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Reggio Emilia Approach

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Reading to Children and Achievement Gaps

Despite the suggested benefits of reading to children, not all families participate in this practice and not all children are exposed to reading before they attend formal schooling. Achievement gaps that have been discussed in research on literacy and reading to children highlight that even though reading to children may not be intended to teach a child to read, basic literacy awareness that includes print concept, alphabet knowledge, word recognition, phonological awareness, and other literacy abilities does play a role in preparing a child for success in formal schooling. Moreover, the role parent's reading-related knowledge is said to have on a child's literacy skills has called attention to home-based literacy programs for parents.

On the other hand, children who are not exposed to reading before formal schooling are considered to be at a disadvantage. Although research on reading to children has found this early introduction to literacy to be beneficial on different levels, there is little research available on the relationship between parents' reading-related knowledge and the influence it has on the reading skills of their children. This being the case, the link between the two has been the focus of more recent investigations and many researchers emphasize the important role educators have in recognizing the various levels of skills with which students enter the classroom.

Research on the relationship between reading to children and literacy development has included pedagogical suggestions, being that some children enter the classroom without prior knowledge of texts or the kind of reading skills valued in the classroom. Pedagogical strategies directed at educators include knowledge of children's literature that extends beyond simply reading out loud to children. This second component suggests that teachers must provide lessons directed at phonological awareness and phonics knowledge in order for children to learn to read on their own. In other words, some argue that reading to children is not enough for them to learn to decode texts. Rather, it is the follow-up activities to reading to children that help develop reading skills.

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See Also: Early Childhood; Parental Involvement; Preschool Programs.

Further Readings

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Reggio Emilia Approach

The Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education (often referred to as Reggio-inspired practice) is based on the philosophies and practices of the infant-toddler centers of Reggio Emilia, Italy. Approximately 33 schools, serving infants to children 6 years old, comprise the municipal early childhood program in Reggio Emilia. The integration of theory and knowledge from disciplines such as science, art, literature, and architecture are central to the continuous reflective practice of the Reggio educators.

In 1991, *Newsweek* magazine named these schools the most outstanding early childhood centers in the world. Since that time, the schools have received international attention for their understandings of the pedagogy, psychology, and sociology of early childhood education. The first international exhibit created by the Reggio educators, the Hundred Languages of Children, traveled across many continents for almost 10 years as a source of information and inspiration; the current (2012) exhibit titled the Wonder of Learning is traveling among cities in the United States. The exhibits are pedagogical documentation making visible the learning of the child, the teacher, the families, and the community.

History

After World War II, Italian citizens were faced with the magnitude of their newfound liberation from the Fascist regime. Though the country had been decimated by war, the Italians' determination prevailed. In Villa Cella, for instance, men, women, and children reclaimed bricks from rubble left by Allied planes to

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begin the work of building a school to educate their youngest citizens. Upon hearing the news that the citizens just outside Reggio Emilia were taking on such a task, Loris Malaguzzi—now referred to as the father of the Reggio Emilia approach—immediately rode his bike to the site of the building project. What he found was a place where land had been donated, machinery had been borrowed, people were volunteering labor, and even children were engaged in the building of the new school. Inspired by this incredible act of solidarity, Malaguzzi continued a lifelong quest to ensure that all children had access to the type of education that would allow them to reach their destinies. Because of his efforts and the continued efforts of expert practitioners and researchers—Carlina Rinaldi, Amelia Gambetti, Lella Gandini, Veà Vecchi, and a host of others—the infant-toddler centers of Reggio Emilia, Italy, continue to gain international attention for their expertise in educational pedagogy and research.

Essential Questions and Fundamentals of the Reggio Emilia Approach

Though only the schools in Reggio Emilia, Italy, can really be called “Reggio schools,” the essential questions and fundamentals of their practice provide a framework to inspire and promote best practices for schools anywhere. Carlina Rinaldi, executive consultant for Reggio Children, has written and lectured on the following fundamental questions that are continuously examined through critical reflection in the Reggio Schools:

- Who is the child?
- What is childhood at this moment in our society?
- What is the meaning of “to educate”?
- What is the relationship between teaching and learning? Which is the consequence of the other?
- What is the relationship of theory and practice?
- What is the role of school in society?
- What is the relationship between school and life?

