi and the Reggio philosophy was Piaget's Genetic Epistemology. His interest in Piaget's work began when he discovered this theory, as Malaguzzi learned that what is learned is considered knowledge today, but that it will be a different knowledge tomorrow and each day that follows. Similarly, children learn a concept today that might be very different tomorrow when the child has the chance to revisit it and create a new knowledge different from the one formed yesterday. Vygotsky's influence on the Reggio philosophy can be found with his concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which is the gap between what an individual has already mastered and what he/she can achieve, when provided with educational guidance. Malaguzzi highlights the learning attained through social interactions and the ability for both students and teachers to guide the process. Maria Montessori was another important educator who influenced the Reggio Emilia approach in numerous ways. First of all, the elimination of labeling children, concentrating on their abilities and not their weaknesses, was one of the central aspects that inspired the philosophy. Second, the teacher should only be a facilitator to help the child become independent in the future by allowing the students to learn collaboratively

to construct knowledge. Next is the importance of the child and the learning environment. Children's materials, tools, and furniture should be adapted to the child. Specific materials and tools should be made available to them so that they can further explore learning. Additionally, setting up the environment and including child-sized furniture not only allows children to work more comfortably, but also conveys a message of respect. Inspired by all the above educational psychologists, Malaguzzi decided to create an amiable place for the children where they could be respected and listened to not only by their teachers, but also by their parents and the community (Edwards et al., 1998).

## **REGGIO EMILIA FUNDAMENTAL VALUES**

The Reggio fundamental values to educate young children are essential components of the philosophy. According to Gandini (2008), these values are: (a) The Image of the Child, (b) Children's Relationships and Interactions within a System, (c) The Role of Parents, (d) The Role of Space: Amiable Schools, (e) Teachers and Children as Partners in Learning, (f) Not a Pre-Set Curriculum, but a Process of Inviting and Sustaining Learning, (g) The Pedagogy of Listening, (h) The Power of Documentation, (i) The Many Languages of Children: Atelierista, and (j) Atelier Projects.

## **THE IMAGE OF THE CHILD**

The image of the child is the first fundamental value. Children are considered powerful citizens that have the rights, and not only needs, to construct their own knowledge by learning through relationships. In essence, children construct their own intelligence. The adult must provide activities and context, but most of all, must be able to listen. Children need proof that adults believe in them. Their three great desires are to be listened to, to be understood, and to demonstrate that they are exactly what we expect (Lewin-Benham, 2006, p.12).

Reggio considers all children intelligent and capable of creating meaning from what and who they see, hear, and feel around them. The child has the right to listen, but most importantly, to be listened to because he or she takes part in the whole society. The child is viewed as a protagonist along with parents and teachers (Boyd, 1997). The child also has the right to discover his or her own identity and

values and to receive help and guidance to nurture them and be able to find his or her place in this world (Rinaldi, 2006). Often, the child is referred to as fragile, feeble, and naive; therefore, incompetent and needy. In order for children to feel powerful and valued, they need to be listened to. The *Pedagogy of Listening* means treating thought seriously and with respect; it means struggling to make meaning from what is said, without preconceived ideas of what is correct or appropriate. A pedagogy of listening takes knowledge as constructed, with perspective and provision, not the transmission of a body of knowledge which makes the other into the same (Rinaldi, 2006, p.15). In other words, by respecting children's dialogue, and building on prior knowledge, teachers can provide a scaffold for their students' construction of new knowledge. The child is also viewed as a collaborator who works with the parents, teachers and the community.

## CHILDREN'S RELATIONSHIPS AND INTERACTIONS WITHIN A SYSTEM

Children's relationships and interactions within a system represent the second fundamental value of the Reggio Emilia philosophy. Learning occurs through relationships formed with the family, teachers, other children and the community (Gandini, 2008). Schools are considered systems in which children, along with parents, teachers, other children, the environment, the school, the community and the society, interact and build intertwined relationships. Schools are considered different systems where these relationships are fostered and traded (Edwards, Gandini & Foreman, 1998). A central figure in the exchange of relationships and interactions within the educational system is the *pedagogista*, a person who fully supports the teachers. The role of the *pedagogista* can be compared to the role of the curriculum specialist in the United States. His or her role goes far beyond curriculum planning and implementation (Edwards et al., 1998). The *pedagogista* in the original Reggio model in Italy works with several preschools. This person is a facilitator who ensures that teachers receive effective guidance and help in a variety of ways (Edwards et al., 1998). The following are some instances of what a *pedagogista* does: they cooperate with teachers and the *atelierista* (Edwards, et al., 1998) on projects, attends parent conferences, investigates behavioral problems in students, takes part in hiring new staff members, and plans professional development activities for the staff (Edwards et al., 1998; Lewin-Benhan, 2006).

