

A Reggio Approach Early Learning Experience & Proposed Outcomes

A Reggio inspired education is steeped in years of interdisciplinary research and is, first and foremost, centrally focused on the capabilities of ALL children. “The child is not viewed in isolation but in relation with the family, other children, the teachers, the environment of the school, the community, and the wider society. Each school is viewed as a system in which all these relationships, which are interconnected and equal, are activated and supported.” (Gandini) In such an environment, each child is ensured an active voice in their educational journey and ongoing meaningful opportunities to construct understanding about the world.

Based on a foundation of relationship-building - attending to the many voices, languages, and abilities of the contributors- children and teachers, in a dialectic manner, develop educational experiences with the engaged involvement of families, and other community stakeholders. Teachers build on children’s innate sense of curiosity and inquisitiveness to collaboratively develop projects that promote critical thinking and problem-solving, creativity and imagination. In addition to being collaborators, facilitators, and partners in the process of learning, teachers and parents become historians (documenters) of children’s educational journeys.

What might a Reggio-inspired program look like?

Image of the child:

In a Reggio-inspired learning environment, curriculum begins with a strong image of the child. As Loris Malaguzzi, founder of the program in Reggio Emilia shared, “All people - and I mean scholars, researchers, and teachers, who in any place have set themselves to study children seriously - have ended up by discovering not so much the limits and weaknesses of children but rather their surprising and extraordinary strengths, and capabilities linked with an inexhaustible need for expression and realization” (The Hundred Languages of Children 2nd Ed., pg.78) In a Reggio-inspired learning environment it is recognized that children are always in the process of making meaning from their experiences and constructing a sense of who they are.

The Image of the School:

The school is viewed as a system. A system is a group of interacting, interrelated, and interdependent elements forming a complex whole. Parts of a system are distinct, separate, and interconnected. In a Reggio-inspired environment, the school recognizes and values the competency and contributions of each of its parts (the children, the teachers, the families, the environment, the culture(s), the community) and strives to bring the parts together to form an integrated space of beauty, meaning and purpose;

“When you set out on your journey to Ithaka, pray that the road is long,
full of adventure, full of knowledge.”

~C.P. Cavafy

spaces that ensure the most favorable social, emotional and learning situation for ALL children.
(Malaguzzi)

The role of the teacher:

Like the strong image of the child, in a Reggio-inspired program, teachers are viewed as competent and valued for the knowledge, skills and abilities that they bring to the school and for being 'expert knowers' of their children. The role of the teacher is one of continual researcher and learner. Teachers observe and listen closely to the children. Teachers ask questions and discover the children's ideas, hypotheses, and theories. They discuss together what they have recorded and make flexible plans and preparations for the daily and weekly educational experiences at the school. Through this ongoing research, reflecting and listening to children together with other colleagues and with the support of an instructional coordinator, a process of continuous individual and group professional growth takes place.

The role of space:

The environment is the most visible aspect of the work done by the children, the families, and the teachers (three protagonists) in a Reggio-inspired school. The environment conveys the message that the adults have thought about the quality and instructive power of space (what it communicates to children about themselves, relationships, the school, possibilities, and the world), and plays a central role in the process of making learning meaningful. The layout of the physical space is welcoming and fosters encounters, communication, and relationships. The arrangement of structures, objects and activities encourages choices, problem solving and discoveries in the process of learning.

The role of projects:

Projects provide the backbone of the children and teachers' learning experiences in a Reggio-inspired environment. Learning is seen, not as a predetermined linear process but as a spiral progression. Teachers listen to and observe children closely, ask questions, seek clarification to uncover children's emerging theories, interests, and ideas/understandings. Grounded in a solid understanding of learning goals and a conviction that children learn best when interested, actively engaged and through a process of revisiting ideas and experiences, teachers identify ideas for projects and present them to children. Subsequent decisions and choices regarding how to move forward are made collaboratively (teachers and children) in relation to the work that emerges and the learning objectives (for individual children, the group, the project) themselves.

The role of the arts:

In Reggio-inspired environments adults understand that children receive information, construct understandings and express ideas in limitless ways - through spoken or written word, symbol, music, movement, drawing, facial expression, clay, wire, paper, shadow, light, gesture and more. Each is considered a "language" of which Malaguzzi, in his poem **No way. The hundred is there** states, "The child has a hundred languages (and a hundred, hundred, hundred, more)". Children are encouraged to explore and express ideas in multiple ways. To support children and teacher's development and use of

"When you set out on your journey to Ithaka, pray that the road is long,
full of adventure, full of knowledge."

