

Reggio Emilia Australia Information Exchange



Navigating Democracy

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).

Defining democracy

" Democratic values and practices shape not just the formal sphere of politics but the informal sphere of everyday life" (Skidmore & Bound, Everyday Democracy Index, 2008)

Peter Moss defines democracy as:

"A multidimensional concept that can be applied at many levels, from national government to nursery; it is both a way of living and relating" (Moss cited in Miller and Hevey, 2012, p.93).

History of Reggio Emilia

"...the commitment to the education of young children in those years was motivated by the desire to build a new society together as a reaction to fascism into the war, through giving a new meaning to human and civil existence (Malaguzzi 1995).

It is for this reason that democratic participation – of children, parents, teachers, educators, auxiliaries, staff and citizens – has become such a distinctive feature of education in the municipal schools in Reggio Emilia and more generally of ECE and the municipal schools that started life at that time." (Moss, 2013, p. 152-153).

The danger of obedience

Renzo Bonazzi: "the fascist experience had taught them that people who conformed and obeyed were dangerous, and that in building a new society it was imperative to safeguard and communicate that lesson and nurture a vision of children who can think and act for themselves"(Moss, 2015, p.12).

Why is democracy important?

"...alternative to exclusion and thinking in enclaves where differences are often set against each other, where we abandon the belief that differences enrich everyone, separating children who learn in different ways and at different speeds. We must learn together, we are the pre-requisites for each other, and we are mutually dependent on each other.....

What is distinctive about a democracy is that we seek unity while still defending otherness and differences of opinion" (Göthson, 2008, p. 25).



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Ethics of Care

How we respond to these ethical dilemmas as Tronto (1993) suggests, involves finding a relation to the Other based on responsibility and the recognition of difference...

Politics

- The politics of childhood – who is making decisions about children? What decisions are children consulted about?
- The image of the child – how do we 'see' children? How is the child positioned in society? As weak, only with needs, or as an active participant, a citizen?
- What we want for our children – What is education? What can it be? What should it be?
- The politics of gender, of diversity and of inclusion.

Democracy as a common good

Carlina Rinaldi refers to as the "emancipatory potential of democracy", by giving all children the possibility to function as an active citizen and to have the possibility of a good life in a democratic community. (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 10).

A "key concept for us in Reggio Emilia is the concept of "child as citizen" right from birth" (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 10).

Our image of education

What is education for?

"If we believe that education or early childhood is about preparation for something, for school, for VCE, for university, anything that is perceived as the next stage, then our settings become sites for the application of human technologies to ensure the efficient and certain production of a range of predefined and uniform outcomes" (Moss, 2012, p. 94).

Changing the paradigm:

- Survival
- Wellbeing
- Creating a just and democratic society

Our image of the child

- Competent
- Constructor of knowledge and identity
- Citizen and subject of rights
- Rich
- Strong



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Our image of the child continued

"Our image of the child is rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent and most of all connected to adults and other children" (cited in Dahlberg et al, 2007).

Participation

"The educational project [of Reggio Emilia] is by definition a participation-based project: its true educational meaning is to be found in the participation of all concerned. This means that everyone – children, teachers and parents [families] in involved in sharing ideas, in discussion in a sense of common purpose and with communication as a value.....

"Participation is based on the idea that reality is not objective, that culture is a constantly evolving product of society, that individual knowledge is only partial and that in order to construct an educational project, everyone's point of view is relevant in dialogue with others. The idea of participation is founded on these concepts and in our opinion, so too, is democracy" (Cagliari et al, 2004, p. 29).

Collectivity as a strategy for democracy

"Malaguzzi never saw the developing child as an ideally autonomous learner, but rather saw education as a necessarily communal activity and symphony of subjectivities involving children and adults.