## THE ROLE OF PARENTS

Reggio's third fundamental value is the role of parents: Parents are considered an important component to support children's learning. They are viewed as partners, and teachers should find strategies to help them participate in their children's experiences and learning. Parents, in the Reggio philosophy, are central and important figures that cannot be separated from the holistic education of children. Education does not begin and end at school: Education continues at home and out in the community (Edwards, Gandini & Foreman, 1998).

## THE ROLE OF SPACE: AMIABLE SCHOOLS

The environment, often referred to as the third teacher, is another value. It is structured by the adults to support communication, build relationships, and exchange and negotiate learning (Edwards, Gandini & Foreman, 1998). Small group spaces are often planned by the teachers to ensure dialogue and learning. The environment must be carefully studied, from the physical structure to the internal layout of the various centers or exploration places. The environment must also include various essential characteristics, including the ratio of children to the available space, the relationship between outside and inside spaces, the transparency between outdoor and indoor spaces, transparency between classrooms and other environments inside and outside the school, poly-sensorial, the light, furniture and materials (size, shape, color, texture, technology, natural-open ended, presentation of documentation on the walls, location of centers, mini workshop, library, dramatic play area, message-writing-center, light table, identity of each classroom). Materials should include various colored pencils, markers, printed letters inside clear jars, glue, photocopied stamps, and envelopes for the children to use to write messages to their parents and relatives (Edwards et al., 1998). Collaboration among the teachers, parents, *pedagogista* and *atelierista* within a preschool helps to create a caring and nurturing environment. According to Ceppi and Zini (1998), primary researchers involved in a meta-project in Reggio Emilia, a place for educating children must include the following important aspects: relationships between subjects, actions, experiences and language, relationships between different spatial relations, transparencies, polysensoriality, light, virtual

spaces, sounds, and the importance of materials. Additionally, all of these aspects can be changed or modified depending upon the intensity of relationships that is built in the school. Simultaneous relations between subjects, actions, experiences and language are different experiences and activities that are experienced and occur at the same time in a classroom. For instance, in the preschools in Reggio Emilia, Italy, an *Atelier* for the youngest children was created to allow more relationships between different languages at a very young age (Edwards et al., 1998). Another important factor in the creation of an environment is the relationship between different spatial relations (Ceppi & Zini, 1998). To illustrate, creating spaces and areas with different volumes for the infants and children to explore would allow the children to have a sense of different spaces. Along with this aspect, the relations among volumes, between more levels, and floors must be created. Stairs are also built in a way that they become a type of playground. They are wider than usual stairs to provide a chance to play even inside the classroom. Young children who have to spend the whole day in school need a variety of different spaces to experience and explore. They can realize how sounds, verticality, and echoes can be experienced differently and change depending on the volume.

## TEACHERS AND CHILDREN AS LEARNING PARTNERS

Reggio inspired teachers continually reflect on their practice in order to improve the way they teach. This incorporates both the children and their parents and the community so that a learning partnership exists between all those involved (Edwards et al., 1998). This is known as reciprocal learning, which enables the teacher to identify genuine interest in the children and use this interest to lead them to discover information for themselves. However, if reciprocal learning is to be effective, certain teaching skills must be reinforced. These include listening to children, observing them, and recording and interpreting their observations. When the teacher understands that the child has an interest in something, his or her role is to encourage and help the child develop that interest through the joy of discovery. Therefore, listening to children, observing them, and recording and interpreting their observations are significant aspects. Reggio Emilia teachers are able to set and achieve elaborated and difficult goals due to the strong relationships and collaboration at all levels within the educational setting (Gandini, 2008).

The study conducted by Morano-Magee (2009) focuses on understanding processes through which learning takes place in four distinct studio learning environments: the Reggio Emilia inspired *Atelier* of School within School, at Peabody Elementary, Washington, DC and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Freshmen Studio Physics, Technology Enabled Active Learning (TEAL). Observations of the instructional, attitudinal and architectural aspects of these classrooms and what takes place in them were used to collect the data. This phenomenological study revealed that embedding a studio or lab within a school served numerous positive outcomes, including hands-on activities for the children, a better relationship between teachers and students, the development of strong relationships, reduction of competition and the provision of continuous feedback and assessment. In a similar national quantitative study, Elliott (2005) discovered that collaboration was one of the most difficult tasks when switching from the traditional teaching approach to the Reggio approach. However, once established, collaboration was seen as one of the greatest successes of the transition.

