

Reggio Emilia 2010

IN-DEPTH STUDY WEEK

October 17th to 22nd, 2010



Reggio Emilia, Teatro Municipale

The experience of the Infant Toddler Centres and its contexts

Joe Gallagher's participation

Funded by the Creative Scotland Professional Development Fund,
in partnership with East Ayrshire Council and Replico Productions



Background

The Reggio Approach is globally recognised as a model of best practice in early years education. The integral role of the expressive arts is key to this unique pedagogical system and is invariably cited by the world's leading cognitive theorists at high-profile arts in education events such as those held by the Tapestry Partnership.

Since 2006 East Ayrshire Council Creative Minds Team, in partnership with Replico Productions, has been developing a range of drama, storytelling and visual arts activities to support literacy and numeracy in Early Years. These have proved extremely successful and have received ringing endorsements from staff using *Child at the Centre* as their evaluation indicator. More recently, we have been conducting research into the Reggio Approach and investigating ways in which this could be incorporated into new and existing strategies which can further support the implementation of *Curriculum for Excellence*.

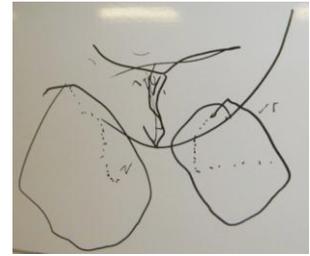
General Comments

The extent of Reggio's global recognition was amply demonstrated by the geographic diversity of the participants. From the hundred or so people in attendance, thirty-two countries were represented from places as far afield and culturally distinct as Japan, Brazil, Azerbaijan and Iran. As one would expect, there was a significant contingent from the US but surprisingly only two representatives from the UK. Accordingly, I felt extremely privileged to have this unique opportunity and the experience certainly surpassed my expectations.

As well as seeing the Reggio Approach revealed in its proper context, I took enormous encouragement from the extent to which I could draw connections and comparisons to my own existing practice. Having said that, a gulf still remains between Scotland and Reggio, not just in terms of practice but also the socio-political frameworks surrounding early years education and attitudes to children in the wider sense. However, if we genuinely seek to make improvements in this respect, an understanding of Reggio can provide the necessary compass with which to direct our energies. To use their analogy, the Reggio Approach should be seen as a journey rather than a destination.

Specific outcomes as stated

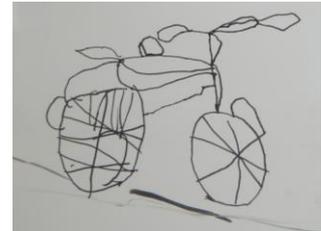
- First-hand observation of the Reggio Approach



Having referenced significant amounts of literature relating to the Reggio Approach, it became apparent that it would eventually be necessary to witness the practice first-hand. *The Hundred Languages of Children*, and other titles on the recommended reading list contain complex conceptual descriptions often translated from Italian to an “Americanized” style of English which can sometimes be hard to instantly digest. However, as with any language, it becomes easier with use so that by the time I arrived in Reggio I was confident that I had built a fairly strong understanding of the concept and was now ready to witness the real thing.

Many aspects of the programme, in fact, did entail yet more conceptual description by way of lectures and seminar style presentations. As these had to be delivered through interpreters, they took up a fair proportion of the day. However, they were liberally interspersed with visits to the Nidi (infant-toddler centres for 0 – 3) and scuole d’infanzia (pre schools 3 – 6), such that the conceptual information helped to maximise the impact of the first-hand contextual experience.

- Consultation with key arts and educational staff

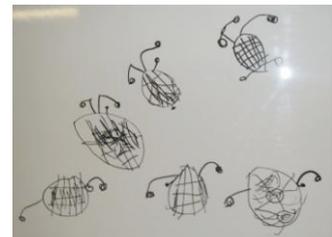


For the majority of participants, opportunities for one to one discussions with Reggio staff were few and far between as most of them didn’t speak much English and the interpreters were, understandably, in high demand. It was fortunate, therefore, that even with my limited Italian, I was able to communicate on a more detailed and personal level during the school visits and find many specific and immediate answers to practical issues, particularly those relating to drama and storytelling.

I was privileged to have been granted interviews with Paula Bagni, the principal education officer at the Teatro Municipale and Maurizio Corradini and other members of Centro Teatrale Mamimo all of whom took great pride in their various relationships with Reggio municipal schools. A summary of the content is outlined below.

Among the participants too I had the opportunity to hear ideas relating to arts and education in other parts of the world and managed to capture interviews with representatives with similar remits from Brazil and the Netherlands.