He saw long-term and meaningful relationships between and among children, teachers, and parents as the necessary precondition for the flowering of communication, co-action, and reciprocity" (Edwards, 1995, p. 8)

Strategies for everyday democracy in education

- Dialogue - "Encounters foster dialogue between different roles, different ideas, different cultures and negotiation leading towards building together...everyone is an active subject each contributing complementary and necessary knowledge (Cagliari et al, 2004, p.28).
- Documentation - "Malaguzzi saw pedagogical documentation as a commitment to democracy.....
- Morning Meetings. "The morning meeting is an experience that consolidates the community of learners and provides anticipation of the possibilities that the day has to offer" (Jan Millikan).

Exhibitions

"The Wonder of Learning Exhibition was proposed as a democratic square or piazza.

A place for dialogue and to:

- Affirm the right to education and learning
- Highlight an idea of schools that choose an ecological approach; interdependency, co-existence and co-participation in building culture. Awareness of and responsibility towards the shared destinies of the planet



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Exhibitions continued

- and humanity require attitudes of 'solidarity' and participation, the capacity for putting oneself in the other's viewpoint (other person or other thing) which has its roots in emotion and the ability to mirror ourselves in others" (Reggio Children, 2010).

Documentation as a strategy

"Malaguzzi saw pedagogical documentation as a commitment to democracy.....

It makes education and the school transparent 'by enabling the active and visible exchange of ideas between a school and its surroundings including the families, community members, and political leaders'; and it transforms a school 'to become a meeting place of co-construction ... (and) a place of democracy (by inviting) multiple ideas, debate, and negotiation among different points of view of an experience" (Moss, 2016, p.175).

Morning Meetings as a strategy for democracy

"Negotiation is not only the highest level of discussion but also of democracy itself. Negotiation, as intended in constructivism, is a permanent process that enables the many othernesses to recognise that "we are the other" and that we are made of exchange and negotiation with others" (Rinaldi, 1996, p.2).

Pedagogy

".... a pedagogy of relations, listening and liberation. This is a pedagogy of children and adults working together to construct knowledge (and values and identities) – meaning-making through processes of building, sharing, testing and revising theories, always in dialogic relationship with others, working in particular through the medium of open-ended project work. It is a pedagogy that welcomes the unexpected and the unpredicted, that values wonder and surprise" (Moss, 2016, p. 183).

Connection with the NQF/Pedagogy of listening

A guiding principle of the NQF is:

The rights and best interests of the child are paramount.

"The NQF aligns with the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child. This treaty ensures that children have the right to be heard, to be free from violence, abuse and neglect, to have the opportunity to thrive, to be engaged in civics and citizenship and opportunities to take action and be accountable. A rights-based approach to delivering education and care means understanding these rights and implementing practice which reflects them" (Guide to the NQF, 2017. p.10).



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Environments for democracy

We leave our spaces open and the children come in and they might add something to the work that's going on.....in terms of respecting the work, they value what others are doing and I think that comes from the way we value and trust the children to use the spaces (Lou Kirkwood, 2020).

Rhythms of the day

- Foucault terms dominant discourses, "regimes of truth"
- "We have always done it this way, this is how they do it in Reggio, or this the "Gr8 Mermaids" (fictional name of service) way".

Instead of othering, dismissing people because they have different subjectivities, we should be utilising the democratic practice of listening; we should be seeking, according to Foucault, the 'Otherwise'".

In conclusion:

"Participation is based on the idea that reality is not objective, that culture is a constantly evolving product of society, that individual knowledge is only partial; and that in order to construct a project, everyone's point of view is relevant in dialogue with those of others, within a framework of shared values. The idea of participation is founded on these concepts: and in our opinion, so, too, is democracy itself" (Cagliari et al. 2004, p.28-30).

We hope this webinar has highlighted an indispensable attitude for participation and conscious solidarity with others and has given you an opportunity to reflect on your practices for reconciliation, social justice, democracy and equity, utilising respectful relationships, listening, reciprocity and participation. Hope for a truly shared humanity can be realised through a democratic approach in educational contexts with and for children.

Questions to critically reflect on:

- What questions or connections does this raise for you in your context as you consider the ideas from Moss?
- Could the values of solidarity, democracy, and equity sit at the heart of your practice?
- What strategies enable these values to come to life, to influence the opportunities we design and respond to, with children and families?



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