## **NOT A PRE-SET CURRICULUM, BUT A PROCESS OF INVITING AND SUSTAINING LEARNING**

The Reggio philosophy is not a pre-set curriculum, but a process of inviting and sustaining learning. Projections are made by the teachers and the pedagogical team on a daily basis. Projections are hypotheses made by the team, based on what they have observed and documented in the classroom (Edwards, Gandini, & Foreman, 1998). They discuss what and how a concept or skill has been learned by the children, their current interests, and what activities might stimulate the children's curiosity in order to learn more about the current topic explored in the classroom. After the projections have been made, the teachers set up the environment, providing interesting materials for the children to use, and that will help them understand the topic that is being explored (Gandini, 1997). In order to understand and discover the children's ideas, hypotheses and theories, teachers ask open ended questions related to the topic and the materials. New projections are made every day, and vary depending on children's ideas, hypotheses and theories. The children discover and come up with new theories through the observations, investigations and dialogue that occur between the teachers and the children. Reggio teachers view learning as a continuous, spiraled evolution.

The teachers consider themselves to be partners with the children in the process of learning. The pedagogical team is an effective resource that enables teachers to share, interpret and discuss their observations. Their interpretations are often shared with the children (Gandini, 2008).

## THE PEDAGOGY OF LISTENING

Listening...as a metaphor for having the openness and sensitivity to listen and to be listened to – listening not just with our ears, but with all our senses (sight, touch, smell, taste, orientation)...to the hundred... thousand languages, symbols, codes we use to express ourselves and communicate...as an active verb that involves interpretation, giving meaning to the message and value to those who offer it...that doesn't produce answers, but formulates questions...as the premise for any learning relationship (Rinaldi, 2006, p.65).

Listening is an essential component of the Reggio Emilia philosophy, specifically reciprocal listening. Through reciprocal listening comes reciprocal respect which leads to the formation of strong relationships – one of the main factors that help individuals become highly emotionally intelligent (Rinaldi, 2006). Additionally, children learn that they too have a voice at a very young age, and that their voice is valued by teachers and parents, as shown by their careful listening to the opinions and theories that are expressed and recreated by the children on an ongoing basis (Rinaldi, 2006).

## THE POWER OF DOCUMENTATION

Documentation is the representation of children's thinking and learning obtained through videos, pictures, slides, diaries, tape recordings and writers' notes. These are used to make hypotheses and projections for future learning. Comments always accompany pictures (Wurm, 2005). Documentation provides communication and collaboration between students, their parents, families and teachers thus creating meaningful dialogue (Bo & Darling, 2009). According to Rinaldi (1998), documentation is: a procedure that is part of *progettazione*, and that sustains the educational process (teaching) in the dialogue with the learning processes of children. Documentation is a point of strength that makes timely and visible the interweaving of actions of the adults and of the children and improves

the quality of communication and interaction. It is in fact a process of reciprocal learning. Documentation makes it possible for teachers to sustain the children's learning while they also learn (to teach) from the children's own learning (p.120).

Documentation is a valuable educational tool that reveals both the process of learning and teaching, including self-assessment and self-reflection from students and teachers (Rinaldi, 2006). Through documentation, learning is made visible. It gives the opportunity to revisit and review the previous experiences and learning that occurred in a school, and provides a chance for reflection. Through this reflection, both the pedagogical team and the students have the opportunity to reanalyze and reconstruct those learning processes. All the documents gathered through the learning experiences are revisited and reanalyzed after the experience has occurred. Therefore, documentation offers both students and teachers the opportunity to make connections with those various episodes and construct meaning from them (Rinaldi, 2006). In order to be able to establish those connections and make sense of meaning, the pedagogy of listening takes place (Rinaldi, 2006). Documentation is a tool that facilitates listening and being listened to. In order to guarantee this valuable exchange, learning needs to be made visible by creating documents that demonstrate not only individual learning, but also group learning. Documentation assists teachers in searching for the meaning of what they do and who they encounter in their experiences. Children have so many different aspects that are part of their daily experiences, including their families, television, video games, school and other social locations they might visit. All these experiences are presented to the child, and through documentation, they are displayed and discussed to help the child make connections that give special meaning to all the events they experience daily (Project Zero & Reggio Children, 2001).