- Opportunities for DV documentation to be developed as a sustainable resource



I was aware at the outset that filming would not be permitted in the nidi or scuole d’infanzia regardless of children being present or otherwise. This is a practical reflection of the overarching philosophy of the image of the child and the associated respect for the children’s rights as their work is visible everywhere in the schools. Furthermore, there are numerous

publications and DV material available which serve this function adequately.

I therefore took the opportunity whenever possible to capture the essence of the town itself as the backdrop for my experience and the findings that can be shared with practitioners in Scotland. I am confident that the combination of these elements with the interview material mentioned above, will provide a vivid illustration to support future CPD programmes.

- International links

As previously mentioned, there was an astonishingly diverse global representation at this study visit. The entrepreneurial spirit of those in attendance inevitably led to rapid exchanges of information which has in turn led to the circulation of e-mail address lists, facebook bulletins, links to the various websites and continued correspondence.

Itinerary

Thursday 14th – Saturday 16th October

Preparation, research and filming



Palazzo di Capitano del popolo

Reflections – Reggio Emilia has a very attractive historic centre and is similar in many ways to other towns I have visited in northern Italy. It is set within the hexagonal boundaries of the old walled city containing a mixture of medieval, renaissance and baroque architecture. It lies equidistant between Parma and Modena on very flat terrain which makes it ideal for bicycles. The town lays claim to being the genuine home of parmigiano reggiano, the birthplace of the Italian tricolour and gives a strong sense of its identity as a municipal commune.

Sunday 17th October

PM Guided tour of the town.

Reflections - This tour was conducted by a member of the friends of Reggio Emilia and offered some fascinating background to the history of the town and the municipal schools. Along with Bologna, Modena and Parma, the town originated as one of several Roman fortifications along the Via Emilia which connected modern day Rimini to Piacenza. As well as places of cultural interest, we were shown the exterior of the very first “Reggio” school – Diana – purpose built and designed by Loris Malaguzzi in the 60s and set in the beautifully maintained municipal gardens.

Il Duomo



Piazza San Prospero



Monday 18th October

AM Introduction to context of Reggio Emilia
Amelia Gambetti, Paola Ricco, Sara Annigoni
Meet and greet

PM Visit to nido – Sarzi



Reflections – There are two lasting impressions of this first proper day of the study visit.

Firstly, I was impressed by the scale of global recognition for the Reggio approach. The meet and greet session took up a fair proportion of the morning and it was fascinating to hear the range of perspectives and cultures represented. Many were teachers; some were managers, some artists and some business people. Certain countries and contexts represented enjoyed high levels of government or private support, while others had experienced not only financial but cultural barriers to the development of education in a more general sense.

The second, and possibly most significant recollection of this day was the visit to the nido – Sarzi. This was my first opportunity to witness a Reggio school first-hand. The information and black and white images that I had seen over the previous three years through publications such as *The Hundred Languages* had, I thought, given me a reasonable understanding of the approach. But this encounter brought all the conceptual material into concrete focus. It was very moving to be able to visualise and contextualise all that had been researched.

This was not one of the purpose built nidi, and had, in fact, been converted from an institutional building of the fascisti era. However, it was evident that a great deal of imagination and invention had been invested in order to transform the space into a wonderland. Every aspect of the building had been thought out and designed to give children every opportunity for enjoyable yet meaningful encounters and relationships. Of course, the necessary facilities for the more mundane aspects of childcare provision were all in place and scrupulously organised, but did not take precedence.

Tuesday 19th October

AM Opening remarks (Carlina Rinaldi)
The identity of the Nido
(Maddalena Tedeschi)
“The Diary of Laura”
(Eluccia Forghieri, Paola Cavazzoni)

PM Visit to Loris Malaguzzi international centre
Interview with Paula Bagni – Teatro Municipale



Reflections – The Teatro Municipale “Valli” is the principal arts venue in Reggio which hosts larger scale theatrical events, opera and concerts. Adjacent to this are the Teatro Ariosto which is the main playhouse and the Teatro Cavallerizza - a studio venue playing host to more experimental drama. From my perspective as an arts in education practitioner, I was keen to find out about the precise nature of the relationship between arts organisations and the municipal schools.

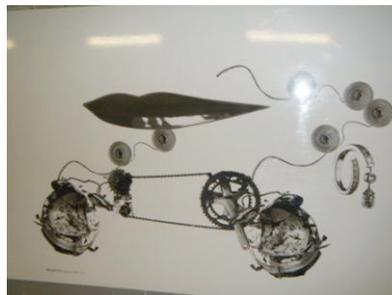
Paula Bagni (education officer) described a range of collaborative projects which fell into two main categories - those which offered a venue-based arts experience and those which used artistic processes to support a school-based learning experience. She pointed out how the range of expressive languages – dance, music, opera, drama, art and design could be deployed effectively in so many valuable ways to enrich children’s learning. I was intrigued to

hear that in addition to the educational projects, mainstream programming could often be informed through regular dialogue with the schools.
It was evident that as a native of Reggio Emilia, Paula was very proud of the town's global reputation and recognised the core philosophical principles that underpin the Reggio approach.

