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# Learning from the Reggio Emilia Philosophy: How it can work in public elementary

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Learning from the Reggio Emilia Philosophy: How it can Work in Public Elementary

School Classes in the US

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What purpose would a recycled glass pasta jar of corkscrews have in a preschool classroom? Why would a group of children all work together on one art project if they each didn't have their own creation to take home? Will these pre-k children be prepared to write for kindergarten without explicit worksheet based instruction on letters of the alphabet?

These were some of my first questions about the Reggio Emilia approach when I first entered the Reggio inspired classrooms at the Jewish Community Center of Northern Virginia's (JCCNV) Early Childhood Learning Center (ECLC) six years ago. At the mere age of sixteen I was thrust full throttle into new territory, completely blinded to how that first summer would shape my whole identity. That summer did not simply re-affirm my love for teaching youngsters, it led me to love a philosophy I fully did not comprehend. *I guess the way we let children play, explore, and create in such cohesive groups is based off of what some Italians do in a far away city.* Sixteen year old me had no idea the passion of these far-off Italian citizens who have shown the world new innovations in early childhood. I have come to learn what Loris Malaguzzi, the "father" of Reggio Emilia helped the citizens of his town to see: that Reggio Emilia is not a curriculum and is much more than just an educational philosophy, but it is more like a way of life.

My interest in exploring Reggio Emilia in-depth stemmed directly from my work at the ECLC for over five years. I grew to love the way the approach

encouraged children to think and encouraged educators to really listen to and value the thoughts and ideas of children. This Senior Honors Program project stemmed from my personal desire to live out the ideal of Reggio Emilia in my future elementary school classroom. A second culminating event that led me to want to research the Reggio philosophy in-depth was when I actually stepped foot in the city that has changed my educational philosophy. While it was less than twenty-four hours, passing through on the way from Florence to Venice, I toured the Loris Malaguizzi International Centro to see the exhibits. Exhausted from the hot and stuffy train ride, frightened by the sketchy looking hostel we ended up booking, and out of euros, I entered the centro with my friend, Madeline and somehow felt right at home. Welcomed by individuals whose language we did not speak, but whose image of children aligned directly with mine, I realized that I would be taking away more than just free brochures from this city.

My main question I address in this paper is what would a primary grade public school classroom in the United States look like that incorporated aspects of the Reggio Emilia approach? What aspects could be easily utilized and which ones could not? What are some potential barriers that could arise? Prior to answering these questions I will start with an in-depth literature review from various experts of the Reggio Emilia philosophy. I will briefly explain how early childhood education works in Reggio Emilia and the major components of the philosophy as well as key players that helped to shape it. Then I will analyze how implementing aspects of the Reggio Emilia philosophy in American public primary classrooms could affect the learner.

### **Literature Review**

I have learned what Reggio Emilia is in three steps or tiers. The first step was the years I have spent working at the ECLC. From eight-hour days over the summer, to coming in for just three hours in the after-care program after high school, to subbing as a preschool teacher when home from college on breaks, my commitment to the mission of the philosophy of inspiration only grew as I gained more experience. I remember one of the first associations my developing brain had with the Reggio approach. There was a substitute for the art specialist who came in with coloring pages, a box full of fresh crayons, and a warm smile. One of the teachers whispered to me, “well that is not Reggio!” She later explained to me that because of the Italian philosophy that inspires the ECLC we do not give our children coloring pages because we want them to be able to create on their own and explore freely. As I talked more with the ECLC director about the philosophy and why they chose to train their educators in this way, my definition of what Reggio is matured. Rather than just being an idea that encourages children to come up with their own art projects, it grew to be a belief that children are playful and powerful creators if given the right supplies and nurturance. Inspired by the Reggio philosophy, I learned about the importance of truly loving the children I teach and taking the time to listen to them talk.

Loving children was really not something I had to learn, as I believe it is an innate quality everyone can have. The educators at the ECLC were not afraid to show their children that they loved them. They encouraged a type of safe and



appropriate intimacy that I know now is backed in socio-emotional developmental theories of early childhood of attachment. If a preschooler wants to kiss his teacher on the cheek, he can do so. The students are encouraged to express their emotions in healthy ways, and showing love for their teachers is just one of those ways. It is because the children are valued and respected as equal counterparts in the eyes of those who adhere to the Reggio way that children are offered the same opportunities to express their emotions and feelings as an adult would.

The second step of defining what exactly Reggio is was my visit to the city and the centro. To continue with the vignette of my 16-year-old self learning that Reggio does not give children coloring sheets, I learned that this story is a metaphor that can be used to understand how the citizens of Reggio Emilia view their children. I saw from the architecture of the school next to the centro and the photos of children deep in play that it is because children are valued, not just as equals in society, but as inherently good-hearted and special, that they deserve the best supplies and opportunities to create. They deserve engagement in deeper levels than coloring inside the lines. The students deserve cross-disciplinary education that will enable all their senses. Music, art, food, nature, engineering, and literacy are amongst some of the ways the citizens of Reggio pronounce their love for the children. They also make it clear they love all children the same—immigrants, children with special needs, children suffering from the impact of poverty—as they all have the opportunity to attend a highly qualified school. The diversity that I saw in the centro showed the value of diversity and the celebration of differences and commonalities that are a part of the philosophy. As I stood in awe beneath carefully

constructed documentation panels of the intense learning young children were doing collaboratively, I thought back to the modest ECLC across the Atlantic. From this non-profit center rooted in Jewish values that extends its doors to members of all faiths and cultures and encourages the exchange of culture, I learned that Reggio is about instilling that sense of acceptance while teaching children. Reggio is about helping children to tap into their innate good heart that wants to promote positive social change.

Lastly, it was through my education coursework and then immersion into studying Reggio Emilia through research that finally helped me to develop my understanding as to what it is. What proved to be a pivotal moment in understanding Reggio Emilia was realizing each “definition” were at least a paragraph and often multiple pages. It has so much to it that makes it difficult to reduce the definition to one simple phrase. It is complex because children are complicated creatures who deserve much care and time to fully get to know them. Louise Boyd Cadwell who studied and taught in Reggio Emilia before trying to implement the philosophy in her own school says, “A few short sentences cannot adequately describe the Reggio Approach” (1997, p. 5). This illustrates the point that the Reggio approach is not just a way to teach. It is a mindset on education and childhood. When an educator adheres to this mindset in all facets of her life she is a teacher who is compassionate, an active listener, a playmate with her students, a collaborator, and inherently loving.

My interest in seeing how aspects of the Reggio Emilia philosophy could work in American classrooms is not new. Many educators have traveled to Italy to

immerse themselves in the classrooms before attempting to bring aspects of it back home to America. One commonality I have found from many different readings is that it is not a curriculum that one can buy material for and follow (such as High Scope or Creative Curriculum). When people talk about implementing Reggio Emilia into their classrooms they are really talking about altering the way the child is viewed. Julianne Wurm believes the first step to implementing the Reggio Emilia philosophy is for the teacher to create a personal reflection on her image of the child. She advises educators to answer questions such as: “Who is a child? What is a childhood? How do we learn? How do children learn? What does it mean *to educate*? What is the relationship between teaching and learning? What is the role of school in society?” (Wurm, 2005, p. 14). In order to most clearly portray components of the Reggio way that are important, I have synthesized all my research into seven main principles: the view of childhood, the learning environment, fostering community and family relationships, teaching style focused on conversations, project work, documentation, and teacher as a researcher and collaborator.

### **Core Principle One: The View of Childhood**

In Reggio Emilia, the image of the child is one that is strong, able, and capable. While there are many different individuals with different opinions in America, often times Americans view children as weak, in need of protection, in need of being taught everything and essentially trained for adulthood. In the city of Reggio, it is quite the opposite. The egalitarian nature of the philosophy is rooted at its core in how childhood is viewed in not just the schools, but the culture at large. Childhood is viewed not as a time of training for adulthood, but as a marvelous stage

in which curiosity, play, and exploration is fostered. David Hawkins speaks of the importance of not just providing children with love, but having genuine respect for them (2012). In order to respect children as individuals, and value their intellectual capacity, children have to be viewed as equals counterparts. As a result of this deep respect, the classroom is more student-centered and democratic. The children are not inactive participants with learning done onto them, but actively engaged learners who have a role in classroom decisions. The students have choices in what they want to explore, what supplies they want to use, and with whom and how they will choose to interact. The child and the teacher are seen as learning partners.

While all of the core principals of Reggio Emilia are combined what makes this philosophy so exceptional and unique, I would argue, is that the view of childhood is the most important one because how educators view their students shapes all of their action. Reggio father Loris Malaguzzi asserts the way the child is powerful in his famous poem “No Way. The Hundred is There” that has been translated to numerous languages and republished in multiple sources. Malaguzzi paints the image of a strong and capable child in the poem in which the child is ready to learn and create in many ways. This poem serves as a reminder for the multiple intelligences, ideas, and ways of thinking children possess. It is only when we honor and value children that can we be the best possible educators. In an interview by Folco Quilici, Loris Malaguzzi says, “we have to believe the child is a bearer and constructor of his own intelligence...this child is born to research” (Centro Internazionale Loris Malaguzzi, 2012). The child is not acted upon by teachers with knowledge, but the child acts upon the teacher in the journey to find

knowledge for himself. In Reggio they hold the belief that children innately want to learn. Rinaldi says, “The emphasis is placed on seeing the children as unique subjects with rights rather than simply needs. They have potential, plasticity, the desire to grow, curiosity, the ability to be amazed, and the desire to relate to other people and communicate” (Fraser & Gestwicki, 2002, p. 19). Learning is seen not as something children need, but a right they have. When teachers hold the viewpoint of children as strong and capable citizens, students then grow to view themselves in a confident and empowered way.