Research carried out on documentation by Jone-Branch (2009), Suarez and Daniels (2009) and Ho (2003) reinforce the important role pedagogical documentation plays in promoting learning (language learning or content) and developing partnerships between teachers and children.

## **THE MANY LANGUAGES OF CHILDREN: *ATELIERISTA* AND *ATELIER***

The next fundamental value is the many languages of children (*Atelier and Atelierista*). The *atelierista* is a teacher who is specialized in expressive arts

and works directly with the other teachers. The *atelierista* works in an atelier, which is a workshop or studio that includes numerous materials and resources that children use to emphasize learning. *Atelieristas* might also work in each individual classroom. Their role is complex, and often they recommend projects for teachers or children. Like the *pedagogista*, the *atelierista* is involved in the pedagogical team and meets with the *pedagogista* and teachers to analyze and revisit documentation and to develop new possible projections (Edwards, Gandini, & Foreman, 1998; Wurm, 2007). A strong partnership is built between an *atelierista* and teachers over the years. Sometimes, they work together for as long as two decades. Having different people with different points of view enables the pedagogical team to analyze and evaluate children's dialogue and actions and what they might mean. This avoids the misunderstanding of children's comments, which happens so often (Lewin-Benhan, 2006).

According to Edwards et al., (1998) children communicate and express themselves with a variety of symbolic languages: words, facial expressions, gestures, dance, play and artwork, to name but a few. Every member of the preschool works to help children explore, discover and express themselves. Teachers continually ask questions in a constant search for making learning meaningful and visible to the children, parents and the community. Teachers' research never ends because they never reach a point where they can stop inquiring. Teachers' research is an ongoing process and a spiral curriculum.

## ATELIER "RAYS OF LIGHT"

The *Atelier* Rays of Light is located in the Loris Malaguzzi International Center in Reggio Emilia (Ceppi & Zini, 1998). The *Atelier* Rays of Light is a research project conducted by Giovanni Piazza (as cited in Ceppi & Zini, 1998), a professional *atelierista*, which investigates the relationship between light and how it is used in schools. There are several interesting reasons behind the choice of light for this research project. First, light is a fascinating theme because it contains many implications and can be integrated into different disciplines. Additionally, the researchers expanded their knowledge on the theme of light as a result of their experimentations with it for many years in preschools (Ceppi & Zini, 1998). Another reason for choosing this topic is because light is connected to

preschools. Architects who design schools do not use light in an emotional way. Generally, there are big fluorescent lights hanging off the ceilings, giving a flat and constant light.

## PROJECTS

An additional and significant fundamental value in the Reggio philosophy is learning through projects (Edwards, Gandini, & Foreman, 1998). In the Reggio philosophy, projects are valued more than programs. An educational program is a system of skills and knowledge through which a child or adult learns using specific materials and preplanned activities. A program forces a child or adult to learn specific skills at a specific time, having to follow the group's pace. Usually, programs are not built around children's interests, but around annual themes and holidays chosen by the teachers. Learning through projects allows the child to learn to understand and internalize that knowledge instead of just learning (Edwards et al., 1998). Children have many opportunities to develop their creativity, curiosity and co-construct knowledge through discussions with peers and teachers as they engage in projects. Working on projects facilitates group cooperation, sharing of ideas and communication in reciprocal relationships (Bo & Darling, 2009). Projects may vary depending on the children's interests. The curriculum used in this approach is flexible, created by the children and framed by the teachers. Children are studied by their teachers and parents in order to investigate their learning interests. Once those interests are discovered, then the pedagogical team meets to frame that idea and build the progettazione based on the children's interests. Instead of embracing a program, children embark on a project that might last two weeks or even the whole school year (Edwards et al., 1998). All these fundamental values enable teachers to emphasize social and emotional learning because the children's thinking and opinions are the center of the curriculum. Hill, Stremmel and Fu (2002) conducted an interview with Malaguzzi to identify relevant teaching tips on how to teach kindness and compassion in diverse situations, especially relating to language barriers, building trusting relationships, attending to children's individuality, encouraging collaboration among children, and connecting with families. Malaguzzi reminded them that children have hundreds and hundreds of languages. When children are provided with hands-on materials, for example, clay, markers, computers, water and other materials, they communicate with

laughter, gestures, and other representations as they work side by side with each other. Even though words might not be used, they are speaking in many other languages that are quite meaningful. Building relationships of trust is an integral part of building classroom community; hence, efforts should be made to connect with children's experiences and families (Edwards et al., 1998). Children should feel important. Hill et al., (2002) stated further that in attending to children's individuality, children begin to feel comfortable with diversity, and feel a strong sense of self within group settings.

