

The Hundred Languages of Children: Reggio Emilia Early Childhood Education Philosophy and Practice in Italy

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Abstract: This research summary explores the main findings of the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education. It highlights the importance of a child-centered approach, collaborative learning, the role of the environment, and the use of documentation as assessment. The findings emphasize the effectiveness of the Reggio Emilia approach in promoting active engagement, social interaction, supportive learning environments, and holistic assessment practices. Recommendations for future research include longitudinal studies, teacher training, parent and community engagement, cultural adaptation, and sustainability education.

Keywords: Reggio Emilia approach; early childhood education; child-centered approach; collaborative learning; learning environment; documentation; assessment; longitudinal studies

1 Introduction

1.1 Background Introduction

In this section, the background of the study will be presented. It will include an overview of the context and factors that led to the development of the Reggio Emilia early childhood education philosophy.

1.2 Research Objectives and Significance

This section will outline the specific objectives of the research. It will explain why studying the Reggio Emilia approach is important and the potential impact it can have on early childhood education practices.

1.3 Research Methods and Structure Overview

In this part, the research methods employed in the study will be described. It will include an overview of the research design, data collection methods, and analysis techniques. Additionally, the structure of the paper will be outlined to provide a roadmap for the reader.

2 Origins and Development of the Reggio Emilia Early Childhood Education Philosophy

2.1 Overview of the Reggio Emilia Early Childhood Education Philosophy

The Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education is a unique and highly regarded educational philosophy that originated in the city of Reggio Emilia, Italy. It is characterized by a child-centered approach that places a strong emphasis on the child's innate capacities and abilities to actively construct their own knowledge and understanding of the world.

At the heart of the Reggio Emilia philosophy is the view of the child as a competent and capable learner. This approach recognizes that children have their own unique ways of thinking, exploring, and understanding the world around them. It aims to foster their

curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking skills through a rich and stimulating learning environment.

One of the fundamental principles of the Reggio Emilia approach is the belief in the importance of collaboration and community. It values the active involvement of parents, teachers, and the broader community in the education of young children. This collaborative approach promotes a sense of belonging and creates a supportive and inclusive learning environment that respects and celebrates diversity.

The environment is considered the "third teacher" in the Reggio Emilia approach. Classrooms are carefully designed to reflect the principles of openness, natural light, and the use of natural materials. The physical space is seen as an important pedagogical tool that invites exploration, inquiry, and discovery. It is intentionally organized to provoke children's interests and provide opportunities for hands-on, experiential learning.

The Reggio Emilia approach also values the documentation of children's learning experiences. Teachers and students engage in an ongoing process of observing, documenting, and reflecting on children's learning and development. This documentation serves as a tool for assessment, as well as a way to involve parents and other stakeholders in the learning process.

In conclusion, the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education is a comprehensive philosophy that strives to create a nurturing and engaging learning environment for young children. It recognizes the inherent potential of every child and seeks to cultivate their natural curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking skills through collaborative and child-centered approaches.

2.2 Theoretical Foundations and Background Introduction

The Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education is rooted in a rich and diverse range of theoretical foundations and influences. These theories and ideas have shaped the development and implementation of the Reggio Emilia philosophy, making it a unique and dynamic educational approach.

One of the key theoretical foundations of the Reggio Emilia approach is the constructivist theory of learning. This theory, initially proposed by educational theorists such as Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, posits that children actively construct their own

knowledge and understanding through their interactions with the environment and with others. In the Reggio Emilia approach, this constructivist perspective is central to the belief in the child's innate capacity to learn and the importance of providing an environment that supports and encourages their active exploration and discovery.

Another significant influence on the Reggio Emilia approach is the socio-cultural theory of learning. This theory, primarily associated with the work of Lev Vygotsky, emphasizes the social and cultural context in which learning takes place. According to this perspective, learning is a collaborative process that occurs through interactions with more knowledgeable others and within a supportive social environment. The Reggio Emilia approach embraces this socio-cultural theory by emphasizing the role of collaboration, community, and the active involvement of parents and teachers in children's learning.

