

## THE REGGIO EMILIA METHOD, A MODERN APPROACH OF PRESCHOOL EDUCATION

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### Abstract

*The concerns of pedagogues over the years focus on an effective training of children to face social life, to cope properly with the challenges of the world they will live in and carry out their activity, starting with the preschool period, then school age etc. Several researchers have dedicated their lives to discover the most effective and proper methods of education and training. One of these researchers was Reggio Emilia and in this article we will highlight the strong points of this method in order to educate properly children of young age.*

**Key words:** high scope, environment, efficiency, the 3<sup>rd</sup> teachers

### Introduction

The Reggio Emilia method stands for a philosophy that approaches preschool pedagogy, namely preschool and early school children's education in a different manner, where community and environment play an important role in child education. This method joins child education, child well-being, children's fundamental rights with the support given to families. But where does this method come from? After the World War II when the whole society was suffering, in a small Italian town, called Reggio Emilia, the community led by Loris Malaguzzi (1920-1994), teacher, philosopher and poet, set the basis of an association that would support children. They built schools with their bare hands and set the bases of a new philosophy on child education where community would play an important role. The Reggio Emilia Method is centred on the community and its culture but a fact worth mentioning is that its ideas are based on preschool education principles developed by researchers like John Dewey, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, David Hawkins, Jerome Bruner, Howard Gardner.

Over time, Reggio Emilia approach developed and came to be known throughout the world as a viable method with high formative qualities for children. Thus, in 1994 a non-profit organization was founded, called *Friends of Reggio Children International Association*<sup>31</sup> aiming at continuing Loris Malaguzzi ideas. At the annual conference *National Association for the Education of Young Children*, in Chicago, the USA, *North American Reggio Emilia Alliance*(NAREA)<sup>32</sup> was founded, aiming at: "Education and

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<sup>31</sup> <http://zerosei.comune.re.it/inter/amici.htm>

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.reggioalliance.org/>

*research to improve the lives of people and communities, in Reggio Emilia and in the world”.*<sup>33</sup>

## **2. LorisMalagutti philosophy**

In his philosophy, Loris Malaguzzi started from the belief that a child’s education should start from the idea that each child is curious and creative. The child is not an individual with an empty memory that waits to be filled up with facts, data, figures and information. According to Reggio Emilia Method, the curriculum for early education and young schooling should be flexible and focused on child’s needs. The curriculum design should be centred on child’s needs and should be adjustable. The Reggio Emilia Method has as main objective the development in each child’s consciousness the desire to learn and explore reality throughout his life.

## **3. Principles of Reggio Emilia method**

The Reggio Emilia Method promotes the community’s involvement in child’s education. In some respects this method has similarities with Montessori and Waldorf alternatives. For many parents, the moment the child starts school, preschool or primary school is an important but also concerning moment. Family will move to the second place while education will be taken over by an educational institution. This fact brings about a lower involvement of family in child’s education, a separation within which different responsibilities are passed on from the family members to the pre/school institution. Hence the idea of community involvement to improve conditions for educating children.

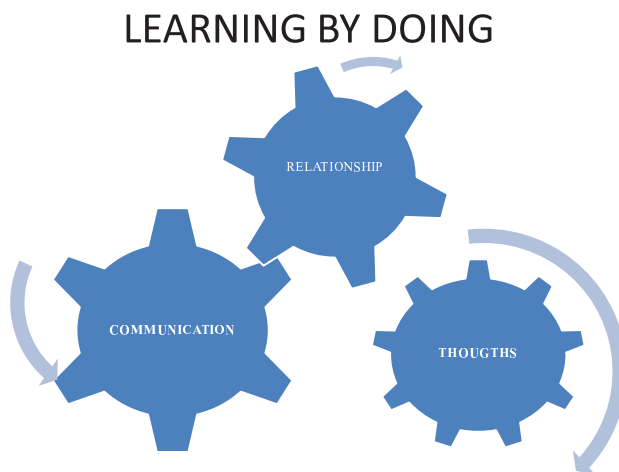
Reggio Emilia school has a leader that informs the local council about all school’s problems and objectives. All members of the teaching staff lead the educational act according to the children’s interests which are carefully considered through different methods. In order to achieve this desideratum, there are two teachers in each classroom who complement each other in everything that education means: care, supervision and work with children. There is also a trained art teacher (at least two art branches) that is responsible for a workshop. In a workshop, children find many and different materials from those found in nature to the ones in the media. They are free to make experiments with them, to use them as they want to because their aim is to develop the child’s creativity and imagination. The teachers, the workshop responsible and all teaching staff are a team that works together for the child’s benefit. The main orientations of Reggio Emilia Method are:

- child centred education;
- the need to prepare children for a free and democratic life;
- social responsibility towards the uniqueness of each child and openness towards his educational needs;
- emphasize the importance of triple relation: family, school, community;
- stimulation of communication and interrelating;
- progressive thinking;
- openness for research and experimenting performed by dedicated teachers;

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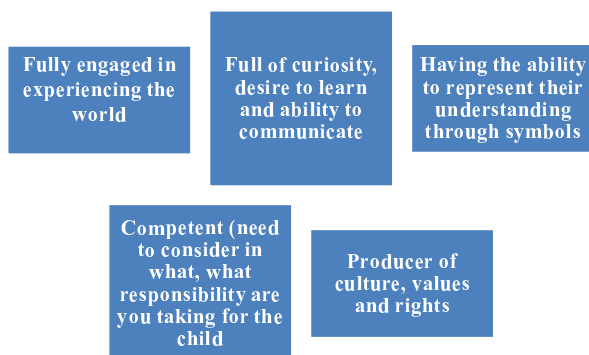
<sup>33</sup><http://reggiocchildrenfoundation.org/>

- workshop activities;
- the need to maintain a real and mutual collaboration between school and community;
- stress on metacognition;
- conscious learning based on acceptance of the need to improve performance.



Reggio Emilia Method places great emphasis on the child's ability to recognize his/her formation, by developing innate potential and by revaluing the child's aspirations. The child is not an empty entity that waits for the educational factors to fill in that hole, the child is a personality in development, with interests, aspirations and a certain, non-recurring individuality, capable of following his own path in life, if helped by parents, teachers and society. In order for the child to achieve something, it is necessary to put an emphasis on child's communication and socializing abilities, to show affectionate care and to build confidence in their own forces.

#### VISION ON GAMES



Parents, school and community must create an educational environment where the child has the opportunity to communicate and relate to other children. They should create an environment that develops the communication and relating abilities, where s/he feels free but at the same time protected and loved, stimulated to explore and learn.

The three educational factors: parents, school and community collaborate and take part in children's education. Parents are actively involved in the life of the educational institution and participate in everything that means improvement and development of a proper educational environment. Therefore, they are encouraged to participate effectively in indoor and outdoor school activities. Family is regarded as a partner not as a consumer; it is part of the school's educational activity.

The teachers are those who set the contents of learning, the objectives that would be followed and fulfilled and the context in which they will be carried on. The main goal is the child's benefit and the observance of his interests and fundamental rights.

The educational institution is designed to be an educational environment adapted to the requirement of child education according to his needs for exploration and learning, where special architecture is conceived as functional, challenging and open to exploration and learning. As Reggio Emilia Method lays emphasis on the learning space, it should offer children a feeling of safety and well-being and then be a cognitive stimulus that gives them the opportunity to interrelate, to motivate and develop their desire to explore new learning opportunities. Reggio Emilia Method aims at promoting speech development under a cognitive, symbolic ethical, metaphorical imaginative and relational aspect. The educational environment has to contribute to the promotion of these objectives, therefore we can compare the educational environment to a community in miniature that highlight culture and social ethics, prosocial attitudes and standards promoted by school curricula, as stated by the founder of this method: Loris Malaguzzi: *The environment should act as an aquarium which reflects the ideas, ethics, attitudes and culture of the people who live in it. This is what we are working towards.*<sup>34</sup>

Children are individuals with different paces of development, with different action and information process paces, with different pace of world understanding, therefore educational factors have to take into consideration these aspects and respect them. Adults mostly regard children as their equals in what concerns world understanding and act consequently. They put too much pressure on their shoulders, rushing them all the time, not having patience to listen and guide them, making them grow up too fast.