## SECTION II

### THE INFLUENCE OF THE REGGIO EMILIA PHILOSOPHY AROUND THE WORLD

#### NORTH AMERICA

#### UNITED STATES

The Reggio Emilia philosophy of early childhood education positively affected students from some of the most difficult and underprivileged preschools in the United States. One of these preschools is the Model Early Learning Center (MELC) located in Washington, DC. With the help of Amelia Gambetti, the international Reggio liaison, this diverse preschool demonstrated that children and families in poverty are capable of thriving when their capabilities are encouraged and respected (Lewin-Benham, 2006). Ms. Gambetti spent one whole year at the MELC to facilitate teachers' understanding of the Reggio Approach. One of the most difficult tasks encountered throughout the year was to convince parents to become involved in their children's education. The reason why parents are considered a central figure in this philosophy is not because they need to be educated by the teachers, but because the teachers need parents' input to better understand the children and to show the children that their parents are also part of the school system. In order to get parents involved, teachers attempted numerous strategies without success. It was only when teachers had the children

write personal notes to their parents requesting their help and involvement that the parents finally agreed to provide their help and time. From their first meeting at the school, the parents realized that they were welcomed and considered an important part of their children's lives at school. They were not being judged, but appreciated for who they were and the important role they played in their children's lives (Lewin-Benham, 2006). Moreover, the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) (2009) revealed interesting findings that support the importance of implementing a curriculum that focuses on the social-emotional development of young children. By implementing programs for young children that foster social and emotional development, the risk of these young children growing up developing mental health problems is considerably reduced. Additionally, research has demonstrated that high quality preschools have a positive, significant impact on the lives and development of young children (Knitzer & Kline, 2006). Children, who attend a preschool in which both cognitive and emotional development are nurtured will be more likely to grow up and develop a healthy life (Goleman, 1995).

Although the Reggio Emilia philosophy was developed to be mainly implemented in early childhood settings, educational experts and researchers at the Graduate School of Education at Harvard University in Boston strongly believe that this unique approach can be highly effective with older children and adults' learning, as well. Project Zero, an educational research project founded in 1967 at Harvard University, includes several research initiatives to study the development of the learning processes of children and adults. Many of these initiatives were influenced by the fundamental values of the Reggio Emilia philosophy. For instance, the Making Learning Visible Project at Harvard University led by Howard Gardner, Mara Krechevsky and Steve Siegel was influenced by the power of documentation and individual and group learning (Project Zero & Reggio Children, 2001). These values which form Reggio Emilia have impacted the educational views of educators, teachers, principals and administrators of P-12 schools. The power of revisiting documentation as group learning enhanced and guided teachers in the assessment and redevelopment of units for understanding based on the time spent by students to learn concepts and the amount of time necessary by teachers to adjust the curriculum. Another project grown from the philosophy of Reggio Emilia, and in particular, from its very first fundamental value, which is the image

of the child, is the Children as Citizens initiative. In this project, implemented in Washington D.C., children are viewed and considered the current protagonists and citizens of Washington D.C., and not its future ones. This project studies the active involvement of children as they actively participate and express their views about the cultural and civic life of the city (Project Zero Current Projects, 2015). Additionally, in one of the last Project Zero publications, *Visible Learners: Promoting Reggio-Inspired Approaches in All Schools* (2013) Krechevsky, Mardell, Rivard, and Wilson explore (1) the possibilities for children's learning by making their learning visible; (2) how in this era of high-stakes, testing standards can be feasibly aligned with the practices of group learning and documentation, providing innovative and effective possibilities to rethink accountability in the American educational system; and (3) a variety of educational tools that pre- and in-service teachers can explore and carry out experiments in their settings. Various examples of units are made available to the readers (Krechevsky, Mardell, Rivard, & Wilson 2013).