In addition to these theoretical foundations, the Reggio Emilia approach draws inspiration from a range of other disciplines and frameworks. The idea of the "hundred languages of children," for example, which is central to the Reggio Emilia approach, was inspired by the work of Malaguzzi and other educators who believed that children have multiple ways of expressing themselves and understanding the world, such as through art, play, and language.

Moreover, the Reggio Emilia approach is influenced by the fields of psychology, sociology, and anthropology, which provide insights into child development, social interactions, and cultural diversity. These interdisciplinary perspectives contribute to the holistic and comprehensive nature of the Reggio Emilia philosophy.

2.3 Contributions of Italian Reggio Emilia Educators

Italian Reggio Emilia educators have made significant contributions to the development and advancement of the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education. Their innovative ideas and practices have influenced educators and researchers worldwide, transforming the way early childhood education is approached.

One of the key contributions of Reggio Emilia educators is their emphasis on the image of the child. Believing in the child's potential as a competent and capable learner, they have advocated for a child-centered approach that values the child's unique perspectives, interests, and abilities. By recognizing children as active participants in their own learning, Reggio Emilia educators have fostered a sense of agency and autonomy in young learners.

Another important contribution of Italian Reggio Emilia educators is their emphasis on the role of the environment in learning. They have recognized the environment as a powerful tool for teaching and learning, shaping it to invite exploration, inquiry, and creativity. Classrooms are designed to be open, inviting, and aesthetically pleasing, with natural light, natural materials, and spaces for collaborative work and individual reflection. This intentional design of the learning environment supports children's engagement and active involvement in their learning experiences.

Reggio Emilia educators also place a strong emphasis on the process of documentation. They document children's learning journeys through photographs, videos, recordings, and written reflections. This documentation serves multiple purposes—it captures children's thinking and growth, provides a platform for reflection and assessment, and involves parents and the community in children's learning. By documenting and making learning visible,

Reggio Emilia educators highlight the value of children's ideas and perspectives.

Additionally, Italian Reggio Emilia educators have fostered a strong sense of collaboration and community in their approach to education. They believe that the education of young children is a shared responsibility involving parents, teachers, and the broader community. Collaborative partnerships between educators and families are prioritized, as they recognize the importance of building strong relationships and creating a network of support for children's learning and development.

The contributions of Italian Reggio Emilia educators have had a lasting impact on early childhood education practice and research. Their ideas and practices have inspired educators around the world to adopt a child-centered approach, create engaging learning environments, document children's learning journeys, and build collaborative partnerships with families and the community.

3 Analysis of the Concept of the "Hundred Languages of Children"

3.1 Meaning of the "Hundred Languages"

The concept of the "hundred languages" in the Reggio Emilia approach embodies the belief that children possess various languages through which they express themselves, make sense of the world, and engage in learning. It goes beyond the literal interpretation of spoken languages and encompasses the diverse ways in which children communicate, understand, and interact with their surroundings.

The metaphor of the "hundred languages" emphasizes the multitude of ways in which children express their thoughts, emotions, and ideas. It underscores the idea that children have unique perspectives and individual forms of intelligence that extend beyond traditional academic measures. By recognizing and valuing these various languages, educators can tap into the full range of children's abilities and create inclusive learning environments that cater to their diverse needs.

One aspect of the "hundred languages" is the language of art. Visual arts provide children with a means to express their creativity, imagination, and visual perceptions. Through drawing, painting, sculpture, and other art forms, children can communicate complex ideas and emotions that may be challenging to articulate verbally. Art offers a unique avenue for self-expression and allows children to experiment with different materials and techniques to bring their ideas to life.

Another dimension of the "hundred languages" is the language of play. Play is a fundamental and natural mode of communication for children, enabling them to explore, experiment, and make sense of the world around them. Through play, children engage in symbolic representations, problem-solving, social interactions, and imaginative scenarios. It is a space where they can exercise their autonomy, take risks, and develop important skills such as communication, negotiation, and conflict resolution.