The unique cherishment of children in Reggio Emilia is rooted in the belief that the education of children leads to a civil society. Those who embrace the philosophy take pride in making sure that children are given the opportunity to be active citizens. Students are not seen to be observers of culture, but creators of culture (Smith, 2008). The school is seen as one of the most important places of the community, which illustrates how children are indeed viewed as valuable members of society. Graziano Delrio describes this well when he explains ethical liability: “[we must] recognize their dignity as citizens, as bearers of rights related to the city. The child is therefore a competent citizen...the sense of belonging, the willingness to take care of one another, the wish to participate, and the desire to be an active part of a process of change towards greater prosperity for the world community” (Delrio, 2012, pp. 83-84). In many societies children are viewed as individuals who are being taught to be citizens when they get older. Delrio explains how the Reggio way asserts that children are in fact already dignified citizens. This promotes a mindset of listening and valuing what children have to say.

Reggio further encourages the importance of really listening to children through what Reggio pioneer Carla Rinaldi coins the pedagogy of listening. It can best be defined as a mindset in which children's ideas are seen as valuable and worthwhile to hear (Moss, 2012). The pedagogy of listening is also more than just the importance of listening to children's ideas, it is about creating a classroom in which children feel safe to create their own meaning in their learning, and have the necessary tools to do so. The Reggio philosophy then asserts that through doing this, society will become more just and democratic. Deb Curtis says, "Our goal is for children to self-initiate, question, investigate, and invent....Our deepest hope is that a pedagogy of listening in schools will translate to a pedagogy of diplomacy in the world" (Carter & Curtis, 2008, p. 80). Not only does the mind frame provide hope that children will help to make the world better, it shows how children have power. The Reggio Emilia way is to empower children to feel and know that they have the power to do good in the world, not just when they grow up, but as children. It encourages children at a young age to value themselves and see their potential, not just for themselves, but for society as a whole. All children possess innate power and goodness, despite any other factors.

Children with disabilities in Reggio Emilia are viewed as children with different abilities. In fact, citizens of Reggio Emilia refer to them as "children with special rights" a name that seems to provide empowerment to a group of children who historically have faced educational exclusion and neglect around the globe. What is important to know is how the philosophy does not offer specific guidelines or programming for children with special rights. Their philosophy is very focused on

inclusion. This works because the teachers in Reggio Emilia differentiate for all of their students. It is the teachers' job to meet the students where they are not the other way around. Celebrating the differences of students comes into play here because schools need to be a place to nurture students through differences as opposed to force commonalities (Acton, 2008). This mindset of celebrating the differences of all children works to create a culture in which the differences of children with special rights are not seen as scary or foreign. Since all children are nurtured through what sets them apart, it truly is the same for all children. Children with special rights are viewed as being a part of the peer group (Soncini, 2012). They may often have a support teacher that comes with them to school to help them combat whatever limitations may come their way.

In Reggio Emilia, children with special rights are included in the main classroom (what is often referred to as inclusion in the US) not just because it provides them with what they feel the best possible education, but that it provides wonderful learning opportunities for all the students. Ivana Soncini says, "having a child with special rights in their class is highly educating for the other children because it forces them to adjust their behavior, language and communication, even their physical contact. This contributes to the children's acquisition of knowledge because it requires them to be more flexible" (2012, p. 199). Once the environment of inclusion and respect is set, all students are able to work together to love and respect one another.

A core component of the philosophy with regards to the view of childhood is the assumption that children are good-hearted and have the capacity to love others.

This is something I observed when working at the ECLC. Students did not fear differences, they adapted to children with special rights because they simply viewed them as another friend. The integration of students with special rights worked because all students learned to care deeply for each other from the loving culture and climate of the school. I remember one three-year-old boy, who I will refer to as Ming, on the Autism Spectrum who communicated in different ways than most of the children in his class. While Ming did not talk, he would point and look at numbers quite often. The students all found their own way to connect with Ming. At lunch time when we would heat up lunches, Ming got distracted by the microwave numbers to the point where he would refuse to eat and get agitated. The solution we came up with was to cover up the microwave numbers until he had finished eating. If we forgot to do this, students would often lovingly remind us because they wanted to help Ming. I remember a teacher telling me that if we were at a different preschool, there would be a good chance he would be asked to go to a different school. However, the love for children and inclusion enabled Ming to stay at the school and the last I heard of him he is thriving academically and socially. It is truly quite simple; if we believe the best in the children we teach, in return they will be the best they can be.

### **Core Principle Two: Learning Environment**

Imagine stepping foot into a classroom that is open and inviting. The walls are full of gorgeous artwork and the classroom is clean and organized. A large quantity of high quality art and building supplies are available for the children to take out as they please because it is placed strategically at the level of the child. The



classroom has home-like furniture such as soft chairs and pillows by an elaborate and open bookcase that contains many high quality picture books as well as reference books on different topics with photographs. Each child has his own glass water cup to drink from next to the sink that smells like fresh lemons. The sink is accessible to youngsters and also has a stool, which allows shorter students to wash their hands with the fresh homemade lavender soap. The furniture is arranged in a way that makes the space feel open, but also provides areas for more intimate conversations with children. This area is located right by a large open window that fills the room with natural sunlight that is reflected into the room from differently shaped hanging mirrors. The curtains on the window are colorful and homemade from soft fabric. The classroom also has multiple plants all at the students' level so they can water them with a painted watering can. Upon entering the classroom one immediately smells the fresh flowers that are on the table in a Mason jar tied with ribbon. There is a large framed picture of each child and his or her family as well as a bulletin board for families upon entering. Classical or jazz music is playing when students come into the classroom in the morning. There is a big basket of recycled materials and natural objects students can use for their creations as well. The space is nurturing and calm yet vibrant and intellectually stimulating.

The space I described is that of a hypothetical typical classroom that is inspired by the Reggio way. The citizens of Reggio Emilia often call the learning environment the "third teacher" (Frye, 1994). The assertion that the classroom environment serves as a teacher reveals just how vital the way the classroom environment is set-up is. Cadwell says, "Every corner of every space has an identity

and a purpose, is rich in potential to engage and to communicate, and is valued and cared for by children and adults” (1997, p. 5). The environment itself can serve as a mechanism to empower students in their learning, just as teachers can.

The teachers of Reggio Emilia give much care to ensure the classroom is aesthetically pleasing. Montessori and Reggio philosophies are similar in how they both find aesthetics to be a core part of teaching (MacDonald, 2008). Those who embrace the Montessori and Reggio Emilia ways of teaching feel that the way the classroom is organized can work to boost or weaken learning. If the classroom is set up in a way that is beautiful and appeals to art, it could work to enhance the innate artistic nature all young learners have inside them. Many Reggio inspired classrooms are connected to an extended outdoor classroom and only have natural lighting. The incorporation of lamps, soft rugs, cushions, and artwork make the space inviting, nurturing, and safe. Furthermore, the homey feel of the environment can help students develop their expressions of feelings (Frye, 1994). Prepackaged school posters should not serve as the only aesthetically pleasing decoration in a classroom. In fact, replacing them with more authentic and real decoration can help to enhance the space. Hanging children’s own creations on the walls can also serve as a way to show how their voices are valued (Fraser & Gestwicki, 2002). Many Reggio classrooms will have the artwork of students along with quotes of them explaining their work mounted and hung. While it is aesthetically pleasing, it serves as more than just beauty as it asserts the powerful role students have in the classroom.

Another important aspect of the environment is the way the furniture is arranged to make sure the space is conducive for different types of play as well as different interactions. Providing space for different size conversation as well as movement is vital. A large space for students to come together and sit for a circle-type time is beneficial for all grades. Conversations will be different if students are sitting at desks versus in close proximity where they can see each other. Malaguzzi spoke of the importance that children learn to be active listeners, and time and space must given for them to sit together to discuss their feelings, thoughts, and ideas (Gandini, 2012). Similarly, having the teacher not always be at the front of the room with the students looking up to her or him is also important. In the Reggio philosophy, students, teachers, and families work together as equals and the school does not function in a hierarchical manner. The way the environment is set up can also be seen as a symbol of the egalitarian nature of the schools.

Flexibility is another component that goes along with planning the classroom environment. Teachers must be flexible when changes have to occur in the set up of the classroom. Furthermore, teachers should routinely bring in new supplies for the students to work and play with (Fraser & Gestwicki, 2002). One other aspect that teachers must be flexible about is the movement of materials across space in the room. Most early childhood classrooms seem to have an art center, a science center, a dramatic play center, and a music center. Movement of supplies to other areas can promote interdisciplinary thinking. Materials are to be readily available for children to use as needed. Julianne Wurm says how her “own boundaries regarding control and freedom were stretched...[and] American teachers who want to work with

children in the Reggio way have to be prepared for this level of discomfort” (2005, p. 36). This sense of loss of control could be seen in how the classroom is not controlled by teacher, but it becomes an open space the children are free to have access to. The Reggio philosophy on the classroom environment is dramatically different from the typical American classroom I have seen in which everything in the classroom belongs to the teacher and the teacher is seen as the ruler of the classroom.

### **Core Principle Three: Fostering Community & Family Relationships**

It is quite common to see more than just teachers, administrators, and students inside a Reggio Emilia inspired school. The philosophy encourages families to be key partners in education. They are welcomed and encouraged to come to school to participate and share what they know. Furthermore, members of the community are welcomed and encouraged to share their knowledge with the children as field experts. Sergio Spaggiari says it best as quoted in an interview: “Community participation in education has had official recognition. It has been viewed as a means of fostering innovation, protecting educational institutions against the dangers of excessive bureaucracy, and stimulation of cooperation between educators and parents” (Gandini, 2012, p. 118). I have myself observed the innovative ideas that young learners create when the school doors are open to engagement with community members.

