

Reggio Emilia Australia Information Exchange



Transforming Orientation and Welcome

Quotes and Provocations

Instead of using these provocations for 'reflection', we hope that you will use them to assist in a process of 'diffraction' that generates uncertainty and new ways of thinking.

"Donna Haraway proposes diffraction as an alternative to the well-worn metaphor of reflection. As Haraway suggests, diffraction can serve as a useful counterpoint to reflection: both are optical phenomena, but whereas reflection is about mirroring and sameness, diffraction attends to patterns of difference" (Barad, 2007, p.29).

Contesting 'preparation for school'

We have an image of the child that is rich and strong and powerful. We do not see early childhood education as a site of instrumental learning but rather a site of learning that supports learning that is transdisciplinary; interconnected. Instrumental learning seeks to tame and domesticate children, objectify them as 'intelligent' for families to 'show off' and impress others.

To oppose this idea, "Malaguzzi proposed to differentiate between competence and ability. For Malaguzzi, ability is just about the mastery of something with something; it is all about visible results. Competency is something much, more extended" (Hoyeulos, 2013, p.313)

Consulting children using documentation

"The documentation panels cover the walls throughout the school as if they were a second skin. The panels make you feel that you are, or invite you to become, a part of experiences and stories. They suggest that future experiences will be valued. The documentation substantiates the value of memory and narration as a right and a vital quality of the educational environment" (Krechevsky, 2001, p. 62).

Cultural Mediators

"In recent years a new role of cultural mediator has been created in the public services of Reggio Emilia. The six cultural mediators who work in the early childhood system are immigrant women of various nationalities (those most highly represented among the families) who have received training as cultural mediators. They interface on a close personal basis with children and families and educators and they improve the educator's ability to mediate the inclusion of the various cultures" (Edwards, et al. 2012, p. 142).

Educational Documentation

"For children documentation makes them feel that this is your place, a place that waits for you, welcomes you, and respects you ... even if it is not always yourself, even if the children see images of other children I believe it is a strong message that says 'this is a place that belongs to children, it is not only a place for children'" (Cavazzoni in Millikan et al, 2014, p.49).

Invitations

"Welcoming implies listening, openness, recognisability. A child, a parent, anyone who works at the school must feel the sense of well-being that comes from being awaited and welcomed with pleasure. The school is not a place for anonymous users, but for people who live a portion of their lives together" (Krechevsky, 2001, p. 64).



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Organisation

In Reggio Emilia, “particular importance is given to the working conditions and the contractual forms that foster stability, continuity and a sense of belonging” (Reggio Emilia, 2010, p.13). How does your environment welcome children and families? Do you have visible messages of welcome?

Orientation and Transition

“Each child encounters or enters into a context, a project that gives meaning and understanding to a child’s potential. This suggests that not all children should follow the same curriculum in school. The offering of opportunities must be orientative and not normative” (Hoyuelos, 2013, p. 213).

“the school must start from a point of view where it is not possible to level out differences [between children] and it must not attempt to do so” (Hoyuelos, 2013, p. 212).

Research as an Ethic of Welcome and Relationship

“Our goal is to build an amiable school, where children teachers and families feel at home . . . It must embody ways of getting along together, of intensifying relationships among the three central protagonists, of assuring fullness of attention to the problems of educating, and of activating participation and research” (Malaguzzi, in Gandini, 2012, p. 43).

“Indeed, education without research or innovation is education without interest” (Malaguzzi, in Edwards, et al. 2012, p.49).

The semiotics of entering

“Social semiotics and the semiotics of the built environment are the analytical tools that help us identify the voices of places, to give meaning to places and spaces and the people who live and grow in them” (Giamminuti in Fleet, et al., 2012, p.192) .

What does transition look like in Reggio Emilia?

- visits to the preschools for families and children
- class meetings with the teachers of the preschool to explore together expectations (and continuities)
- providing basic information and reassurances
- identity cards with the names of their possible future friends and the teachers
- an invitation to the children to gather memories of how they spend their summer
- a get together is organised, having an icecream or a cup of tea is a good pretext to get together
- individual interviews
- interviews between the teachers of the infant toddler centres and the preschools. This is NOT a final assessment but rather an opportunity to narrate the experiences of the child, through documents that speak of the child. They talk about how best to create a welcoming environment for each child
- professional development sessions for the teachers from the infant toddler centres and the preschools, held both separately and together, to prepare for the event, the move from one institution to another, including the farewell and welcome party to which the teachers are mutually invited.

What does transition look like in Reggio Emilia for children with special rights?

How do you tend to attachment?

What are your priorities? Who are your priorities?

Do you work in partnership with professionals during the orientation process?



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“In fact, as we get to know the child, the teachers are expected to revise, reinterpret and refine the child’s program continually, under the supervision of the school, pedagogista and myself. The point of the plan is not to focus only on the child’s disabilities but also on his or her tremendous capabilities. It is important for us to offer many rich possibilities and have high expectations” (Edwards et. al. 2012, p.194).

What is orientation?

“The process of orientation is a process of ‘welcome’” according to Levinas and Derrida, (1999). Moss says that they use “the concept of welcoming which opens the way for another word, ‘hospitality’” (Moss, 2005, p.81).

What is transition?

“Transitions, including from home to early childhood settings, between settings and from early childhood settings to school, offer opportunities and challenges. Different places and spaces have their own purposes, expectations and ways of doing things. Building on children’s prior and current experiences helps them to feel secure, confident and connected to familiar people, places, events and understandings. Children, families and early childhood educators all contribute to successful transitions between settings. It is the responsibility of early childhood educators to design experiences for children to feel secure, confident and connected to familiar people, places, events and understanding” (DEEWR, 2009, p.19).

“As children make transitions to new settings (including school) educators from early childhood settings and schools commit to sharing information about each child’s knowledge and skills so learning can build on foundations of earlier learning” (DEEWR, 2009, p.19).

What is welcome?

“In the entryway of a school in Reggio Emilia, we are already aware of the value given to communication and openness of information. There is an intention to make the identity of the school visible” (Gandini, Edwards & Forman, 2012, p.318).

In conclusion:

Educational settings, leaders, teachers and educators are responsible “to give orientation, sense and value to the school’s experience and to children” (Hoyeulos, 2013, p.298).

“Ideas evolve. They are not like a light that is suddenly turned on with a switch. Nor are they random. We have ideas about questions that have been raised or problems that we are grappling with. And if there is an aha moment, it comes only after we’ve been reading things, watching things, listening to things and having conversations with others – all things that contribute to, inspire and point us in a direction that our ideas may form” (Sinek, 2019, p. 225).

Questions to critically reflect on:

How do you see yourself as an educator or teacher? Is it your role to ‘prepare children for school’?

What signs and symbols in your place communicate a sense of welcome, belonging and solidarity to your community? What do you do to notice, to listen to how they might making meaning of this new landscape?

What strategies empower families to feel that they have something important to contribute, to shape the evolving context of the community of learners?

Do you work in partnership with professionals during the orientation process?



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