The Reggio Emilia Method focuses on the community, that is why it is so important that all educational factors: parents and teachers to communicate with children in all possible manners, to contradict each other, to argue and share their emotions through games: to laugh, to cry, to fight. Socializing and communicating in this way, children and parents will develop relations based on mutual trust, where everyone feels safe and not in a strong competition. Children feel good in a warm and harmonic environment. It leads to the development of positive feeling, animated by empathy. The preschool and primary school teachers' role is to give children the opportunity to take part in activities that make them aware of their capacity to acquire new knowledge. Educators must encourage children in being creative, to constantly learn even when facing error, to help them make connections between information, between what they know and want to know.

In each classroom there are two teachers, one of them registering observations on children's activity and the other one is the partner, the supervisor. The teacher's role is to coordinate children's activities, being:

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<sup>34</sup>[http://www.reggioemilia.org.nz/pdf/PRINCIPLES\\_OF\\_REGGIO\\_EMILIA\\_APPROACH\\_TO\\_EARLY\\_CHILDH](http://www.reggioemilia.org.nz/pdf/PRINCIPLES_OF_REGGIO_EMILIA_APPROACH_TO_EARLY_CHILDH), p.33, (accessed on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2013).

- the child's co-partner in discovering the surrounding world;
- to challenge children to find answers, to solve the problem and to relate friendly;
- to elaborate educational projects starting from the child's ideas;
- to organize the educational environment in a pleasant and useful manner;
- to lead children towards new explorations and a proper understanding of the surrounding world.

As an important educational factor in a child's education, the teacher has to follow certain principles regarding child education. S/he will team up with the parents and they will follow the child's evolution and progress. The teacher will record on sheets, video or audio support the child's progress, will maintain a close and open relation with the parents, all in the child's best interest. These documents that will contain observations, recordings discussions, deficiency in knowledge are a basis for the teacher in planning his future educational objectives. The whole teaching staff along with the parents will discuss the educational projects necessary for the children's proper development and they will decide together their educational path. The teacher will be the link between the institution, family and community. The idea of unity in educational requirements is challenging, this aspect of co-work involves responsibility from all factors.

*The Reggio Emilia Method does not want to set a model, as Millikan stated in 2003: The preschools and infant-toddler centres of Reggio Emilia do not provide a model, but rather the opportunity to reflect on our own educational theories, practices, and methods of organization*<sup>35</sup>.

It is desirable to be an aspiration for teachers, parents and society in creating a better school for children, an educational environment according to the child's nature that would follow his best interest and desire to acquire education, a place that would reflect the ideals, beliefs and ethics of the society we live in.

The philosophy of Reggio Emilia Method raises some questions that we need to reflect upon. One concerns the amount of information that we take from this educational philosophy, how we adapt it to the Romanian educational system and how will we be able to apply it. The ideas advocated by Reggio Emilia Method are worth to be followed because they aim at the child's best interest and progress<sup>36</sup>:

- it promotes everlasting values of society;
- it promotes the best ideas for education;
- it applies the child's right to education, like children with special educational needs that have the right to education in any institution they want to;
- it encourages games and team activities;
- teacher and child are viewed as partners in playing and learning;
- learning is not seen as a lineal process but a curl one, as a progressive process where teacher supervises the child's interests and assures necessary resources for a proper exploration and learning.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibidem, p.34

Lella Gandini, Lynn Hill, Louise Cadwell, Charles Schwall, *In the Spirit of the Studio: Learning from the Atelier of Reggio Emilia (Early Childhood Education Series)*

It is worth reflecting upon the Reggio Emilia Method that managed to create a real connection, a partnership between pre/school institution, family and community and which asserted the educational environment as the 3<sup>rd</sup> teacher.

The Reggio Emilia Method is an example on how teachers can involve children in their own formation through creative and motivating activities. Adults and children can learn together in a pleasant and useful manner, where everyone takes part in his/her own pace, using the resources s/he wants to. Children are regarded as members of the community with full rights and are encouraged to think freely and act autonomously.

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