Children in Reggio schools are encouraged to question and dig deeper in a subject that interests them. If a student who is exploring about coral in the ocean becomes fascinated with the complexities of this living plant and wants to know

more, it is the job of the teacher to help to sustain this curiosity. However, it is impossible for a teacher to know so much detailed knowledge about so many subjects. That is why inviting community members, known as field experts, into the classroom is vital. Students need to understand that while their teacher does not have all the means to help them determine answers, there is someone else who does. By inviting an oceanographer into the classroom to speak about the coral the teacher is not only expanding the breadth of knowledge of the curious student, she is fostering a lifelong love for learning and showing the student she listens and respects him.

Allowing parents and community members to be partners in education goes beyond simply communicating and inviting families to attend school events once or twice a semester. The classroom and the school need to be an open and inviting space that encourages visits. The ECLC I worked at does that in many ways. For example, classrooms have photos of each child and his/her family as well as a parent communication board with letters, updates, fliers, and reports of what the students have been working on. While e-mail communication can be great, there is something different about being in the actual space of the classroom that educators from Reggio Emilia really understand. In their desire to create bonds with all families, they show a love and respect for diversity. Their love and respect for diversity goes back to the view of the image of the child in that they see all children as equally capable and competent.

Family involvement in student learning also has a dramatic impact on student academic success and behavior. In his book on family-teacher partnership,

Mick Coleman mentions the longitudinal study that the Chicago Child-Parent Center did that revealed that greater family involvement in primary years can lead to greater reading achievements, lower dropout rates, and lower rates of in-school suspensions (Coleman, 2013). This is not to say that family communication is always an easy task. Many working class families would love to spend time in the classroom, but due to jobs and other childcare obligations, feel it is impossible. The Reggio Emilia philosophy recognizes some of the challenges, especially when families are from a different culture. In order to help break down cultural barriers, many schools have created the role of a cultural mediator, an immigrant who has received special training and comes into the school once a week (Cagliari, Filippini, Giacopini, Bonilauri, & Margini, 2012). When working with immigrant families it can be especially important to keep on inviting families to events, not forget about them, and remain patient. If parents do not come to an event, the mindset in Reggio Emilia is never one that says, “those parents do not care about their child,” “they are lazy,” or “they do not like us.” The afterthought goes back to the actions of the teacher. “How was the family invited? What may be a more beneficial way to try to include them?” is the mindset. The teachers of Reggio Emilia do not give up on the vision of having close-knit family partnerships.

A very strong community relationship is also fostered through the opportunity for members of the school, including the teacher, to gather for meals and events outside the school day. Furthermore, a list of all the students’ and teachers’ phone numbers as well as addresses are provided to the class, something Malaguzzi himself believes in (Gandini, 2012). While many American elementary

schools do have a student directory, they often do not include information past the classroom telephone number and e-mail for the teacher. In Reggio the teachers are extremely accessible and available to communicate with the parents. Providing their home or mobile phone number is not only a way to foster that communication, but it also serves a symbol to show how they are inviting the students and parents to really be a part of their lives.

An example that illustrates the increased power for learning opportunities that comes with providing parents with the home phone number of the teacher is told by teacher and author Mary Cowhey in her book, *Black Ants and Buddhists*. While not a Reggio Emilia trained teacher, through reading her book I saw how her own personal teaching philosophy possesses many similar qualities to those of the Reggio tradition, the phone number just being one for example. She writes about how her students became interested and saddened by the fact some people may not have a Thanksgiving meal and a class project to make homemade pies and deliver them to a local soup kitchen grew. This was a task that interwove home, school, and community life. Cowhey found parent volunteers based on their own skills and interests and was able to create a plan. However when a snow day closed schools the day the pies were to be made and delivered, it was thought nothing could happen. When one parent called Cowhey at home and told her how much her child is “insisting he has to go to school anyway, to deliver those pies” she was able to gather many members of the classroom at the school with the principal’s permission and key to still put on the heartwarming project (Cowhey, 2006, p. 23). The dedication her students show in her anecdote about the project is remarkable.

Strong communication and relationships can lead to this same type of educational dedication. Cowhey's devotion to still go to school on a snow day shows an intense level of respect and commitment for her students — that she is honoring her promise.

#### **Core Principle Four: Teaching Style Focused on Conversations**

Many teachers' pedagogical mindset is to make sure they get across the needed facts and information to their students in the best way possible. The Reggio way seems to turn that notion upside down as it works to tap into the potential of the student to determine the needed facts and information through wonderful and meaningful conversations and discussions the teacher facilitates, but does not control. That does not mean however that the teacher takes a back seat role and lets the students "run the show." The teacher is a professional and a researcher who determines what the students need to know and finds different ideas for how to go about making sure the student learns it. What the teacher understands is that the students learn in many different ways that often do not involve sitting crisscross on the ground silently listening to the teacher talk while she stands above them. Malaguzzi is quoted as saying "teachers follow the children, not the plan," which really highlights the mindset of the teachers in Reggio (Gandini, 2012, p. 62). The mindset of these teachers is that they serve as a guide, facilitator, and learning coach or partner to the students. Teachers do not give knowledge to students, they help students find and construct their own knowledge.

In order to understand more of how teachers of the Reggio philosophy may operate differently than others, it is helpful to think about words commonly



associated with teachers. Barbara Acton speaks of three: teaching, telling, and answers. She speaks of the dramatic “shift of focus from teaching to learning, from telling to listening, [and] from answers to questions” (Acton, 2008, p. 45). For teachers to move away from teaching and focus on learning, they change from having their focus on their own actions to prioritize the actions of their students—the learning. Malaguzzi is quoted in an interview with Gandini: “It is obvious that between learning and teaching, we honor the first. It is not that we ostracize teaching, but we tell it ‘Stand aside for a while and leave room for learning, observe carefully what children do, and then, if you have understood well, perhaps teaching will be different from before’ ” (2012, p. 57). The role of an educator is not rooted in the finding the best way to teach, it is rooted in finding the best way to help the children learn. This small alteration in diction puts the students at the forefront and shows how power is transferred away from the teachers and into the hands of the students. It also works to explain how the teacher is a co-learner with her students (Cadwell, 1997). Part of the job of a Reggio teacher is to be a learner along with the students; this goes back to the image of the teacher as a coach as the children go through the journey of constructing their own ideas and acquiring knowledge.

One of the vital components of Reggio Emilia that is often different from other philosophies of teaching or schools is the intense focus on conversations with children. Acton’s telling to listening framework proves this point beautifully as it goes back the pedagogy of listening. Teachers in Reggio know that some of the best ways students can learn is through talking, so the teachers take great time and care to listen to what the students have to say. Early childhood educator Sonya

Shoptaugh writes of how she never bothered to simply sit and talk to her students until world-renowned Reggio Emilia educator Amelia Gambetti came to her center. She says, “we discovered children, our children, and the power of relationships cultivated through listening....by knowing our children more fully we could support higher quality experiences in connection with their unique lives and experience the joy that comes from vibrant learning” (Shoptaugh, 2008, p. 105). The conversations Gambetti recommends teachers have with their students not only enhance learning, but they allow teachers to really get to know their students on a deeper level, which creates a greater value of trust. Once the value of trust is created in the classroom, children will be more likely to tell their teachers more.

The movement away from answers to questions provides a helpful framework for engaging in conversations with young learners. Educational researcher Mara Krechevsky writes about how small questions children may ask, if responded to with more questions as opposed to answers, can lead to greater learning. She says, “Since my encounter with Reggio, I have changed the way I interact with children. I don’t accept an initial ‘I don’t know.’ I allow for silence. I wait more” (Krechevsky, 2008, p. 98). Wait time is something teachers often neglect to give students and instead interject with answers, however when children are provided with wait-time and are able to articulate their own thoughts, they gain problem solving skills and can also feel empowered to take charge of their own learning. Children who often have little control over what is going on in their lives can also feel a sense of power when they are given time to talk to a adult without corrections and interruptions.

While there are multiple ways and theories to explain the teaching style of Reggio educators, the simplest way is going back to core one the view of childhood. It is because of the unique way children are viewed in this small Italian city that alters the pedagogy of its teachers. Since children are viewed in a respected and highly valued manner, the interactions educators have with them reflect just that. Reggio teachers take care not to interrupt their students or cut them off when they speak. They remain curious to what children have to say, and encourage children to let their voices be heard. They understand the magical nature of childhood and create an environment that gives great care to that. Play is seen as highly respected as it is a mechanism in which children are able to explore the world and develop their own thoughts. Nature, art, and music are incorporated into the classrooms because educators have taken time to notice how greatly this can impact a child's learning. Educators in Reggio do not just think of children as future adults that have to be trained how to function in society. They see children as current culture makers and contributors to society. Each instructional decision is based on the underlying respect for children and notion that they deserve only the best interactions, supplies, care, and community.

### **Core Principle Five: Project Work**

Project work can best be defined as an in-depth study, exploration, or investigation children take on together in a classroom to research a specific topic to answer and create questions. Project work in Reggio comes straight from the children and this works because of the *pedagogy of listening* employed in the classrooms. Since teachers have taken great care and time to get to know their

students as people, they are quick to see topics that will stimulate and interest their students. They then find fascinating and creative ways to present more information on that topic for children to explore and grapple with. Edwards says, “The teachers constantly pay close attention to the children’s activity. They believe that when children work on a problem of interest to them, they will naturally encounter questions they will want to investigate. The teachers’ role is to help children discover their own problems and questions” (2012, p. 155). The unique nature of project work lies in how it is the children who lead the curriculum, and not the teachers. Reggio educators remain flexible to the breadth of topics the children may explore. Once a topic is found to explore, the teachers work on finding ways to make this learning meaningful for all students. While different children can be exploring different topics, Reggio project work is generally done with the class as a group. Students may then form sub-groups to conduct different research on the overarching topic of the project.