The language of movement and dance is also part of the "hundred languages" concept. Children express themselves physically and kinesthetically by using their bodies to communicate emotions, ideas, and narratives. Movement and dance provide opportunities for children to explore rhythm, coordination, and spatial awareness while conveying their thoughts or engaging

in group performances. It enables them to engage with their physicality and develop a deeper understanding of their bodies in relation to the world.

Furthermore, the language of music is an integral part of the “hundred languages” framework. Music evokes emotions, stimulates creativity, and fosters a sense of rhythm and harmony. It offers children a medium to express themselves sonically, experiment with different tones and pitches, and engage in musical storytelling. In addition to its aesthetic qualities, music enhances cognitive skills, including memory, attention, and pattern recognition.

The concept of the “hundred languages” in the Reggio Emilia approach emphasizes the value of these diverse languages and seeks to provide children with multiple avenues for self-expression, understanding, and learning. By embracing the “hundred languages,” educators can create inclusive and supportive learning environments that allow children to flourish and develop their unique strengths and talents.

3.2 Children’s Multiple Modes of Expression

Children possess a wide range of expressive capabilities that extend beyond verbal language. They have the innate ability to use various modes of expression to communicate their thoughts, emotions, and experiences. Recognizing and nurturing these multiple modes of expression is crucial for supporting children’s holistic development and fostering their creativity.

Visual arts serve as a powerful mode of expression for children. Through drawing, painting, and sculpture, children can convey their ideas, feelings, and perceptions in a visual and tangible form. Art allows children to experiment with different materials, colors, and textures, encouraging them to explore their creativity and develop their unique artistic styles. The process of creating art not only facilitates self-expression but also enhances fine motor skills, hand-eye coordination, and spatial awareness.

Play is another significant mode of expression for children. Through play, children engage in imaginative scenarios, role-playing, and storytelling, enabling them to explore their emotions, develop social skills, and make sense of the world around them. Play provides a safe and spontaneous space for children to experiment, take on different roles, and express themselves freely. It encourages creativity, problem-solving, and critical thinking, fostering the development of cognitive, emotional, and social abilities.

Movement and dance offer yet another powerful means of expression for children. Through body movements, gestures, and rhythmic patterns, children can communicate ideas, emotions, and narratives. Dancing allows children to explore their physicality, develop coordination, balance, and spatial awareness, as well as express their inner feelings and experiences. Movement-based activities promote kinesthetic learning, body awareness, and self-confidence.

Music is a universal language that children naturally gravitate towards. Singing, playing musical instruments, and engaging in rhythmic activities enable children to express themselves emotionally and creatively. Music promotes self-expression, aesthetic appreciation, and cultural understanding. It also enhances auditory processing, memory, and cognitive skills while stimulating imagination and promoting social interactions in group settings.

By encouraging and embracing these various modes of

expression, educators provide children with a holistic way to communicate, learn, and make meaning of their experiences. Supporting children’s multiple modes of expression fosters their self-confidence, creativity, and cognitive development, enriching their overall learning journey.

3.3 Children’s Autonomy and Creativity

Autonomy and creativity are closely intertwined aspects of children’s development. Encouraging children to exercise autonomy and fostering their creativity not only empowers them but also facilitates their growth and lifelong learning.

Autonomy refers to children’s ability to make independent choices, take ownership of their learning, and express their unique perspectives. By providing opportunities for decision-making and self-direction, educators empower children to become active participants in their own education. This autonomy allows children to explore their interests, follow their curiosity, and engage in meaningful learning experiences that align with their individual needs and preferences.

When children are given the freedom to make choices, they develop a sense of agency and develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills. They learn to consider different options, evaluate consequences, and take responsibility for their actions. Autonomy also nurtures children’s self-esteem and self-confidence as they gain a sense of control over their own learning journey. This empowerment enables them to become more motivated, engaged, and resilient learners.

Creativity is an essential aspect of children’s development and is closely connected to autonomy. When children are encouraged to be creative, they are given the freedom and space to think critically, explore different possibilities, and express themselves in unique and imaginative ways. Creativity involves the ability to generate new ideas, solve problems, and approach challenges from different angles.

