

## Learning to Learn is a Journey My Perceptions of Reggio

Reggio Emilia, Italy is recognized as having the best early childhood programs in the world ("The Ten Best Schools in the World, and What We Can Learn From Them," Newsweek, December 2, 1991). Education is seen as a communal activity and sharing of culture through joint exploration among children and adults who together open topics to speculation and discussion. This approach provides us with new ways to think about the nature of the child as learner, the role of the teacher, school organization and management, the design and use of physical environments and curriculum planning that guides experiences of joint, open-ended discovery and constructive posing and solving of problems. Reciprocity, exchange and dialogue lie at the heart of Reggio education. The Reggio system is an establishment of an educational community: teachers, parents, community members and thousands of children committed to cultivating and guiding each child's intellectual, emotional, social, and moral potential. These schools are well funded and supported by the community. They are an inspiration of what can be for all children of the world!

Some of my memories:

- The teaching staff at Reggio act on the assumption that young children have an inherent desire to grow, to know, and to understand things around them.
- Children express their thinking using "100 languages", i.e. drawing, painting, constructions as a basis for further discussion and work.
- Teacher-child relationships are enriched by their work on projects, and the adults' behavior conveys to the child their respect for all aspects of his/her work.

- Detailed documentation and display of children's thought and work enhances their learning, the teacher's learning and the parents' involvement.
- School life is based close to the family and community relationships.
- Education is an open-ended spiral where children were encouraged to repeat key experiences, observe and reobserve, consider and reconsider, represent and rerepresent.

I was struck by the depth of respect for young children, for their talent and potential. Respect permeates the environment, which was amiable, creative, and inspiring. Adults used actions and strategies that demonstrated true collaboration with children supporting their researching, questioning, and thinking. All ideas were valued; differences of opinion were encouraged; frustration and risk taking were viewed as keys to building new depths of knowledge and competence. Teachers actively wove theory and practice into their work with young children. Provisions and materials were of the highest quality. Parents and teachers met monthly to discuss projects, next steps, share tools for research, create new questions and support each other. Each and every being is committed to continuous improvement and renewal.

We have begun to build a bridge between Reggio-inspired practice and our Saxon Hill community values and setting. In August, parents, grandparents, alumnae, staff and spouses changed our space by painting, stripping chairs, adding new table tops, carpet, baskets and materials offering a new 'canvas' to children and teachers to begin the journey. Staff and children are working and reworking this canvas to create an environment, which reflects our personalities, interests, and learning. Staff members are working together to define our view of the child and

our vision. We are asking questions of each other: Who is this child? What is childhood? How do children learn? What is the meaning of "to educate"? How will we develop curriculum projects? How will we communicate to parents, to the community? How can we involve parents in the learning process?

I am so grateful to the Saxon Hill Community for the opportunity to go to Reggio Emilia. On my first day there, Emelia Gambetti paraphrased one of Loris Malaguzzi's (founder and Director of Reggio Schools until his death) sayings: there is no preschool, just as there is no pre-life. Our students are at school and are learning things that will serve them throughout their lives. Malaguzzi likened it to giving children coins that they keep in their pockets to pull out and spend when the opportunity presents itself further down the road. I have always believed that the tools and strategies that children and their families gain through their experiences at SHS follow them on their journeys all the days of their lives. I know my pockets overflow. I would invite you to join us in our plan for continuous improvement and renewal.

Thank you,  
Michele