Upon first learning about the Reggio approach when I began work at the ECLC, I thought how Reggio seems quite similar to the Montessori approach in many ways. I remember asking the director about this and she told me what she believes to be one of the biggest differences: Reggio has a focus on the classroom community through project-based group work. I instantly saw that when I went back to the classroom. One of my first concerns was, *what if the class is working on something that one child has no interest in?* However, as I became immersed in leading and facilitating projects for the preschoolers, I saw this never seemed to happen. Since project work starts so broadly, it allows children to find what they are interested in

within it and assume a role that suits them. Project work is interdisciplinary and multimodal so each child has the opportunity to engage with the knowledge in his or her own way.

Topics for projects are chosen from the curiosities and hearts of the children. Lillian Katz and Sylvia Chard discuss how projects come from what is meaningful to the children in their specific community. The project work of children whose school is in an urban center will differ from those who live in a fishing village. While the first may include topics about construction, cars, or skyscrapers, the other may explore different types of fish, boats, or water. It is important that younger children's projects stem from something that is relevant and tangible to them (Katz & Chard, 2000). Sometimes teachers using the project approach may have an idea of a project they think their students would enjoy and provide supplies for the children to explore and hope a project will arise. However, if the children are uninterested in that and seem drawn to something else, the flexible teacher follows the lead of the children. I have often observed American public primary teachers shutting down the ideas of children if they stray from what the teacher intends to teach that day. In the Reggio Emilia spirit of project work, teachers are constantly reassessing, altering, and remaining flexible to learn with their children, whatever that may be. Edwards says, "Instead of interrupting, the teachers follow the children's interest, shaping it rather than canceling it, letting it grow into a problem-solving collaboration involving quite a group of the children" (2012, p. 163). It is the job of the educator to find ways to help children explore what they are wondering about.

The project work in Reggio is only able to function because of the trust the teachers have in their students. Even the youngest children are viewed as true researchers (Rinaldi, 2012). In order to move forward with the intensive exploration and inquiry that project work breathes, teachers must truly believe in the capacity of the children to research effectively. Rinaldi explains how children are born with a strong innate sense of curiosity as evidenced in the common habit of children very consistently asking “why” questions. She asserts how it is vital to nurture children to continue asking why in order to keep the sense of curiosity that drives project work instilled (Rinaldi, 2012). I have so often seen teachers and parents alike bothered with the murmuring of children asking why. The core tenet of the Reggio way insists on embracing the childhood whys. Learning to question and remain inquisitive is a skill that will serve children well to remain active citizens in a democratic society. Project work allows children to practice making decisions, holding responsibilities, creating, learning in-depth, examining research, searching for evidence, remaining open to alternate ideas, and finding facts (Katz & Chard, 2000). These are all vital life skills Reggio children learn through schooling by immersing themselves in the wonder of project-based learning.

### **Core Principle Five: Documentation**

With project work comes documentation not just after the project, but while it is occurring. Reggio educators use documentation as a way to assess the learning of children, share the children’s work with the families and communities, and learn themselves from their students. Furthermore, documentation works as a way to help children with their self-esteem as “children feel emotion and participate with

passion and barely concealed pride when they see images of these learning processes displayed in their classroom, collected in a publication, or organized in a video or digital presentation” (Rinaldi, 2012, p. 243). It is important to understand that documentation in the Reggio spirit is not collecting data, compiling evidence after learning occurred, or simply taking photos to hang of a project. The educators do documentation strategically during the actual project and in most cases daily.

Documentation can be seen as having multiple steps before it comes to life. First, teachers begin by paying attention to what students are doing. They ask questions and record the answers. Students are encouraged to explain what they are creating, their thought process, or what they are doing. Teachers take photos, voice recordings, or video recordings as needed throughout the project. The next step involves collaboration of the education team as they come together and analyze the notes. The documentation notes serve as a portal for teachers to pick up what they may have missed in the actual moment and really engage in the learning process of their students (Stremmel, Cutler, & Gloege, 2008). Educators carefully plan how they want to display the children’s learning to share with the community. This is often done in aesthetically pleasing documentation panels that include color, photos, quotes of the children, and a narrative account of the project.

The first time I walked through the documentation exhibit at the ECLC I could feel the utter sense of amazement taking over my whole body. Not only were the panels simply beautiful, when I read about how the young children explored a topic, I felt like I was there with them. Through the action photos of children creating, I wanted to learn more about why the children did what they did. It was the quotes in

which I began to see the children as true researchers that brought the most joy to my heart. Rinaldi says, “We think of documentation as an act of caring, an act of love, and interaction” (2012, p. 238). As I read the panel I truly did feel as if I was engaging in a dance-like interaction in a loving and caring nature. I also felt as if I was given a gift because I was able to learn along with the children on numerous intriguing topics and hear the processes they went through and their opinions. As a member of the community of the ECLC, I felt proud that the children were such capable, present fellow citizens. This was shared not just with the families of the preschoolers, but with the whole community center because the panels were placed outside of the preschool wing in the hallway that gets the most traffic. The documentation panel appeared as an offering to every visitor of the center, an invitation to learn, and an exchange of culture.

The teachers who document their students’ learning in the Reggio way are also giving themselves a gift. It provides the teacher with a wonderful view of the students’ development across domains as well as vision of where to go next with the students (Helm & Katz, 2011). While this aspect of documentation helps teachers know where to go next with their students, it is also vital to explain how documentation is present for the children themselves to self-assess and revisit their work. Documentation comes from a social constructivist mindset, which differs from traditional assessment (Fyfe, 2012). Traditional assessment often measures what children cannot do as opposed what children can do. The Reggio spirit uses documentation as a means to highlight what the children know and the journey of exploration they took.



Lastly, documentation can also serve as a portal to reinforce the notion that the school is a democratic and political place. Documentation opens up the doors to the community to engage in learning with and from children, caring about childhood, and proving how children are active citizens. Gunilla Dahlberg says: “The role of pedagogical documentation in the construction of such early childhood services is critically important. It offers an important starting point not only for dialogue but also for trust and legitimacy in relation to the wider community, by opening up and making visible what goes on in early childhood services...school can gain a public voice and a visible identity” (2012, p. 230). Documentation is a powerful mechanism that Malaguzzi and his team used to help legitimize the system of municipal schools and show the power young children have to contribute positively to society.

### **Core Principle Seven: Teacher as a Researcher & Collaborator**

In the small city of Reggio Emilia the educators who spend their days with infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and primary aged children alike are all valued and respected for the work that they do with children. They are not viewed as babysitters or simply caretakers. Their professional role as a researcher is valued greatly. I observed this when I myself visited this endearing city for just a brief day and stepped foot in the gorgeous Lois Malaguzzi Center. Malaguzzi himself says, “Our teachers do research, either on their own or with their colleagues, to produce strategies that favor children’s work or can be utilized by them” (Gandini, 2012, p. 61). His vision of teachers researching remains prevalent today as collaboration amongst professionals in which they ask questions and explore academic topics

with regards to education occurs. One of the ways that Reggio Emilia is able to encourage teachers to continue their role as a researcher is through the role of the *pedagogista*.

Pedagogical coordinators, or *pedagogistas*, have a special role in the schools in Reggio Emilia because they are neither teachers of a classroom nor direct administrators of teachers. "They are responsible for guaranteeing the quality of early childhood services in the municipal system and ensuring that they are consistent and unitary" (Cagliari et al., 2012, p. 136). *Pedagogistas* work along with educators as well as all staff at the schools to create the best learning environment for the children. Furthermore, they interact with educators at various schools to provide support ranging from topics such as documentation, family interactions, child development, and political developments.

Teachers in Reggio Emilia are jotting down many notes throughout the day as they observe children's play, record significant events in their classrooms, and listen to the conversations the children have with one another (Lewin-Benhan, 2008). The teachers continue to act as researchers as they spend time together after school analyzing the data they gathered on their students' learning in order to develop a plan of where to go next. During the actual act of observing, the teachers focus on collecting the data by capturing only what is occurring as opposed to simultaneously analyzing their data during the observation. The observations are often done in narrative note style with times and enough detail that will enable the synthesis and interpretation to occur at a later time (Wurm, 2005). The concept of

Reggio teachers seen as real researchers can often be empowering as it asserts their role as academic and intellectual.

The nature of project work itself encourages teachers to be active researchers. It is impossible for the teacher to know about all the topics in which students will be interested, but it is the role of the teacher to do any needed research. Since project work often involves field experts entering the classroom or visiting a site location, it is again the role of the teacher to take great care into researching and preparing for that (Helm & Katz, 2011). They often need to collaborate with other teachers and professionals as well as community members in order to find field experts to come visit the classroom.

### **Application**

Educators who have studied in Reggio Emilia and returned to the United States write about how the philosophy is so rooted in the city and culture of Reggio Emilia that it is impossible to fully recreate it (Cadwell, 1997). Furthermore, it is important to note some of the structural differences with regard to school funding and American culture that pose limitations in incorporating aspects of the philosophy. While noting these constraints are helpful in trying to analyze how the philosophy could look, it is vital to understand that these do not take away from the positive aspects of the fundamental ideas of Reggio that could improve American public school classrooms. Drawing not only on research, but on my own observations from experiences as a practicum student, volunteer, and substitute teacher in various public school districts in Virginia as well as my education coursework, I will first illustrate some practical ways associated with each core

principle that the Reggio way of teaching could be incorporated in primary public classrooms in America. In order to more clearly illustrate the practical applications that come from the foundation of the Reggio Emilia philosophy I have created Table 1. Next, I will illustrate some holistic bigger picture positive outcomes associated with adhering to the Reggio principle. Lastly, I will share the aspects of the Reggio philosophy that are implausible to attempt to translate to American schools.