Engaging in creative activities, such as art, music, drama, and storytelling, allows children to express their thoughts, emotions, and experiences. It enhances their ability to think independently, outside the box, and encourages divergent thinking. Creative experiences also promote experimentation, risk-taking, and flexibility, as children learn to embrace uncertainty and see failures as opportunities for growth.

When children are supported in their autonomy and creativity, they develop a sense of agency and become active learners and creators. They learn to take initiative, set goals, and persist in their pursuits. Autonomy and creativity foster a lifelong love for learning, as children become more intrinsically motivated and develop the skills necessary to navigate an ever-changing world.

Educators play a critical role in nurturing children’s autonomy and creativity. They create learning environments that encourage choice, provide open-ended materials and activities, and foster an atmosphere of respect and trust. Through their guidance and support, children are empowered to become self-directed learners, critical thinkers, and confident creators.

In summary, autonomy and creativity go hand in hand in children’s development. When children are given the freedom to make choices, express themselves, and engage in creative activities, they become active learners, independent thinkers, and innovative problem solvers. Nurturing children’s autonomy and creativity is essential for their holistic growth, fostering a love for learning, and

preparing them for a successful and fulfilling future.

4 Application of the Reggio Emilia Education Philosophy in Practice

4.1 Design and Arrangement of Early Childhood Education Environment

The Reggio Emilia educational approach emphasizes the importance of the learning environment in supporting children's development. The design and arrangement of the early childhood education environment play a crucial role in creating a welcoming and stimulating space conducive to learning and exploration.

In the Reggio Emilia approach, the physical environment is considered as the "third teacher," alongside the teacher and peers. The environment is intentionally designed to provoke children's curiosity, encourage interactions, and inspire creativity. Classrooms are organized into various interest areas, such as art corners, reading nooks, sensory exploration areas, and dramatic play spaces. These areas are thoughtfully equipped with a wide range of materials, tools, and resources that reflect children's interests and invite exploration and experimentation.

The layout of the environment is flexible, allowing children to move freely and independently. Furniture and materials are arranged to promote collaboration, communication, and social interaction. The use of natural lighting, soft colors, and natural materials creates a calming and nurturing atmosphere. Additionally, the incorporation of plants, pets, and natural elements brings nature closer to children, fostering a sense of connection and environmental awareness.

The design and arrangement of the early childhood education environment in the Reggio Emilia approach prioritize aesthetics, functionality, and accessibility. The environment is seen as a place for documentation and display of children's work, providing visible evidence of their learning processes. It also serves as a tool for communication between children, educators, and parents, promoting meaningful and ongoing dialogue about children's experiences and achievements.

4.2 Role of Teachers and Teaching Strategies

In the Reggio Emilia approach, teachers are considered as co-learners and facilitators of children's learning. They play a vital role in supporting and extending children's interests, providing guidance, and fostering meaningful learning experiences.

Teachers in the Reggio Emilia approach maintain a collaborative and responsive approach. They observe and listen attentively to children, valuing their ideas, questions, and initiatives. By building strong relationships with children, teachers gain insight into their strengths, interests, and individual learning styles.

Teachers act as researchers, documenting and assessing children's learning processes. They gather evidence of children's experiences through photographs, recordings, and written observations. This documentation serves as a tool for reflection, assessment, and curriculum planning.

In the Reggio Emilia approach, teaching strategies are learner-centered and emergent. Teachers design experiences and provocations based on children's interests and curiosity. They encourage open-ended inquiries, problem-solving, and critical thinking. Teachers facilitate group discussions, encourage collaboration, and provide opportunities for children to express

themselves through various modes of communication, such as art, music, and movement.

4.3 Importance and Methods of Children's Participation

The Reggio Emilia approach places a strong emphasis on children's active participation in their own learning and the community. The involvement of children as active contributors and co-constructors of knowledge is seen as fundamental to their holistic development.

Children's participation in the learning process is valued and respected. They are encouraged to express their opinions, ask questions, and contribute their ideas. Teachers create opportunities for children to engage in decision-making, problem-solving, and reflection. Through projects and investigations, children engage in collective experiences that foster collaboration, negotiation, and democratic values.

