What Is "Reggio Emilia Inspired"?

After World War II, many Italians wanted to prevent the rise of another dictator in their country. Citizens of the community of Reggio Emilia believed one step toward that goal was to provide child-centered early education. Their philosophy and practices eventually caught the attention of an international audience. Now, programs around the world are inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach. What are you likely to see in a Reggio Emilia–inspired program?

A similar approach, but many variations

Some programs may look very different from each other, but they have many basic elements in common. They all share the same purpose: to encourage children to investigate, collaborate, and imagine.

An appealing environment

The Reggio Emilia philosophy sees the environment as "the third teacher" (with families and teachers). Educators carefully plan room arrangements, lighting, and color schemes and provide open-ended materials, such as tools, natural objects, and fabrics. There is no set Reggio Emilia curriculum or floor plan; costly supplies and room redesigns are not needed. Classrooms reflect the culture of their communities. A rural Illinois school and an urban Italian program might be furnished very differently.

Engaged, active children

The Reggio Emilia image of the child treats each child as a unique individual with rights, including the right to be active partners in an education that respects their curiosity, creativity, and capabilities. Teachers promote children's interactions with objects, people, and events in spaces that inspire and encourage them. A Reggio Emilia–inspired day includes time for children to plan and carry out investigations, build relationships, play, and solve problems, both on their own and interdependently with peers and adults.

Child-created evidence of learning

Reggio Emilia–inspired educators value what they call "the hundred languages of children." They encourage children to freely express knowledge, ideas, and questions in a variety of ways: conversation, drawing, writing, painting, clay work, making music, dancing, and pretend play, to name a few. Some Reggio Emilia–inspired programs have special teachers who show children how to use a wide range of art media. Displays of children's work may focus on their learning processes during an investigation, rather than a finished product.

Ongoing documentation

Visitors to Reggio Emilia–inspired programs may notice that teachers regularly observe and document children's activities via note-taking, photography, or video. The information helps them plan ways to enhance classroom experiences and provide what individual children need. They also share the information with families, so family members can support the children's interests at home.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois State Board of Education.

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