



Fundamentals of the Reggio Approach

From *Bringing Reggio Emilia Home: An Innovative Approach to Early Childhood Education*, by Louise Boyd Cadwell

- **The child as protagonist.** Children are strong, rich, and capable. All children have preparedness, potential, curiosity, and interest in constructing their learning, negotiating with everything their environment brings to them. Children, teachers, and parents are considered the three central protagonists in the educational process (Gandini, 1993).
- **The child as collaborator.** Education has to focus on each child in relation to other children, the family, the teachers, and the community rather than on each child in isolation (Gandini, 1993). There is an emphasis on work in small groups. The practice is based on the social constructivist model that supports the idea that we form ourselves through our interaction with peers, adults, things in the world, and symbols (Lewin, 1995).
- **The child as communicator. This approach fosters children's intellectual development through a** systematic focus on symbolic representation, including words, movement, drawing, painting, building, sculpture, shadow play, collage, dramatic play, and music, which leads children to surprising levels of communication, symbolic skills, and creativity (Edwards et al., 1993). Children have the right to use many materials in order to discover and communicate what they know, understand, wonder about, question, feel, **and imagine. In this way, they make their thinking visible through their many natural "languages."** A studio teacher, trained in the visual arts, works closely with children and teachers in each school to enable children to explore many materials and to use a great number of languages to make their thinking visible.
- **The environment as third teacher.** The design and use of space encourage encounters, communication, and relationships (Gandini, 1993). There is an underlying order and beauty in the design and organization of all the space in a school and the equipment and materials within it (Lewin, 1995). Every corner of every space has an identity and a purpose, is rich in potential to engage and to communicate, and is valued and cared for by children and adults.
- **The teacher as partner, nurturer, and guide (Edwards, 1993). Teachers facilitate children's** exploration of themes, work on short- and long-term projects, and guide experiences of joint, open-ended discovery and problem solving (Edwards et al., 1993). To know how to plan and proceed with their work, teachers listen and observe children closely. **Teachers ask question; discover children's ideas, hypotheses, and theories;** and provide occasions for discovery and learning (Gandini, 1993).
- **The teacher as researcher.** Teachers work in pairs and maintain strong, collegial relationships with all other teachers and staff; they engage in continuous discussion and interpretation of their work and the work

of children. These exchanges provide ongoing training and theoretical enrichment. Teachers see themselves as researchers preparing documentation of their work with children, whom they also consider researchers. The team is further supported by a pedagoga (pedagogical coordinator) who serves a group of school (Gandini, 1993).

- **The documentation as communication.** Careful consideration and attention are given to the presentation of the thinking of the children and the adults who work with them. Teachers' commentary on the purposes of the study and the children's learning process, transcriptions of children's verbal language (i.e., words and dialogue) photographs of their activity, and representations of their thinking in many media are composed in carefully designed panels or books to present the process of learning in the schools. The documentation serves many purposes. It makes parents aware of their children's experience. It allows teachers to better understand children, to evaluate their own work, and to exchange ideas with other educators. Documentation also shows children that their work is valued. Finally, it creates an archive that traces the history of the school and the pleasure in the process of learning experienced by many children and their teachers (Gandini, 1993).
- **The parent as partner.** Parent participation is considered essential and takes many forms. Parents play an active part in their children's learning experience and help ensure the welfare of all the children in the school. The ideas and skills that the families bring to the school and, even more important, the exchange of ideas between parents and teachers, favor the development of a new way of educating, which helps teachers to view the participation of families not as a threat but as an intrinsic element of collegiality and as the integration of different wisdoms (Spaggiari)