Wednesday 20th October

AM Visit to scuola dell'infanzia – Balducci

PM Discussion groups with teachers, atelieristi and pedagogisti
(Annalisa Rabotti, Jovanka Rivi, Mirella Ruozi, Emanuela Gualandri, Marica Cocconi)



Reflections – This was my first sight of a purpose-built “Reggio school”. The experience impressed me even beyond what I saw at the nido Sarzi on the Monday, which I hadn't thought possible. I had been warned by colleagues from Stirling Council that the study visit would in turns be exhausting and, at times, highly moving. This experience was a keen demonstration of the latter.

This visit was a practical demonstration of virtually everything that I had previously read about the Reggio Approach. The entire surroundings had been designed with the children in mind. It was almost your childhood wishes and dreams were being recalled and configured into a reality.

More specific information regarding the fabric and nature of the building and the potential encounters and relationships available to the children are too numerous to list in this document but will, however, form a substantial element of forthcoming CPD.

The most moving aspect of the day was the opportunity to interact with a group of four-year olds who had no difficulty in confronting a complete stranger and explaining their activities to me. Thankfully, I had just enough Italian to correspond with them and we even sang a song together.

Thursday 21st October

AM Video presentation “A Day in a Nido” and “Becoming a Group”
(Maddalena Tedeschi, Silvia Crivellaro)
Group discussions

PM Interviews with
Bia Jabor (Arts in education manager – Brazil)
Angelique Felix (Movement, play and creativity – Netherlands)



Parco Municipale

Visit to nido/scuola dell'infanzia Iotti
“Compositions in dialogue between individual and group”
(Mirella Ruozi, Barbara Magnani)
Presentations by participants (New Zealand, Japan, Canada and Colombia)

Reflections – This was another example of a purpose built school but even larger than Balducci, which combined the facilities of both the nido and scuola d'infanzia. This school enjoyed an expansive conservatory / garden / atelier in which the outside could be brought inside and vice versa. As with the other schools, there was evidence of project work in various stages of completion, although being Reggio, even incomplete work had the look of an exhibit.

The visit was augmented by presentations from various participants to reflect the diversity of culture and practice. There was also the opportunity for parents to share their reflections and an opportunity to sample local produce and a variety of homemade food.

Subway exhibition

Friday 22nd October

AM The expressive and artistic languages of the atelier
(Maddalena Tedeschi)

Presentation and video documentation "Light and colour" – Mirella Ruozzi



PM Loris Malaguzzi International Centre – workshop – "Ray of Light Atelier"

Visit to nido Rodari

Observations and cultural exchange

Reflections – A powerful series of encounters drew to a conclusion over the course of the day. While it is always sad to see things come to an end and sadder still to say goodbye to new friends after such a brief acquaintance, a strong feeling of satisfaction seemed apparent throughout.

I was especially pleased to discover the importance of stories within the wider learning experience and that the projects we had been developing in East Ayrshire were not wildly different from what was happening in Reggio. The main distinctions lie in the degree of time allocated, the magnitude and details of the encounters for each project.

Saturday 23rd

AM Interviews with members of Centro Teatrale Mamimo

Reflections - As well being to connect with fellow thespians, the most fascinating aspect of these interviews was that they represented the perspective of native Reggians. It was evident that they shared a great pride in the city's global reputation and recognised the supportive municipal spirit of the town which enabled the Reggio approach to take hold in the first place.



Key findings and recommendations

We anticipated that this study visit would yield significant benefits to my work both as a cultural coordinator and as a drama practitioner, with particular respect to the practices and relationships between atelieristi (studio directors) and pedagogisti (learning directors).

It was also stated in our application that practical manifestations of this creative dynamic would form the basis of future CPD to be made available to other arts practitioners and nursery staff in East Ayrshire and the wider Scottish learning community.

In particular, whether for school staff or artists, I would shape any future CPD to promote an understanding of the following –

- The image of the child
- The Pedagogy of Listening
- Progettazione
- Documentation
- The role of the pedagogista
- The role of the atelierista
- The triangle of protagonists
- The environment
- Meaningful encounters
- Working with materials
- Working with stories

Uffizi municipali and Basilica Santa Maria



Select Bibliography

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In Dialogue with Reggio Emilia

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ISBN 978-0-415-34504-0

The Diary of Laura

(Edwards, Rinaldi – Redleaf Press))
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I Piccolissimi del Cinema Muto

(Reggio Children)
ISBN 88-87960-07-0

Teatro Municipale - Interior