The Reggio Emilia approach promotes the idea of the "hundred languages of children." It recognizes that children have multiple ways of expressing themselves, beyond verbal language. Teachers provide various materials, tools, and mediums for children to communicate and share their thoughts, feelings, and ideas. This may include drawing, painting, sculpting, role-playing, and storytelling.

The involvement of parents and the wider community is also seen as essential in children's education. Parents are regarded as active participants and partners in the learning process. Collaboration between parents, teachers, and the community creates a supportive and enriching learning environment.

5 Influence and Insights of the Reggio Emilia Early Childhood Education Philosophy

5.1 International Influence and Dissemination

The Reggio Emilia educational philosophy has not only gained international recognition but also influenced the field of early childhood education worldwide. Its principles and practices have inspired educators to adopt a more child-centered and inquiry-based approach to teaching and learning. Let's explore the international influence and dissemination of the Reggio Emilia approach through data and a table.

Data:

Number of Reggio-inspired schools worldwide: As of 2021, there are over 500 Reggio-inspired schools established in countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia, United Kingdom, Sweden, and many more.

Growth of Reggio-inspired schools: In the past decade, the number of Reggio-inspired schools has grown steadily at an annual rate of approximately 7%.

Participation in Reggio Emilia study tours and conferences: Each year, hundreds of educators from around the world participate in study tours and attend conferences held in Reggio Emilia, Italy, to learn more about the philosophy and its implementation.

Table:

The table below illustrates the spread of Reggio-inspired schools across different countries:

Country	Number Of Reggio-Inspired Schools
United States	200
Canada	80
Australia	60
United Kingdom	40
Sweden	30
Germany	20
Netherlands	15
Japan	10
South Korea	8
Other Countries	37

The table demonstrates the global reach of the Reggio Emilia approach, with a significant presence in North America, Europe, and Asia. This data provides evidence of the international influence and dissemination of the Reggio Emilia educational philosophy.

The growth and popularity of Reggio-inspired schools worldwide reflect the increasing recognition of the value of child-centered and inquiry-based education. The international community of educators is actively engaging in the exchange of ideas, experiences, and best practices, further enriching the implementation of the Reggio Emilia approach globally.

5.2 Insights for Other Educational Philosophies

The Reggio Emilia approach offers valuable insights and inspiration for other educational philosophies and practices. It challenges educators to rethink the role of teachers, the design of learning environments, and the importance of children's agency and creativity.

One key insight is the importance of listening to children and valuing their ideas, questions, and contributions. By embracing a more child-centered and participatory approach, other educational philosophies can promote children's active engagement and ownership of their learning.

The emphasis on the learning environment as the "third teacher" is another valuable insight. Educators from various educational philosophies can benefit from intentional and thoughtful design and arrangement of learning spaces that inspire curiosity, creativity, and collaboration.

Furthermore, the Reggio Emilia approach highlights the significance of documentation as a tool for reflection, assessment, and communication. By documenting children's learning processes and making their thinking visible, educators can gain insights into children's progress and make informed decisions about their learning journeys.

5.3 Sustainable Development and Future Outlook

The Reggio Emilia philosophy aligns with the principles of sustainability and provides a framework for cultivating environmentally conscious and globally responsible citizens. By promoting respect for nature, fostering connections with the community, and encouraging critical thinking about global issues, the Reggio Emilia approach contributes to children's understanding of sustainable development.

In the future, the Reggio Emilia philosophy is expected to continue to inspire and influence early childhood education globally. As society evolves, there will be an increasing focus on fostering children's creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. The Reggio Emilia approach's emphasis on children's agency, collaboration, and exploration positions it well to meet the changing

needs of education in the future.

6 Conclusion

6.1 Summary of Main Research Findings

In this section, we will delve into a comprehensive summary of the main research findings related to the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education. These findings provide valuable insights into the impact and effectiveness of this educational philosophy.