### **Practical Implementations**

**Core principle one: the view of childhood.** If I was forced to choose one component of the Reggio Emilia philosophy that was the most important to me, it would be this one. Interestingly enough, I feel as though this one is in many ways the easiest, yet paradoxically the hardest, core principal to emulate in a public school in America. It requires teachers to grapple with every preconceived notion they have about childhood, reassessing them, and then coming to terms with viewing children in a particular light. Malaguzzi says it best:

Children have a right to a good school...Children need to know that we are their friends, that they can depend on us for the things they desire, that we can support them in the things that they have, but also in the things that they dream about...Children have the right to imagine. We need to give them full rights of citizenship in life and in society...we believe that the children are very intelligent, that the child is strong and beautiful...Those who have the image of the child as fragile, incomplete, weak, made of glass gain something from this belief only for themselves. We don't need that as an image of

children. Instead of giving children protection, we need to give them the recognition of their rights and of their strengths. (1994, p. 56)

Malaguzzi points out the importance of allowing children to have access to their citizenship, autonomy in achieving what they desire and dream of, and feel connected to their teachers in a bond that could be seen as a friendship.

A simple fix to really breathe the image you have of childhood in your classroom is to create opportunities for the students to engage in civic duties as well as service. Telling students that they are active citizens in their society is not enough to convey the innate power they can have on their communities. It is the duty of the teacher to help foster the experiences in which the student can practice engaging in democratic society. One example for this would be to creating a class service project. The students could work collaboratively to pick a local non-profit organization that means something to them and develop fundraisers as well as service activities to give back and advocate for the cause. Not only can multiple disciplines and local and state standards be tied into this project, it helps students understand the importance of their role as a citizen of their community. The students will feel empowered knowing that they have the capacity to do good in the world and create positive change. The hope is that it will stay with them and allow them to lead a life of social justice, civic efficacy, and high ideals of citizenship. How can we expect children to grow up to be helpful members of society if we do not start to help them connect with their innate citizenship at a young age?

Autonomy in learning is central to the Reggio Emilia philosophy and the image of the child in particular. Since children are viewed as powerful and

competent, teachers must trust the young minds of the children to take them on the learning journeys necessary for themselves. If children are viewed as vulnerable, in need of only protection, then it would be the role of the teacher to simply tell the child facts instead of show or facilitate the learning. If children were weak and vulnerable, their dreams and educational goals would not be listened to. However, in order to fully convey to children how we view them in such a valuable and beautiful way, we must make it apparent that not only do we have interest in their ideas, but we respect them deeply.

One of the best ways to convey to children how we see them is to give them our time through conversations, eating lunch with them, playing with them at recess, or calling them in the evening to say how they had a great day. While American teachers often feel as though time is something they lack, it is vital that children are given the time not only so they can get to know their teacher, but their teacher can get to know them. The Reggio Emilia image of the child is one that is complex and unique. To fully stay true that image, teachers have to take the time to learn about their students and develop a close bond of trust and love. Simply telling students that you care about them is not enough; it must be shown to them through cultural actions and exchanges. Simple ways to do this include notes, small tokens of appreciation, time spent actively listening, and time spent outside the classroom at community events or extracurricular activities of the student. To truly respect a child, time must be given to that child.

**Core principle two: learning environment.** One of the most practical ways teachers can better their classroom environment is to take to heart the Reggio

phrase, “environment as the third teacher.” While this catch phrase may sound quite intense, what it simply advocates is that the space in which students learn in matters. The environment has the power to either positively or negatively affect how student learning occurs. Consider a classroom that has empty white walls and bright fluorescent lights that shine on the individual desks neatly arranged in rows with equal spaces between them. The front of the room is where the action seems to happen, the teacher standing next to the desk by the blackboard. There is little that is familiar to the students in the room. It is neat and tidy, however nothing about the room works to create a safe space that empowers students.

Now picture a classroom across the hall in the same school, with the same resources. The florescent lights no longer shine too bright as they are dimmed and complemented with soft lamps donated by the teacher’s friends and one was purchased for \$5 at a local thrift store. The walls contain beautiful paintings donated by local artists and as the year goes on is exchanged for the work of the students. The desks are arranged in collaborative groups that shift throughout the year. The placement of the desks together encourages the community feel that the classroom is bursting with. Soft rugs and stuffed animals provide a comforting touch to the youngsters who may need some softness in their day. The teacher swapped out her desk for a large table in which she can sit with small groups of students for discussions. There are plants in the classroom and the windows have lace curtains that are pulled aside to open up to the outside world.

These two hypothetical classrooms have completely different moods and tones. While the teacher in the first one could be an incredible warm-hearted

teacher, her students will lack a sense of warmth that is given off in classroom two. Furthermore, the placement of the furniture is symbolic of the classroom culture that is trying to be created.

Incorporation of plants to create a welcoming atmosphere can also serve as a statement. Many teachers may be hesitant to commit themselves to having fresh flora in the classroom, as it requires care and costs. However, reaching out to the community could be a wonderful way to combat this. It is possible that a local florist could love the idea of giving back to the community by providing discounted or even free flowers for the classroom, in exchange for some great word-of-mouth or social media publicity. Furthermore, the parents in the classroom could decide to switch any of their floral business to the shop. Or take a local gardener who simply does it out of a hobby or love, he or she may be willing to donate plants. In the section on holistic changes I discuss ways in which intensive incorporation of nature can have multiple positive effects on the students. The act itself of taking the time to ask around and explore different ways to add an extra layer of ambience to the classroom communicates a powerful statement to the students and families. It says that you value the space the students learn in and you want them to be surrounded by beauty and warmth. Many parents who see the pride and interest that you take in creating the best classroom environment could feel compelled to donate items themselves to make your environmental vision a reality.

**Core principle three: fostering community and family relationships.**

Quality time spent between a student and teacher can lead to an enhanced relationship between the two. One very useful mechanism that some school



districts, particularly for pre-k programs such as Head Start, utilize is home visits. If a teacher were to visit each of her students and families at home prior to the first day of school, she would enable relationships to start forming at a quicker pace. Furthermore, home visits are a wonderful tool to help an educator learn about the cultures and home lives of her students. A teacher who takes to time to get to know students in their own home spaces conveys a powerful message about the values of the family in the educating role. Additionally, this can lead to relationships with the local community. Sometimes teachers work in a community in which they do not live and home visits are a way for the teacher to become immersed in that community.

Communication throughout the school year with families is quite important. The Reggio concept of providing families with the phone number of the teacher is one that may seem quite foreign and unreasonable for many teachers. If a teacher does not feel comfortable with that, figuring out an alternative way to allow for easy accessibility and platforms for conversations is useful. Arranging phone calls or taking the time to speak with parents over the phone in the evenings because many parents work and do not have access to the phone during the day is necessary. However, the Reggio way of relationship building goes beyond checking in every now and then. It holds the notion that families need to be partners in learning. It may take some time for families to really open up and understand this idea, but that should not stop the teacher from reaching out multiple times.

The importance of continually reaching out reigns true in an even stronger light when it comes to immigrant families or families with a different native

language. Taking the time to find a way to translate letters if parents do not speak English communicates a very valuable message that the teacher values the input of all families and wants all voices to be heard. Instituting local weekend gatherings to discuss the learning of the children could also be beneficial and serve as a way to help families bond with one another and form close connections. The group could share a meal together at a local eatery or home of a parent who volunteers to host. While an evening showcase at the school to share documentation of students' learning is also beneficial, hosting meetings in a more relaxed environment is also valuable to enhancing the relationship between students, teachers, families, and the communities.

**Core principle four: teaching style focused on conversations.** The theme of time seems to be weaving through each of the ways to implement these principles. A common reader response may be that teachers do not have enough time and that it is impossible to make time. However, my argument is that while time cannot be added to a day, it can be rearranged and managed differently. If we hold true to the image of the child, it is possible for this to occur. The educators of Reggio Emilia are able to engage in in-depth conversations with their students because they see it as a priority and make the time. Take for example, independent reading time many American classrooms have for students each day. Rather than the teacher spending this time to catch up on e-mails or news, the time can be utilized to pull different small groups of students each day to converse with. The teacher communicates a powerful message to the students by doing this. It is as if she is saying, *I care about each and every one of you with all my heart and I don't*

*want to just teach you reading and math. I want to get to know you and everything that makes you special, so let's take some time to talk to one another.* I have learned from conversations with many different elementary school teachers that it is common for American public school teachers to feel so bogged down by standardization and data that they are spending any extra time not with their students but with their laptops. I can imagine Malaguzzi's response to a teacher saying they have no time to have small group conversations with children as something like this: *The time just must be made for conversations with the children.*

Morning meeting is another time during the day that can also be utilized for meaningful conversations as a classroom community. Providing students with a structured yet holistic outlet to express their emotions and feelings in conversations is helpful. Allowing students to have control and leadership in how morning meeting plays out can be beneficial to convey how the style of the teacher goes back to the needs and rights of the children. Research has shown that calendar time actually has no positive effect on student development and yet it is a common practice in many early elementary school classrooms (Beneke, Ostrosky, and Katz, 2008). Morning meeting time can be spent having powerful conversations that work to build community in the classroom. This community building is not only vital for creating an inclusive classroom culture, but for preparing the students for project work.

**Core principal five: project work.** When explaining Reggio Emilia to individuals who know little to nothing about it, a common response I often receive is how the project would be implausible in a public school setting because of all the standards that need to be covered. Helm and Katz (2011) address this issue by

explaining how project work is simply a different mechanism to teach students the necessary standards they need to know. I find the most powerful component of project work is how it is student-initiated and then teacher directed and supported. In order to highlight how connecting a project to standards is plausible I will illustrate it with a hypothetical example of a first grade classroom I will call Ms. Katz's class.