~C.P. Cavafy

diverse languages, a teacher who is trained in the visual arts works closely with the other teachers and children to help build concepts, to develop understanding of different languages, and to support the representation and fine-tuning of theories and ideas.

The role of documentation:

In a Reggio-inspired classroom to document means to leave traces - to create documents - written notes, observation charts, diaries, other narrative forms, recordings, photographs, videos, and more - that serve to make visible the children's learning processes and ways of constructing knowledge. Documentation is used to help the child find meaning in what they do, in what they encounter and what they experience. It is used to produce traces/documents that confirm and make visible the ways of learning of the individuals and the group, as well as, to ensure that each group and individual child can observe themselves while they are learning. Documentation offers children and teachers the unique opportunity to re-listen, re-see and re-visit individually and with others the events and processes that have taken place. Finally, documentation provides the educator with a tool for research and a key to continuous improvement, as children and adults reflect on the process and outcomes of their learnings.

Proposed Outcomes

Committed to the image of competent children, and recognizing that the early childhood environment is often the place where children first come to experience and know who they are as part of a diverse community, we endeavor to create a program that reflects the belief that ALL children, no matter their endowment, are powerful, competent and 'rich in potential'.

It is our vision, that through:

- The establishment of a space that is welcoming and fosters encounters, communication, and relationships;
- The formation of supportive and reciprocal relationships (at all levels and in every combination) between children, ideas, experiences and theories, the environment, families, teachers, and the community;
- Teachers who are expert knowers of their children;
- Learning experiences that provoke questions, theories, and curiosities;
- Adults who consider themselves partners in the process of learning, who respect children's ideas and theories and embrace the dialectic process of synthesizing (co-creating) knowledge with children (rather than for them); and
- A system of ongoing study and documentation that reflects respect for children's efforts, helps determine the direction in which the work and experiences with children will go, helps make families aware of their children's experience and maintains their involvement, allows teachers to understand children better and to evaluate their own work (promoting ongoing professional development), and facilitates communication and exchange of ideas,

“When you set out on your journey to Ithaka, pray that the road is long,
full of adventure, full of knowledge.”

~C.P. Cavafy

we will:

- Contribute to Odyssey Charter School's vision of providing unique, globally-focused educational experiences that prepare students for a rich, lifelong journey of learning;
- Address an expressed community need by providing access to high-quality care, and research-based experiences for children and families coming from economically-challenged environments or experiencing other areas of need (including serving children with alternative learning needs, disabilities and challenging behaviors);
- Contribute to the attainment of milestones outlined in Delaware's Strategic Plan for a Comprehensive Early Education System by providing early learning relationships and experiences that support school readiness and the attainment of foundational skills;
- Create an environment that encourages and supports innovative practices and thinking; and
- Collaborate with our partners and others in our community and beyond to improve the life prospects of all young children.

To summarize desired quantitative outcomes:

1. 75% of Ithaka Early Learning Center graduates will meet or exceed 3rd grade Smarter Balanced proficiency targets for their specific subgroups;
2. 85% of Ithaka graduates will be considered "accomplished" when they are assessed in their first kindergarten semester;
3. Where possible to follow in elementary schools, Ithaka graduates will consistently outperform their subgroup peers in their formative growth outcomes.

In addition, assessment partners will evaluate the following qualitative outcomes for Ithaka graduates:

1. Have formed positive, caring relationships with each other, and with adults (Teaching Standards Gold (TSG) objectives 2a, 2b, 2c, 2d);
2. Can share their point of view with others, and are flexible in their thinking (TSG objectives 3a, 11d);
3. Show empathy towards each other and their environment (TSG objectives 2b, 3a);
4. Adults and children can engage in dialogue (conversation) and respect each other (TSG 10a, 10b);
5. Families are actively engaged in the life of the school and their children's education, as measured by tracking family participation in: parent conferences, family education programs, family partnership opportunities, individual portfolio information exchanges/project discussions, or other volunteer opportunities. It is expected that 80% of the families will participate in 2 or more of these experiences; and
6. Children will be fully integrated into the multicultural and diverse Barley Mill Plaza campus community.

"When you set out on your journey to Ithaka, pray that the road is long,
full of adventure, full of knowledge."

~C.P. Cavafy