David Perkins and Howard Gardner conducted extensive research using documentation to make learning visible at individual and group learning levels (Project Zero & Reggio Children, 2001). During the past four decades, Project Zero, a research project at the Harvard Graduate School of Education has placed the learner at the very center of the curriculum and educational practice. This enables researchers to respect individual learning differences at different times in life, in terms of how they perceive the world and express their ideas (Project Zero & Reggio Children, 2001). Discovering to what extent individuals, groups and institutions are capable of achieving learning is a common goal of the research studies conducted by Project Zero researchers. Research topics included in these projects contain critical thinking to be able to solve unforeseen problems, assessment viewed as a constant tool used to support instruction, making connections between the school and the wider society, and the use of technology to enhance knowledge (Project Zero & Reggio Children, 2001). Katz and Galbraith (2006) added to the making learning visible theory by performing a study on how making social interaction visible, and supporting it through the use of documentation, promoted social interactions among children in an inclusive early childhood classroom. Findings revealed that the making learning visible approach is an effective tool for supporting social interactions in early childhood classrooms.

## SOUTH AMERICA

The Reggio Emilia Philosophy has reached and inspired numerous countries in South America. RedSOLARE is the Latin-American association that supports and disseminates this philosophy in Argentina, Paraguay, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, Costa Rica, Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala, Dominican Republic, Uruguay and Venezuela.

### BRAZIL

RedSOLARE Brazil (RSB) is a network for the coordination and dissemination of ideas on the educational practice of Reggio Emilia, in defense of a world of childhood culture from an integral perspective, integrated with real exchanges between Brazilian states and Latin American countries. It is an association of institutions and individuals, and non-profit organizations, which recognizes social responsibility as a duty of all. This organization provides teachers and schools with opportunities to participate in conferences and seminars to learn more about this philosophy and how to implement its values into their own schools. The RedSOLARE Brazil 2015 conference was held in Bahia on October 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>. The conference was based on the theme of "Children, Nature of Languages and each of us: Connections and Relationships to Reggio Emilia". This conference focused on the elements that inspire creative educators' processes: childhood and nature. This website also offers professional publications for purchase (RedSOLARE Brazil, 2015).

### COLOMBIA

RedSOLARE Colombia (RSC) includes individuals, institutions and educational and social projects, and non-profit organizations with representation in Barranquilla, Medellin, Cali and Bogota. Its mission is to create a network among its members to develop communication, cooperation and exchange of experience, research and theories, and to always generate many new dialogues on the role of children in education, culture and society (RedSOLARE Colombia, 2015). RedSOLARE Colombia focuses on four branches:

1. Projects, institutions and individuals inspired by the Reggio Emilia philosophy, who recognize and demonstrate the influence of the philosophy's fundamental values in its methods of working with children.

2. Dissemination and organization of events, conferences, workshops, etc., with the purpose of publicizing and broadening the perspective of the Reggio Emilia philosophy and its culture for children.

3. Educational research projects, institutions and individuals working with a continuous investigation on the cognitive, physical and social-emotional development of children. Furthermore, sharing the results of these research experiences as a common good of pedagogy and the values of childhood is highly encouraged.

4. Community engagement to attempt to investigate methods and solutions to work with vulnerable populations.

Like RSB, RSC offers a plethora of opportunities to professionals in the early childhood field to participate in conferences and seminars at local, national and international levels.

## MEXICO

RedSOLARE Mexico (RSM) is an organization that promotes the educational philosophy of Reggio Emilia preschool education in Mexico through various initiatives, such as conferences, study groups and translating books about this educational philosophy that has inspired schools worldwide (RedSOLARE Mexico, n.d). In 2012, RSM launched their first professional journal titled "Voices that Transform". This journal emphasizes collaboration and dialogue between Reggio Emilia and Mexican preschool education (RedSolare Mexico, n.d.).

## CHILE

The RedSOLARE Chile collective, represented by M. Mercedes Herrera R., invites educators, parents, visual artists, sculptors, musicians, architects and everyone who is an advocate for high quality children's education as a right of all Chilean children. This association is sponsored by numerous Chilean universities,

which strongly believe in the implementation of the Reggio Emilia philosophy. Like several other South American countries, RedSOLARE Chile (n.d.) offers local, national and international conferences for anyone who is interested in increasing their knowledge of the philosophy.

## URUGUAY

RedSOLARE Uruguay (2015) is represented by the Society of Friends of Popular Education. The school Elbio Fernandez, the headquarters of RedSolare in Uruguay, has gradually been inspired by the Reggio Emilia philosophy, training its teachers and participating in various courses, seminars and lectures on the ideas and pedagogy applied in schools in Reggio Emilia, Italy, founded by the pedagogue Loris Malaguzzi. Its interest in the Reggio Emilia philosophy was first sparked in 2001, when members attended an educational conference on education in Barcelona, Spain. In August 2007, the traveling exhibition that has toured the world, entitled "The hundred languages of children" was held in Uruguay. This exhibit was brought by UNESCO, OMEP and supported by the Uruguayan Ministry of Education and Culture. This event led to the provocation and interest by classroom teachers and administrators who embarked on projects that arose out of children's interests. RedSOLARE Uruguay collaborates with several associations and organizations that are strongly committed to the development of highly effective educators for young children and their families from different cultures and with different needs.