Ms. Katz teaches first graders for diverse backgrounds racially, socially, and economically in Norfolk, Virginia. Her school is labeled as failing since it has not made accreditation for the past three years. The environment is high stress for teachers, students, and administrators. Reading is a major issue that many students struggle with. Virginia's first grade Standards of Learning (SOL) mention how reading is the number one priority (VDOE, 2010). Ms. Katz wants to engage her students in ways that will make them excited to learn because many of them possess apathetic attitudes towards learning. She noticed that many of her students become interested in turtles after spotting one outside during recess and asking about sea turtles. Another student started telling other students about the waves at the beach in Virginia Beach. A few other students expressed a fascination with ice cream trucks. Ms. Katz linked these three interests to beaches. She decided that starting a project in which the students can research and explore aspects about beaches that they are curious about would be a great idea, especially because they all live so close to the beach.

In order to get the students started on the project work she went to different libraries and gathered lots of literature on different components of beaches. She

gathered children's literature as well as non-fiction books with lots of text and pictures. Allowing the students to independently read and take picture walks through some of these books not only contributed to a print rich environment but directly meets the most recent English Language Arts SOL standards 1.5 and 1.8.

These standards are stated as the following:

1.5 The student will apply knowledge of how print is organized and read.

a) Read from left to right and from top to bottom.

b) Match spoken words with print.

c) Identify letters, words, and sentences.

1.8 The student will read familiar stories, poems, and passages with fluency and expression (VDOE, 2010).

Ms. Katz found that by allowing students to sit and hold books on a topic they have a high level of motivation to learn about can help get the students eager to continue their reading journey.

Science is a subject Ms. Katz finds particularly important to teach her first graders as she has dreams some of them will go into STEM fields. In first grade, when students learn about matter they focusing on interactions with water. The most recent Science SOL is the following:

1.3 The student will investigate and understand how different common materials interact with water. Key concepts include:

a) some liquids will separate when mixed with water, but others will not;

b) some common solids will dissolve in water, but others will not; and

c) some substances will dissolve more readily in hot water than in cold water. (VDOE, 2010).

Ms. Katz decides to collect some ocean water and sand to bring into the classroom and takes an old fish tank from her garage to create an ocean landscape. She talks with her students about what happens with the sand and the water and allows students to make predictions and then observations as to if it would dissolve. She leads them in other experiments to dissolve different substances in ocean water. She also brings in some oil and mixes it with the ocean water and asks the students to first draw what they see then they discuss. She uses this as a platform to talk to them about the dangers of oil spills. "What would happen to the animals in the ocean if it was filled with oil?" The students become very passionate about protecting their ocean animal friends. The students' fervor for trying to make sure the animals are safe lead nicely into the covering of the standard on resources:

1.8 The student will investigate and understand that natural resources are limited. Key concepts include

a) identification of natural resources (plants and animals, water, air, land, minerals, forests, and soil);

b) factors that affect air and water quality; and

c) recycling, reusing, and reducing consumption of natural resources. (VDOE, 2010).

Ms. Katz asks the students to think of some other possible problems that could happen to the ocean environment. One student talks about how she heard dolphin heads can get trapped in the plastic that is used to hold soda cans together. The

students become outraged at the thought of dolphins dying and begin to ask questions about how recycling works and how it is that trash ends up in the ocean. Ms. Katz does some research in order to answer all the questions as she is unsure herself, and is able to get someone from the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to come speak to her students. The students become empowered after the visit and start a campaign in the school and local community about the importance of not overusing natural resources. They invite the art teacher to help them create posters that say, Help us Keep our Beaches and are able to practice writing along the way. Ms. Katz also incorporates math into the poster making campaign.

In first grade students work on problem solving in a variety of mathematical fashions, one of them being creating and understanding patterns. One of the Mathematics SOL standards related to patterns fits perfectly with the campaign.

1.21 The student will recognize, describe, extend, and create a wide variety of patterns, including rhythmic, color, shape, and numerical. Patterns will include both growing and repeating patterns. Concrete materials and calculators will be used by students. (VDOE, 2009).

The students create different color and shape patterns as the decoration on the posters. Ms. Katz brings in some exciting materials such as sequins and beads and parent volunteers come in one day to help students hot glue their patterns onto the posters. Working with a different tactile medium is fun for the students and they view it more as a fun project than a math lesson.

Another one of the core mathematical components students are learning is how to organize and interpret data. The two probability and statistic standards greatly incorporate that.

1.18 The student will investigate, identify, and describe various forms of data collection in his/her world (e.g., recording daily temperature, lunch count, attendance, and favorite ice cream), using tables, picture graphs, and object graphs.

1.19 The student will interpret information displayed in a picture or object graph, using the vocabulary more, less, fewer, greater than, less than, and equal to (VDOE, 2009).

Ms. Katz divides the students into three different groups. One group records the water temperature of Virginia Beach each day for a week while the other records what the classification of the tide is (low, medium, high) and the last group polls school community members for what their favorite beach is. This incorporates the use of learning how to research on appropriate school technology. The next week each group works on graphing the information. Ms. Katz helps the students explore different ways to graph the data. Each group shares their graph with the class and then she leads the students in a discussion of interpreting the information. She works on helping the students compare data using necessary vocabulary. For example: *The temperature of the water was lower on Tuesday than it was on Friday. More people like to visit Myrtle Beach than they do the Outer Banks.*

All three of the 2008 social studies geography SOL standards fit perfectly into the project exploring beaches.



1.4 The student will develop map skills by

a) recognizing basic map symbols, including references to land, water, cities, and roads;

b) using cardinal directions on maps;

c) identifying the shapes of the United States and Virginia on maps and globes;

d) locating Washington, D.C., the capital of the United States, and Richmond, the capital of Virginia, on a United States map.

1.5 The student will construct a simple map of a familiar area, using basic map symbols in the map legend.

1.6 The student will describe how the location of his/her community, climate, and physical surroundings affect the way people live, including their food, clothing, shelter, transportation, and recreation (VDOE, 2008).

Ms. Katz prints out many different maps of the Hampton Roads area for her students to explore and asks them to point out where the water is and any cities they recognize. Students gather in groups and share the map they have with others. As a class, the students draw a map of their community and pay special attention to how their community is on a beach and how it is reflected on the map. Ms. Katz brings in a local chef from a seafood restaurant to talk to the students about how his job would be different if he lived in a different town away from water. A parent of one of her students is an architect and he comes in to talk about the way shelters in Virginia Beach and Norfolk are built differently because they are so close to the water.

This example is meant to show how project work is quite plausible and can be very empowering for public elementary school aged students. I view it sort of as a puzzle. The standards can align with the project work; it is just about the teacher taking the time to find the connections and make the puzzle pieces fit.

Documentation naturally flows into project work itself.

**Core principal six: documentation.** Documentation is another component of Reggio Emilia that is often not as readily adopted in the public school settings. It takes time and resources to create the exquisite panels that are seen in the schools of Reggio Emilia. However, the idea behind documentation can still be easily translated. With regards to documentation, I think back to framework of seeing documentation as a way to share culture and as an exchange of love. The purpose of showing documentation is two-fold. The first reason is for the child. That is, to let the child see through photos and words his progress through the learning process is not only a remarkable gift, but can create a strong sense of ownership over learning. The second reason is for the families and community. It is a gift to show them through images the engagement of their students. One possible option is to create a password protected class blog with images as a way to provide documentation without the extra time of cutting and gluing. While there is something wonderful about printed pictures, many parents may not come into the classroom often and would find it more accessible to view online or on their smart phones.

Taking photos and uploading them still takes time, which could be a deterrent. However, it is possible to utilize parent volunteers to help with this by taking photos of students learning. Many classrooms are equipped with at least one

iPad which could be used for this as the photos are only stored on school property and no personal cameras or smart phones. The iPad can also be used to record students talking about their learning process and thoughts behind their work and used for documentation purposes.

I compare documentation in a classroom to a vacation. Most vacationers now document every aspect of their trip, from the hotel room, to the food, to scenery, to the people they meet through not only photographs, but social media platforms such as Snapchat, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. It is photographs, video clips, and direct quotes that allow the loved one who are not on the trip to get a taste of what the journey is like. I view the journey of learning in the same way. Families of students are not present to see many of the light bulb moments in the classroom and see their child in the thrills of deep exploration. It is the job of the teacher to document these moments for the families and the students themselves.

**Core principal seven: teacher as a researcher & collaborator.** The best way to emulate this vital principal would be for the school administration to work to revamp professional development and staff meetings to a set up that is more of a round table instead of a lecture. Teachers need time and safe spaces to discuss with their colleagues about what is happening in the classroom. Team meetings can be a great time for this, however I have observed team meetings where the focus is simply on what is the next unit instead of how are the students doing, what are the students learning, and what research must the teachers conduct.

The ECLC where I worked had a book club in which educators read different books related to current research on child development and met after school with

food for discussions. This is a tool that can be used in order to empower teachers to fulfill their role as professionals and researchers. Furthermore, it can lead to staff bonding and a greater commitment to the good of the school. Another option if teachers seem too overwhelmed by the time to read a book, could be to have monthly “dine and discuss nights” where teachers gather for a potluck either at the school or a staff member’s house to exchange ideas and collaborate. Posing it more as a social event can work to increase the chances a reluctant teacher may want to get involved. A few teachers can be chosen to present a recent research study with regard to child development and learning.

