



The Reggio Emilia Approach

Early Childhood Ireland Explainers

What is the Reggio Emilia Approach?

Reggio Emilia, which is situated in Northern Italy, is home to one of the most innovative, high-quality, Early Years approaches in the world.

The Reggio Emilia Approach is an educational philosophy that is based on the idea that every child is unique and will express themselves in different ways. The Reggio Emilia Approach focuses on children's rights and brings together values of diversity and integration. It is profoundly democratic and places a great deal of importance on relationships and social connections and the value of society. It adopts a 'village-style approach' to engage children, parents, and the community in the learning process.

Since the end of the Second World War, the residents of Reggio Emilia have built an educational system for young children via collaborative efforts from parents, teachers, and the rest of the community. This was all done under the guidance of Loris Malaguzzi. The city's post-war reconstruction involved the building of the first school for young children. This school was built by parents using proceeds from the sales of a war tank, three trucks, and six horses left behind by the Germans.

The present-day Reggio Emilia Approach is made up of the preschools and infant-toddler centres in the city, [Reggio Children](#), and the [Fondazione Reggio Children – Centro Loris Malaguzzi](#).

Reggio Children was established in 1994 to promote and defend the rights of children, both locally in the city and in Italy and internationally. It organises pedagogical and cultural exchanges between the Early Years centres in Reggio Emilia and teachers, academics, and researchers from around the world. The [Reggio Children International Network](#) was created in 2006. It supports people from around the world to learn more about the Reggio Emilia Approach.

The Fondazione Reggio Children – Centro Loris Malaguzzi was founded in 2011. Its aims are to promote solidarity projects through research and improve the lives of children and communities through the promotion of quality education.

Values

There are a series of values that are integral to the success of the Reggio Emilia Approach. One value is that the children are as active protagonists in their growing and learning process. The Approach treats them as active collaborators in their education, instead of as passive observers.

Another key aspect of the Approach is that children possess a hundred languages. This means that they have a hundred ways of thinking, expressing, understanding, and of encountering otherness through a way of thinking that weaves together and does not disconnect the various dimensions of experience.

Participation is also key in the Reggio Emilia Approach. This means not only making sure that children participate but also parents and guardians. Educators in this Approach see education as a relationship between the child, the teacher, and the parent.

Educational research and documentation are important principles in the Reggio Emilia Approach. Educators are responsible for documenting the learning process within the classroom and writing down the verbal language used by children. Documentation also reveals connections between events and provides an opportunity to review past experiences and plan for future ones. For children, documentation shows them that their work is valued. For parents, it allows them to learn about their children's experiences. Research, which is aided by documentation, reforms knowledge, builds learning, and becomes an element of pedagogical innovation, both nationally and internationally.

Collegiality and professional development are also seen as important in the Reggio Emilia Approach. Staff often work in pairs and maintain strong relationships with each other and other colleagues. They engage in discussions and analysis of their methods. Their professional development is integrated into their work week.

Another critical component of the Approach is a flexible and open-ended environment. The classroom is a place where children can share relationships with their friends and teachers. It is also a place where children feel that they belong to a welcoming, alive and authentic world. The Reggio Emilia Approach involves designing and organising a classroom so that they are interrelated with common spaces as well as outside communities.

Early Childhood Ireland and Reggio Emilia

Early Childhood Ireland is the Reggio Children International Network partner for Ireland. Early Childhood Ireland supports and is inspired by the Approach to care and education in the Early Years settings of Reggio Emilia. As the Network partner for Ireland, Early Childhood Ireland aims to support the identity and the work of Reggio Children and the [Loris Malaguzzi International Centre](#).

In 2023, Early Childhood Ireland led a new project which is supported by National Pyjama Day, the largest one-day fundraising event in the Early Years and School Age sector in Ireland. Part of the project involved 24 members of Early Childhood Ireland went to Italy in April for an immersive study tour. A return visit with representatives from Reggio Emilia took place in

May. This will be followed by the development of an eLearning toolkit on the Reggio Emilia Approach for Early Childhood Ireland members.

If you want to learn more about the Reggio Emilia Approach, check out Early Childhood Ireland's [podcast series](#) and [articles](#).

