

The Reggio Emilia Approach

Prospect Latin School focuses on the Reggio Emilia (pronounced red'jO AmE'lya) approach to early childhood education. Hailed by Newsweek Magazine® as “the best preschool approach in the world,” the Reggio approach was developed after World War II for municipal pre-primary schools (children under age six) in Reggio Emilia, Italy. The approach allows children to readily acquire the skills of critical thinking and collaboration and today, has been widely adopted throughout the United States, Europe, New Zealand, and Australia. Characteristics include:

Inquiry and Invention

Students have an innate desire to understand their world and master ways of interacting in it. Students learn through the complementary processes of (1) Inquiry: a cycle of hypothesis, experimentation, and conclusion and (2) Invention: a cycle of experience, reflection, and expression.

Research Projects: Connecting Ideas

Groups of students engage in multi-disciplinary research projects. Research groups apply cognitive, expressive, and inventive skills by responding, recording, playing, exploring, hypothesis building, testing, and provoking upon their thoughts and ideas. Here, students connect their ideas and their experiences and so develop a context for understanding. Students follow their interest and return again and again to add new insights.

Throughout a project, teachers help students make decisions about the direction of study, the ways in which the group will research the topic, and the representational medium that will demonstrate and showcase the topic.

Means of Expression

Students express themselves through speech, writing, mathematics, technology, music, movement, and multidimensional artistic representations. Different forms of expression support and fulfill the students as they construct ideas that are ever more complex.

Collaboration

Students collaborate throughout the day. The ability to listen, collaborate, and negotiate with both peers and adults is directly related to the child's ability to develop sound ideas.

The Environment as the 3rd Teacher

The aesthetic beauty of the school is seen as an important part of respecting the child and his/her learning environment. Natural materials, homelike elements, soft lights, real vases, plants, and organized/clutter-free spaces add to the welcoming feel of each classroom. Very little if any commercial products are included. An atmosphere of joy pervades. Examples of children's work and collections that children have made from former outings are displayed at eye level for both children and adults.

Documentation as Assessment & Advocacy

Teachers act as documenters for the children, helping them trace and revisit their words and actions and thereby making the learning visible. Teachers document and display the student's project work to help student's express, revisit, construct, and reconstruct their feelings, ideas, and understandings. Similar to the portfolio approach, documentation of children's work-in-progress is viewed as an important tool in the learning process. Pictures of children engaged in experiences, their words as they discuss what they are doing, feeling, and thinking and the children's interpretation of experience through the visual media are displayed as a graphic presentation of the dynamics of learning process.

Interactive Spaces

Classrooms, halls, mini-ateliers (art studios), and the piazza (our common room) are organized to support the interweaving of relationships and encounters between adults and students and among students and other students. Work is done in small groups where students share their own perspective, hear others' perspectives, negotiate, cooperate, and make decisions within group.

The Teacher as Researcher

Teachers carefully listen, observe, and document student's work. They are committed to reflection about their own teaching and learning. They work in pairs and collaborate, share, and mentor between one another. Organization of staff is based on the values of collegiality, relationships, exchange, and co-responsibility. The interaction between teachers and children, the development of ideas, the observations, and provocation is an endless spiral.

Home-School Relationship

In the Reggio approach, students, teachers, parents, and the community are interactive and work together building a community of inquiry. This type of communication and interaction deepens children's inquiry and theory building skills. The school's educational philosophy of "education based on relationships" focuses on each student in relation to others and seeks to activate and support children's reciprocal relationships with other children, family, teachers, society, and the environment

“We learn not for school, but for life!”