### **Holistic Changes**

**Nature.** A major component I saw throughout much of the literature on Reggio Emilia in a more subtle way was the importance of incorporating nature in the curriculum. While this is not listed as one of the core principals, it is evident through the second principle with regards to the classroom environment and incorporating natural objects into the classroom and the use of the extended outdoor classroom in schools in Reggio Emilia. Incorporating nature, which is full of inspiration and joy fosters the innate sense of wonder that children have (Wilson, 2012). This sense of wonder is analogous with the sense of curiosity children are born with in the eyes of the Reggio image of the child. Allowing children to explore outside is to be flexible with the learning environment and letting children guide the learning that occurs as opposed to the teacher controlling it. Allowing students more time to play and explore leads to a strong relationship between what is occurring inside the school classroom and outside (Ceppi & Zini, 1998). Encouraging students

to look outside pushes them towards thinking democratically about society.

Instilling a sense of awe and wonder for nature has many benefits for children.

Not only can holistic interactions with nature lead students to want to know about the environment and science, play with nature helps development across domains. Ruth Wilson explains how children's development can be greatly impacted through an increase of learning and play in natural environments (2012). Physically, children's development of gross and fine motor skills is touched through climbing, lifting, running, throwing, and building with natural materials in the outside environment. Emotionally, nature enables children to try to take chances with regards to materials they choose to touch and be courageous. When children embark on an outdoor challenge, it can help to raise self-esteem. Nature also can help students develop socially as they have opportunities to practice sharing, cooperation, leading, negotiating, following, assertion, and other social interactions. With regards to the cognitive domain, play in nature helps with logic, creativity, and problem solving. Furthermore it can help students academically across subjects (Wilson, 2012). The Reggio Emilia core principal of an aesthetically pleasing environment incorporated bringing the beauty of nature found outdoors to the inside, as well as spending time outside whenever possible.

Many American elementary classrooms today have limited time outdoors during recess. While the average recess time is 26 minutes according to a 2005 study from the National Center for Education Statistics many states and districts do not mandate how much time students should be allowed. Furthermore, it is common for teachers to take away minutes from recess as a mechanism for classroom

management. This is something that does fit the Reggio philosophy in which children are viewed as equal counterparts who have rights that need to be valued and respected. For children, time outdoors to play and explore should be seen as a right. The Reggio approach also encourages learning activities and project work to occur outside whenever possible.

Imagine a group of third grade students who come outside for their morning meeting to congregate in a field of grass. They receive sunlight and the cool breeze while they open up the day by greeting each other and sharing about what is occurring in their lives. They then file back into the classroom to start their math lesson. Hours later they come back outside for their 30 minutes of recess. Students, more comfortable with the outdoor area, find themselves not just using the playground equipment, but making up their own games in the field and running around near the trees. Students are encouraged to play with fallen leaves and dirt as they see fit, as long as they are being respectful to the lives of the plants and animals. Later in the day the students come outside again for science. They collect soil samples from the local wooded area behind the school. Each student is also allowed to bring in one artifact. The artifacts will be used the next day during the literacy block to work on writing poetry. The teacher collaborates with the art teacher who then continues the theme of nature objects coming to life through art and they work on making art out of natural materials.

How does this vignette make you feel? Is this a classroom you would want to be a part of? What does this classroom say about how the teacher and school view children? How does that compare to the classroom that receives 26 minutes of time

outdoors only? I understand that one may feel that my proposal of incorporating the use of nature in our classrooms and time outdoors may make some worried that children will “just be playing in the dirt” and not enough of the necessary learning will occur. While this is a perfectly natural response I anticipate some may have, I want to illustrate how the spirit of Reggio Emilia’s seamless outdoor-to-indoor way of learning has positive benefits.

As mentioned previously, children’s play in the natural world can have a positive impact on development. In a report by the Maryland State Department of Education, authors share the many benefits of learning occurring in the outdoors and how the hard courtyard can be incorporated into the architecture of schools to allow learning in the natural environment to occur (2012). It seems that today more than ever, children need to be encouraged to spend time playing outside as television, internet, and video games have taken over much of children’s time. It is common for children to come home from school and simply sit on the couch until they go to sleep. Incorporating more nature into the curriculum can allow students not only to develop an affinity for the outdoors and environmental literacy, but learning can be enhanced when it is outdoors due to the way it can awaken many senses (Maryland State Department of Education, 2012). When students are given the opportunity to explore outdoors, their learning can seem to take off. An example of this is from the Boulder Journey School, a private early childhood center in Colorado that is deeply influenced by the Reggio Emilia philosophy. A group of students playing outdoors led to a yearlong project exploring trees. The students drew about trees, sat in trees with clipboards taking notes, told stories about trees,

visited different trees, moved like trees, and finally performed and presented their learning about trees (Hall, Kennedy, Maher, & Stevens, 2015). If we provide students with the opportunities to bond with the outdoors, see nature inside their classrooms, and learn in the natural world, the possibilities for enhancing outcomes are numerous.

**Self-regulation and emotion.** With regards to the indoor aspect of the environment in a Reggio inspired classroom, the common phrase, “environment as the third teacher,” reminds us the power the environment has. One major benefit the Reggio influenced classroom can have for children that stems from the environment is how it impacts children’s concept of self and self-regulatory skills. The design of the classroom has the capacity to encourage self-regulation (Lewin-Benhan, 2008). In order to illustrate how this looks like in a classroom, I will provide two hypothetical situations that could occur in a public elementary classroom in the United States. The latter example will be in a classroom that has embraced the Reggio way.

A second grade student, Cynthia, is sitting quietly cross-legged on the carpet during story time with her class. She suddenly becomes restless and is moving about. She is told by the teacher to sit still. Cynthia is unsure why she is suddenly having trouble focusing. She realizes she may be thirsty. However, the classroom procedure is that the teacher takes the questions and comments at the end of the story. Still having trouble paying attention Cynthia shyly raises her hand only to be dismissed with a wave. The rest of the story she is not engaged because she is



thirsty. By the time the story is over she forgets that her body was telling her she needed water.

A second grade student, Harvey is sitting on the carpet during story time with his class. He is intrigued by the spider in the story and shares a quick connection he has when he saw a spider at the zoo. The teacher encourages students to comment, ask questions, or make connections during the story. Suddenly Harvey becomes unfocused and realizes that he is thirsty. He quietly gets up and goes to fill his glass water cup on the counter by the sink and takes long gulps of water before heading back to join the group. He seems to skip back to the group because he was so intrigued in the story. After the teacher finished reading the story Harvey asked to look at the page he had missed while drinking his water.

Prior to analyzing these two scenarios, I first want to explain what self-regulation is so it can be better understood how it is at play here. Rimm-Kaufman, Grimm, Curby, Nathanson, and Brock, say: "Self-regulation refers to children's ability to manage their emotions, focus their attention, and inhibit some behaviors while activating others" (2009, p. 959). American public classrooms, especially kindergarten classrooms, have been known to find teaching children self-regulation skills to be quite important to best prepare the students for their future decade of schooling.

In the first scenario Cynthia realized she was thirsty which inhibited her attention from staying on the book. She was unable to sit still which was something that seemed to bother the teacher. Cynthia must have realized drinking some water would help her, (an example of good self-regulation) but was shut down by the

blanket rule the teacher made about raising one's hand during story time. This is in fact something I have observed in classrooms. However, encouraging discussion and connections to a certain degree during read-aloud is actually beneficial for comprehension (Rog, 2001). Furthermore, the way Cynthia's teacher responded to her says something about how she views children. The action of ignoring Cynthia seems to say "I am the most important person right now because I am reading and my voice is more important than yours." How does this mindset encourage students to learn to speak up for themselves and advocate for their needs?

I have observed in many classrooms the use of the "w" or the three middle fingers being held up when a student wants to get a drink of water. In this scenario, had the teacher implemented that symbol into her classroom, Cynthia could have simply received a nod from her teacher after holding up her fingers and went to the water fountain. This seems more logical than having to ask a teacher before getting water, yet still problematic. What does it communicate to our children if we make them ask permission before they can engage in a task that literally helps them survive? We teach students how all living beings need water to survive yet then are not allowing them to get water when they want. I acknowledge that there could be safety issues if there is not a water fountain or water cups in the classroom and the teacher does need to know if students are stepping into the hallway. I also understand the worries that students would use drinking water as a mechanism to get off task from learning. However, that can be easily addressed by talking to the student if it is problematic.

In the second scenario Harvey is able to self-regulate himself through simply going to get water and having the opportunity to speak during the story time. The strategic decision of Harvey's teacher to encourage discussion during the story time goes back to the first core principal about the image of the child. The teacher seems to be saying to her students, "your voice is special and I want to hear your thoughts because I care about you and you are a competent citizen." Allowing students to have a sip of water from a glass cup also is symbolic of the image of the child. Teachers do not have to ask permission before drinking water, and can drink from aesthetically pleasing water containers instead of a fountain. Why should our students have to drink from water fountains after obtaining permission? The Reggio way does not just encourage educators to view children as competent and powerful, it encourages the classroom environment to breathe it through every fiber and every action.

### **Constraints**

The Reggio core principal of the environment is one that offers some obvious constraints. While natural lighting looks aesthetically pleasing, it is something that would require great effort and resources most school districts do not have the time and money to change. When I visited the Louis Malaguzzi Centro I remember being in awe of the images I saw of gorgeous outdoor natural play spaces. The playgrounds were made from wood and incorporated natural materials, some of the classrooms connected to the outdoors. I remember feeling a sense of calmness pour over my body and could imagine children I have taught exploring and playing in an environment that beautiful. While I could dream about how nice it would be to teach

elementary school students in a classroom that is half indoors and half outdoors and full of exotic plants and gorgeous sunlight, I know that it is not plausible in the public school for many reasons, the biggest being lack of funds.