## GUATEMALA

RedSOLARE Guatemala (2015) aims to spread and support the philosophy of Reggio Emilia within its early childhood centers and schools. Its mission is to transform the country's political and private level of the importance of the image of the child, and the potential fundamental rights of children, as a way of recognizing their social role and participation and supporting and embracing the educational philosophy of Reggio Emilia.

## EUROPE

### SWEDEN

The Reggio Emilia Institute in Sweden offers many kinds of training. Its program is open to all. The program has been divided into 'stockholm' and 'Around the Country'. Additionally, it provides opportunities for professional development offered at the location of the school, requesting the training through its program 'Corporate Education'. This organization also serves as the liaison between Swedish organizations interested in attending seminars and professional development courses in the schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy. These courses consist mainly of the annual weekly seminar in Reggio Emilia. It also runs three in-depth courses, the "Pedagogista," the "Atelierista" and the "Educator", and provides information about advanced training for Pedagogista, which began in January 2016 (The Reggio Emilia Institute in Sweden, 2015).

### DENMARK

The Danish Reggio Emilia Network (2015) offers a biannual publication entitled "Refleksioner", which means Reflections. This publication is available at no cost on the organization's website. Approximately four years ago, Danish Reggio Emilia set up REMIDA centers around the country. Strongly supported by the Foundation and the political support of the participating five municipalities. In 2002, the Danish Reggio Emilia Network initiated the creation of REMIDA centers and established a teaching initiative and a development - a working relationship between the individual municipalities' participants in order to build REMIDA centers. ReMida centers were named after King Midas because everything he touched turned into gold. These centers have been an invaluable source of materials and supplies for children and adults, who wish to transform apparently worthless things into beautiful and imaginative expressions that can support the learning processes, creativity and imagination. Furthermore, Danish Reggio Emilia provides opportunities to participate in study tours to the early childhood centers in Reggio Emilia, Italy.

## GERMANY

Germany Reggio Emilia (2015) is a profit-making association aimed at disseminating the pedagogical experiences and results of Reggio Emilia/Northern Italy in Germany. This initiative invites participants to regular professional exchanges. Research, development and documentation projects conducted in Germany support and expand on the work done in Reggio Emilia. This organization also carries out professional development meetings and is an official partner and part of the international network of Reggio Children. Like many of the organizations mentioned above, Germany Reggio Emilia provides study group tours to Reggio Emilia, Italy to expand on the implementation of the fundamental values of this philosophy and the roles of the *pedagoga* and *atelierista*, and the community.

## UNITED KINGDOM

Sightlines Initiative is a national organization in the United Kingdom that collaborates with the Reggio Children Network. The aim of this organization is to nurture creative and reflective practice in early childhood settings. It was established in 1997 with the purpose of providing professional development that focuses on inquiry-based practices and action-research as tools to investigate and improve early childhood education in the UK. Sightline Initiative offers a professional journal titled "ReFocus", which focuses on the values and principles of the Reggio Emilia philosophy, the image of the child and understanding of the development of the early years (Sightlines Initiative, 2015).

## SPAIN

DIIP Spain is another organization that collaborates with the Reggio Children Network. DIIP stands for Design Infancia (Childhood), Innovación (innovation) and Proyectos (Projects). Design refers to the integral design of primary schools or redesign and reorganization of existing spaces. Infancia alludes to professional development activities and workshops with teachers and educational professionals and children within their own center. Innovación (Innovation)

refers to innovation as a result of research related to children's education at the national and international levels. Finally, Proyectos (Projects) denotes the training, educational projects, research in the educational field (Design, Infancia, Innovación, Proyectos, (n.d.).

This organization, like those mentioned above, also provides opportunities for study tours and exchange of dialogue to improve early childhood education.

## AFRICA

### SOUTH AFRICA

Owing to changes in its education system, Africa has demonstrated a new interest in the application of the Reggio Emilia approach. An example of such an application is seen at the St. Mary's School in South Africa. St. Mary's is an independent school for girls from Infancy (called Little Saints) programs through to senior level.