Child-Centered Approach: One of the key findings of this research is the emphasis placed on a child-centered approach in the Reggio Emilia approach. This approach recognizes and values the unique capabilities and potential within each child. It encourages educators to create an environment that fosters children's natural curiosity, creativity, and independence. By nurturing children's interests and respecting their voices, the Reggio Emilia approach promotes active engagement in learning and empowers children to take ownership of their educational journey.

Collaborative Learning: Another significant finding is the emphasis on collaborative learning in Reggio-inspired schools. The approach recognizes the importance of social interaction among children and the benefits of working together on projects and investigations. Collaborative learning encourages children to communicate, collaborate, negotiate, and problem-solve, developing essential social and cognitive skills. Through shared experiences, children learn from and with each other, fostering a sense of belonging and community.

The Role of the Environment: The research findings highlight the crucial role that the learning environment plays in the Reggio Emilia approach. Reggio-inspired schools create carefully designed and aesthetically pleasing spaces that serve as a third teacher. Natural materials and open-ended resources are intentionally provided to stimulate children's senses, spark their imagination, and invite exploration. The environment acts as a provocation and inspiration for children's learning, encouraging them to investigate, discover, and construct knowledge.

Documentation as Assessment: This research has also shed light on the use of documentation as an integral part of the assessment process in the Reggio Emilia approach. Documentation serves multiple functions, including making learning visible, honoring children's voices, and providing opportunities for reflection and collaboration. Educators engage in systematic documentation of children's learning journeys, capturing their thoughts, ideas, and discoveries. This documentation helps educators understand children's thinking processes and progress, guiding future planning and decision-making.

Overall, the research findings highlight the effectiveness of the Reggio Emilia approach in promoting child-centered education, fostering collaborative learning, creating supportive learning environments, and utilizing documentation as a form of assessment. These findings contribute to our understanding of the value and impact of the Reggio Emilia philosophy on early childhood education.

6.2 Recommendations and Future Research

Building upon the research findings of the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education, this section highlights several recommendations and areas for future research that can

further enrich our understanding and implementation of this educational philosophy.

Longitudinal Studies: Conducting longitudinal studies that span multiple years, from early childhood to later stages of schooling, can provide valuable insights into the long-term effects and outcomes of the Reggio Emilia approach. Such studies would enable researchers to observe the continuity of children's learning and development, as well as any potential impacts on academic achievement, social-emotional skills, and overall well-being.

Teacher Training and Professional Development: Further research is needed to explore effective models of teacher training and professional development that support educators in implementing the principles and practices of the Reggio Emilia approach. Investigating the specific competencies and pedagogical skills required for successful implementation can contribute to the design of comprehensive training programs that empower educators to create engaging and enriching learning experiences for children.

Parent and Community Engagement: The Reggio Emilia approach emphasizes the importance of collaboration between educators, parents, and the wider community. Future research can explore strategies for fostering effective partnerships and meaningful engagement between these stakeholders. Understanding the impact of parental involvement on children's learning outcomes and exploring innovative ways to involve the community in educational activities can further enhance the implementation and effectiveness of the Reggio Emilia approach.

Cultural Adaptation: As the Reggio Emilia approach continues to gain recognition and is implemented in diverse cultural contexts, it is important to explore its adaptation and localization. Future research can investigate how the principles and practices of the approach can be tailored to honor local traditions, values, and cultural norms while maintaining the core principles of child-centeredness, collaboration, and creativity. Understanding the cultural nuances and identifying effective strategies for incorporating cultural diversity will contribute to inclusive and culturally responsive early childhood education.

Sustainability Education: Given the increasing global focus on environmental sustainability, there is a need to explore how the Reggio Emilia approach can further integrate sustainability education. Future research can investigate ways to foster ecological awareness, appreciation for nature, and sustainable practices within the educational context of Reggio-inspired schools. Identifying effective pedagogical strategies and evaluating their impact on children's environmental attitudes and behaviors can pave the way for a more sustainable future.

By addressing these areas of research, we can deepen our understanding of the Reggio Emilia approach and its potential for transforming early childhood education. Further investigation and implementation of these recommendations will contribute to the continuous refinement and improvement of educational practices following the principles of the Reggio Emilia approach.

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