In addition to the continuous reexamination of the essential questions, the fundamentals of Reggio Emilia provide a solid foundation based upon theory and research. The school is viewed as a democratic place where the voices of all participants are valued and

shaped by the experiences. Parents are active participants in the school and contribute valuable ideas, skills, and resources. The “image of the child” is the belief that all children are capable, competent, powerful learners who bring to the school valuable theories and hypotheses of their own that are worthy of investigation. Learning is not linear and therefore not predictable. Teachers are keen observers of children and great importance is placed upon the adult being an active listener. The adults speak most often with questions to challenge and nurture the child’s thinking and provide provocation for new ideas and theories to emerge.

Carlina Rinaldi describes the relationship between listening and change: children come with their own theories and interpretations and, as adults, we must listen and be open to their ideas and change our questions, plans, and ideas in response to the child. The importance of relationships between and among children and adults, materials, and ideas in intentionally designed environments provoke inquiry and expression through multiple languages (e.g., drawing, sculpting, movement, or music). The concept of “the environment as the third teacher” reflects the purposeful selection and organization of space and materials in a way that engages the child in purposeful learning and exploration. The construction of knowledge is a group process and children engage in interactions that encourage them to share and reinterpret their understandings. The investigations and project work of the children are captured through images, artifacts, dialogue of the children, and critical analysis and interpretations of the educators in documentation that makes the learning visible for the community and provides a permanent capture of the process of learning that can be reexamined and researched to continuously inform the practice of teaching.

The Reggio Emilia Approach in an International Context

Over the past two decades, the Reggio Emilia approach has spread internationally. In the 1990s, Dr. Louise Cadwell led the charge in bringing Reggio-inspired practice to the United States. This work began when the Danforth Foundation provided funding for Webster University to partner with Cadwell in order to begin the St. Louis Reggio Collaborative, which included schools such as the College School, St. Michael’s, and the Clayton Family Center.

While the Reggio Emilia approach is typically associated with early childhood education, it is very much

in line with the ideas, theories, and philosophies of university teacher education programs. Educators in Reggio Emilia are informed by their own work and research but are also quite familiar with the work of educational scholars such as Piaget, Vygotsky, Bruner, Gardner, and Dewey (to name only a few). Because of this, teacher-educators—especially those teaching early childhood and elementary courses—find affinity with the work of the Italians. Some educators use the essential questions to guide their thinking about their teacher education practices. In other cases, universities are opening their own schools or partnering with local school districts to create early childhood centers and/or elementary schools based on the philosophies and practices of the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education. For instance, Butler University and the Indianapolis Public Schools have partnered to open the IPS/Butler University Laboratory School in Indianapolis, Indiana. Regardless of their application to early childhood education or university-level instruction, the essential questions and the fundamentals of the Reggio Emilia approach provide guidance for educators interested in engaging in Reggio-inspired practice.

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See Also: Early Childhood; Parental Involvement; Preschool Programs.

Further Readings

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simple definitions or broad consensus. It is unsurprising then that religious education holds no universal meaning. It is highly debated, contextually derived, interpreted, and reinterpreted. Understandings about religious education can be separated into two distinct categories: education in private, faith-based schools and education in public, state-supported schools. Nevertheless, the term *religious education*, although used widely, can be adequately explained only when rooted within its historical context.

Historical Context: Religious Education in the Nineteenth Century

Religious education as a highly contentious topic in the United States is not new. In fact, religious education has been a part of the American landscape, in different forms, since its beginnings. However, a focus on key events in the last three centuries offers clear insights into this history. The 19th century marked American Christians and Catholics grappling over the role of theological doctrine in school curriculum. At this time, the argument revolved around which Bible and which prayers were appropriate for the classroom. In the mid-1800s, this argument escalated into violence, in both Philadelphia and Boston, where a number of people died and several Catholic churches were burned.

In response to the controversy over the relation between education and religion Horace Mann, often referred to as the father of American education, proposed the "common school." Ideally, the common school would not teach any particular doctrine and would welcome students from all classes and religious traditions. The 19th century common schools did not offer religious education courses and made no effort to teach about the role of religion in American history. The concept of the common school was an amicable solution to many in the Protestant community who supplemented the common school education with religious teachings in a Sunday school setting. However, the Roman Catholic Church, which, in large part, was not in agreement with the common school concept, invested in developing a national parochial school system.

Religious Education

Religious education in the United States is a complex phenomenon. Religion and education both stand alone as multifarious entities that fail to lend themselves to

Religious Education in the Twentieth Century

In response to widespread controversy over teaching religion in schools, the Supreme Court intervened. Seminal cases, like *Cantwell v. Connecticut* (1940) and *Everson v. Board of Education of Ewing Township*