At the Little Saints level, the relationship between the child and the teacher becomes an important element of the education. According to the School website, "teachers are held in high regard and enter into an intellectual dialogue with children. They provoke occasions of discovery through inspired listening and join the children in their excitement and curiosity in creating, exploring and learning" (St. Mary's School Waverly, paragraph 2). This highlights the Reggio Emilia approach of teachers and children as partners in learning.

In the Little Saints grades 000 and 00, a more direct influence of the Reggio Emilia approach is seen at the level of projects planned by the teachers based on the child's interests. At the same time, the different areas from the fantasy, to the cognitive, to the atelier, to the library and to the garden areas; they all provide the child with opportunities for holistic development that is physical, social, emotional, creative, intellectual, and spiritual.

The relevance of St. Mary's School Waverly goes beyond the application of the philosophy in its early education classrooms. In 2010, Mrs. *Des Hugo* (Headmistress of St Mary's Junior Primary) and *Tessa Browne* founded the Africa Reggio Emilia Alliance (AREA). Since then, the Africa Reggio Emilia Alliance and St. Mary's

School have hosted an annual conference. The Africa Reggio Alliance annual conference seeks to promote the Reggio Emilia approach among early education teachers in South Africa and beyond. The 2015 AREA International Conference titled *A Deeper Exploration of Teaching and Learning: Reggio Perspectives* brought together representatives from the Reggio Children in Reggio Emilia, the Reggio Children International Network, academics from South African universities, and teachers from Reggio inspired schools in South Africa. The conference provided the space for disseminating best practices and promoting dialogue.

## AUSTRALIA

The Reggio Emilia movement in Australia is carried out by the Reggio Emilia Australia Information Exchange (REAIE) organization. This organization established in 2000 “draws on the Reggio Emilia experience as an ongoing catalyst for thinking, research, and advocacy in Australian education settings” (REAIE, para. 2). With more than 3,000 participants, the organization presents a forum for the understanding, development, and sharing of resources that promote the application of the Reggio Emilia philosophy in Australian schools.

As part of its advocacy efforts, the REAIE provides a variety of workshops for teachers, debates, research projects, and conferences among others. The latest biennial conference held in July 2015, entitled “Landscapes of Imagination” set the tone for Australian educators and international attendees to discuss the teaching practices or pedagogies of the Reggio Emilia schools. According to the conference website, the title of the conference calls for “enlivening our own imagination and exploring more deeply the curiosity and imagination of children as they connect and interconnect within and between the arts and sciences, reality, fantasy, identity and towards transformation” (REAIE, About the 2015 Conference, para. 2, n.d.).

Aligned with its mission to advocate the role of research, the REAIE offers a documentation center for its members. The documentation serves as a repository for documentation samples, journals, projects, etc. for members to review and enhance their practice. In addition, the organization also publishes **The Challenge Journal aimed at sharing practices and experiences of practitioners of the Reggio Emilia pedagogy.**

**Like the other Reggio Emilia organizations, the REAIE, also organizes** study tours to New Zealand and Reggio Emilia to promote discussion, observation of praxis through school visits, and lectures on the Reggio Emilia practices.

## CONCLUSION

Mansilla and Jackson (2011) argue that globally competent students need to demonstrate four competences: “Investigating the work beyond their immediate environment, recognizing others’ perspectives as well as their own, communicating ideas effectively with diverse audiences, and taking action to improve conditions” (p. 11). The development of these soft skills is a life-long learning process that starts in the early years of a child’s life.

The Reggio Emilia approach provides a valuable framework for developing these skills by experimenting with the environment based on a child’s interests, communicating with others through play and different projects, recognizing its perspective and that of others, through the pedagogy of listening, and acting upon the experiences created by them.

The alignment of the Reggio Emilia values with the globally competent soft skills described by Mansilla and Jackson (2011) highlights the relevancy of the Reggio Emilia philosophy across nations. According to Carla Rinaldi, “today we think of the concept of internationalism not only as crossing geographical frontiers but metaphorical and symbolic frontiers too, in a permanent attempt to go beyond the confines of our mentalities and feelings” (Reggio Children S.r.L.).

This quotation highlights the internationalization of the Reggio Emilia philosophy inspiring teaching practices in Latin America, North America, Europe, Asia and Africa. Within those different regions, the rise of organizations advocating the application of Reggio Emilia in schools, showcases the need to educate reflective children, developing emotional and cognitive connections, while making thinking visible.

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