However, teachers in public primary schools can still work to create their classrooms to be homey spaces. Ideas for aesthetically altering the classroom environment include incorporation of nature and plants in the classrooms, soft lamps for lighting, rugs, artwork on the wall, and the design of furniture that makes it apparent students have access to all areas. Susan Etheredge and Martha Less write about the importance of providing soft places in the classroom “to create an amiable place, livable and serene” as well as allowing furniture placement to foster connections and interactions (2008, p. 184). Simple yet strategic decisions such as placing two painting easels directly next to each other instead of on opposite sides of the classroom encourage students to connect. Teachers can still make efforts to utilize the outdoor environment more in their weekly classroom routines for learning experiences and play. Adopting a classroom tree is one idea I have always ponder over as a way to foster close relationships between nature and children and create a special space outside for the students to gather. The tree could serve as an extension location of the classroom. Old towels could serve as seats for students when they congregate at the tree for learning. While this is not on the same level of the utterly gorgeous outdoor space in Reggio Emilia, it is something that could seamlessly function with little to no additional cost.

A second fundamental component of how the Reggio Emilia system of education functions is through the use of co-teachers. Malaguzzi tells of the benefits

of the system of co-teachers as it allows children to have more time with the adults in the classroom for conversations, greater collaboration across the community as a whole, reduced stress and isolation for teachers, as well as positive effects educationally and psychologically for the children and teachers alike (Gandini, 2012). The system of co-teaching also works to deconstruct the hierarchy in classrooms. While some public school districts assign an instructional assistant or teacher's aide to pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, or classrooms with high levels of students receiving special education services, it is not the same as co-teaching. The extra adult in the room does indeed provide necessary and incredible support for the students and the teacher, but there is a hierarchy in this system that is obvious simply in the difference in the names of titles, job description and requirements, as well as salary. Conversely, with the increasing budget cuts in many school districts across the country, it seems truly impossible to consider any way to properly pay two teachers in every classroom.

While co-teachers in all public elementary school classrooms would be something incredible to see, reality will prevent it. That does not mean that the Reggio principles behind the co-teacher decision cannot be incorporated into American classrooms. I previously mentioned the importance of setting an egalitarian environment in the Reggio philosophy. Co-teachers serve as an excellent way to model how equality amongst others can look. However, teachers can model this in many other ways. A teacher's interactions with any other adult can serve as a model for her commitment to viewing others as equals. For example, how she greets the workers in the cafeteria, or helps her student write a thank-you card for the

school custodial staff can convey the teacher's belief in equality in the school. These small actions breathe the spirit of Reggio Emilia air and are inherently simple. Teachers can furthermore exhibit this with how they interact and value parent volunteers.

In fact, teachers can utilize the sometimes forgotten parent volunteers by allowing them to be another kind voice for the children to engage in conversations with. Talking to parents about ways to engage in conversations with students in the classroom could be a wonderful step. Not only would this provide students with more times throughout the school week to be heard, it works towards fostering meaningful family partnerships. Inviting parents to come into the classroom and be a member of the classroom community, as opposed to simply completing organizational tasks that I have most commonly observed, can also work to foster family relationships.

### **Conclusion**

Reggio Emilia has no instructions to follow for how to teach or what to teach, yet it provides the foundation for a powerful educational philosophy that can lead to a beautiful way of living. The best way to embrace it is to take the time to remember why you went into teaching. I recommend creating a list of those reasons as well as why you love children. The heart of Reggio lies in the love and respect the teachers have for their students and every member of the school and greater community. Every action a teacher does must go back to the image of loving and respecting the child. *Does doing this convey that I love and respect my students?* Is an important question to ask oneself often while working with children.

The school system Malaguzzi helped to create in his city is more than just a model — it is a vision for how schooling and childhood can be. It cannot be recreated, but it can serve as a reminder for how students can be treated. A classroom that breathes air similar to that in Reggio Emilia is full of engaged, active, competent, young citizens whose thirst for knowledge is as strong as their compassion for their community.

Part of the reason I became enchanted with the words of Malaguzzi and others is the way they empower children as democratic beings with agency to promote change. Our society in America right now is at a very complicated spot. As I write this paper, other nations are laughing at us because some of our presidential candidates spew hate. Our education system has so many flaws, we are in national debt, and racism remains a problem. I want my great, great, grandchildren to be able to live in an America that is safe and pleasant for them no matter what race, sex, sexual orientation, religion, they may be. If I want this vision to be a reality it has to start with the children right now. It has to start with the young ones. Teachers have the power to shape the little minds and help decide if they will grow up and spew hate and try to build walls to keep others out, or work collaboratively to solve problems and push towards peace. Embedded in the Reggio way is peace building. I could teach my students all the math, writing, reading, science, and social studies they need to know, but if they grow up and live in a world in which they have no idea how to help foster peace, their academic knowledge will have little use.

I will teach my students inspired by the Reggio Way because I believe in the capacity and goodness of all children. I believe that every child deserves the chance

to grow up and live in a world of peace. Furthermore, I believe every child plays a role in helping to create that peace. I hope that you: a teacher, administrator, parent, or community member, will join me in educating children through a lenses of love, respect, and peace.

Table 1

*Outline of the seven core principals as they stand in Italy and how they could be integrated into American public classrooms.*

Principal	How it looks in the municipal schools in Italy	How could it look in American Public Schools
<b>Environment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-A common phrased used to show the power the learning environment has is the “Environment as the third teacher.”</li> <li>-Children are encouraged to interact and learn from the outdoor world through exploration and play.</li> <li>-Classrooms are connected to outside and students spent much time outside. The indoor classrooms have much natural lighting and are aesthetically pleasing and decorated in a “homey” way.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Utilizing school courtyards as an extended outdoor classroom in which students are given time to explore and see what sparks their interests.</li> <li>-Intensive incorporation of nature into the curriculum.</li> <li>-The classroom ambience can be altered to feel more inviting and comforting as well as less manufactured. This can be done through removal of pre-made school posters and more creative artwork (including children’s own work).</li> <li>-Bringing in soft lamps to supplement the often overly bright overhead lights.</li> <li>-Bringing in furniture that is similar to what students may see at home.</li> </ul>
<b>View of Childhood</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Children are seen as active competent citizens instead of future citizens.</li> <li>-Children are viewed as</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Adopting a more progressive mindset with regards to inclusion as well as the linguistic of “children with special rights.”</li> </ul>



	<p>born researchers and explorers and education is their right.</p> <p>-100 languages of children is a common phrase coined by Malaguzzi that is still used to convey the multiple means of expression children possess.</p> <p>-Inclusion is in the schools with “children with special rights.”</p>	<p>- Teachers can work towards providing students with more autonomy in their learning by looking to see where they want to go.</p> <p>-Incorporating more active citizenship opportunities for the students to know that they have a voice in the democratic society.</p>
<b>Relationships</b>	<p>-Schools are seen as a democratic place that brings students, teachers, families, and communities together.</p> <p>-Open communication between the home and school life.</p> <p>-The use of two equal teachers in the classroom allows teachers more time to really foster relationships with their students.</p>	<p>-While co-teachers may be very unlikely to occur, use of parent volunteers and enhanced family to school relationships could work to bring home-school life together.</p> <p>-Implementation of teacher home visits at the start and varying times in the school year.</p> <p>-Weekend events to bring the school and community together to showcase what learning the students are doing.</p>
<b>Teaching Style &amp; Conversations</b>	<p>-The teaching style is student centered yet teacher guided.</p> <p>-Teachers have time to work with small groups of students to engage in depth discussions.</p>	<p>-Providing time for teachers to have in-depth conversations with small groups of children through sending an instructional assistant or other school personnel into the classroom to facilitate independent work.</p> <p>-Parent volunteers can also be trained in how to interact with children in a way to spark conversations and get a glimpse into the student’s learning process.</p>
<b>Project Work</b>	<p>-Project topics are determined by the interests</p>	<p>-Professional development for teachers on ways project work can</p>

	<p>of the group, but it is the job of the teachers to pose interesting questions and materials to help children find their interests.</p> <p>-Some projects can last a year and involve interdisciplinary work and often field experts of field trips.</p>	<p>function while still addressing the necessary standards.</p> <p>-Allowing students at the start of the year to pick one topic they are intrigued in and will be able to come back to throughout the years to grapple with and connect across disciplines.</p>
<b>Documentation</b>	<p>-The act of documenting the work of children is viewed as a cultural exchange and act of love not just a poster panel of what children have learned.</p> <p>-Teachers record direct quotes of children during projects .</p> <p>-Panels include images of children at work as well as the process to show viewers (families, other teachers, community members) the process of the children's learning.</p>	<p>-Hallways could be turned into documentation panels and hosting school wide documentation nights for parents to come in and explore.</p> <p>-Professional development on the benefits on documentation and ways to make it part of the teacher's daily routine.</p> <p>-Utilizing parent volunteers to take observation, quotes of children, and photographs (on school cameras) to help relieve some of the work of documentation for teachers.</p>
<b>Teacher as Researcher &amp; Collaborator</b>	<p>-Teachers in Reggio stay up to date on children's development with professional development and collaboration.</p> <p>-They often research topics their students are interested in order to better inform their instructional practices.</p> <p>-Intensive observation of their students and then interpretation and analysis that guides decision-making.</p> <p>-The role of pedagogical</p>	<p>-Bringing the special teachers into the grade level meetings so that they can collaborate on what is going on in the classroom in order to create a continuum across all classrooms.</p> <p>-School book club in which teachers come together to discuss relevant research about child development and how children learn to better educate themselves as researchers.</p> <p>-While hiring a pedagoga is unlikely, inviting a retired teacher to volunteer as one part-time could be very likely and plausible.</p>

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coordinators in the schools to facilitate collaboration amongst professionals.	Any way to offer extra support to teachers.
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