Early Childhood Curriculum Model Report: 
Assessment of Reggio Emilia Approach

Introduction:

Early childhood curriculum places a lot of emphases on the importance of understanding the foundation of early childhood. The students are expected to understand the foundations before developing and using quality instruction and teaching programs. The development of early childhood is based on different theoretical such as behaviorist theory, constructivism theory and social learning theory. Different early childhood models have been developed to support in the running of the programs. Some of the early childhood models include the Montessori approach, developmentally appropriate practices, high scope curriculum, and the Reggio Emilia approach (Wortham, 2010). This paper is aimed at assessing Reggio Emilia model by using the principles of developmentally appropriate practice that positively influence children’s development.

Background of Reggio Emilia approach:

Reggio Emilia model has its origin from the town of Reggio Emilia in northern Italy. It was a movement towards cooperative and progressive early childhood education. At first, it was started as preschools by Loris Malaguzzi and many committed parents after the end of World War II (Hindustan times, 2014). Later it expanded to include infants and toddlers center and now governed by municipal government. There has been significant development in the running and organization of the municipal infant toddler centers as well as the establishment of preschools. In 2003, the municipality stated managing the services network through a new body
now known as Istituzione. In 2006, there were 22 preschools under Istituzione where 2 are affiliated cooperatives. There were also 24 infant toddler centers where 13 of them are municipal schools and the rest are affiliated cooperatives (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2006). Interestingly, all the Reggio-inspired schools are unique in that they use an adaptation of the model that is specific to the needs of their individual community. This is encouraged because community, parent, teacher, and student differ from each other (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2006). The Reggio approach main focus on child image (viewed as strong, competent, inventive, and rich in ideas and having rights rather than needs), the environment as a third teacher, relationships, collaboration, documentation, provocation and one hundred languages of children.

Part: A

Does this model support a Child Approach?

Reggio Emilia approach supports a Child Approach in that a child’s image is viewed as having rights and not just needs. It has been argued that if a child has legitimate rights, they should therefore have an opportunity of developing their intelligence and to be prepared for the success that should not escape them (Hewett, 2001). A child has been viewed as beautiful, competent, powerful, curious, creative as well as full of ambitious desires and potentials.

Does this model support children’s individual differences and needs?

The Reggio Emilia approach fully supports children’s individual differences and needs. The approach believes in a child who is bestowed with unlimited potentials and eager to interact with the world. A child has been viewed as one driven by imagination and curiosity, who has capability and delights in taking responsibilities for own learning. A child is also viewed as one
who listens and desires to be listened to, who needs to be loved and to love and one who should be valued. The approach does not expect all children to get involved in same thing and children’s originality is valued. Children are encouraged to work alone or in small groups, inside or outside or in any room in the center. They can also work in ateliers and central piazza or in the art studio.

**Does the model take into consideration providing opportunities for children’s construction of knowledge?**

The model takes into consideration providing opportunities for children’s construction of knowledge. The model views a child as having rights and thus possessing competence, strength, and potentials. The child is therefore viewed as a protagonist who occupy primary active role in his or her education and learning. The child is perceived as having an innate desire to learn, discover and make some sense of the world. The approach borrows significantly from Jean Piaget’s writings. The writings on constructivism examine how active physical interactions of children with the world help children in constructing knowledge. Piaget argues that a learner who achieves particular knowledge through spontaneous effort and free investigation is able to retain it later. The teachers play the role of an observer and listener to the children and are therefore able to ascertain critical knowledge that concerns children’s learning and development. They also get to know children’s interests and curiosities and hence are enabled to produce specific strategies that favor the work of children or that can be utilized by them (Hewet, 2001).

**Does the model provide opportunities for children’s freedom of expression and free choice?**

The Reggio Emilia approach also provides an opportunity for children’s freedom of expression and free choice. The approach places a lot of emphasis on children’s social
construction of knowledge achieved through their relationships in the context of dialogue, collaboration, negotiation, conflict and through cooperation with adults and peers. The approach has the belief that ‘it’s only when children articulate to others their beliefs as to what is true that they come to understand errors in their own thinking. There is an emphasis on communication and learning which have been influenced by Lev Vygotsky’s writings. Communication in children through language using any of the hundred languages of children has been considered essential in bringing meaning to knowledge (Hewet, 2001).

Does the model provide opportunities to provide play based experiences and experiences that are meaningful to them?

The approach provides opportunities that provide play based experiences that are meaningful to the children. This is well established in the environment that surrounds the children. The approach recognizes space as having powerful capacity in conveying messages such as to welcome and invite attention. Each school and center has a central piazza area where there is an area for dress-up clothes as well as other interesting things. Often children from various classes join here for play and to work on projects (Gestwicki, 2007).

Which theorist’s work does this model seem to support and reflect on?

This approach has borrowed concepts from various theories of development. It has supported and reflected on theories by Jean Piaget’s, Jerome Bruner, Lev Vygotsky and Howard Garcher (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2006).

Is this a more teacher-directed or a more child-centered Approach?
The approach is more of a child centered than teacher centered where teachers are encouraged to know each child in a unique way and also to create a relationship that enhances learning. Teachers also strive to support and encourage every child through the learning journey. Teachers do not dispense information or provide corrections but provokes children’s mind in as a way of taking them to the next level of understanding. The approach has great respect for children’s individual theories and hypotheses. Children are allowed to make mistakes as they try to solve problems because this is considered as fundamental in learning (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2006).

Is parent involvement supported in this model?

Parents are involved in supporting the Reggio Emilia approach. Parents and the community as a whole participation forms one of the most distinctive feature in this approach. The approach has been described as pedagogy of relationships. This is so because it is founded on the belief that learning takes place through making connections between items, experiences and concepts. The parents have the right to participate in an active way and with adherence which is voluntary to the basic principles, growth, care and the development of their own children who have been enrolled in the public institutions. This is achieved through interacting with the surrounding environment and other people. This participation encourages continuity in children’s life, creates a reciprocal network in communicating and feeling of ownership by all parties (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2006)

Part: B

Concept of Expressive Arts in the preschool: Hundred Languages:
The approach perceives a child as being made of one hundred, has hundred languages, hundred hands, hundred thoughts, hundred ways of thinking, hundred ways of playing and speaking. According to Thomsen (2013), there is a lot of emphasis on expressive arts as a means of boosting learning. The approach emphasizes on the use of multiple and symbolic languages through which children express their understanding in their project work. It also calls for the integration of the graphic arts as tools for linguistic, cognitive, and social development. In addition, the presentation of concepts is done through multiple forms such as art, print, drama, construction, puppetry, music and shadow play (Gestwicki, 2007).

There is a lot of emphasis on the role of educators in the process of learning and also to their professional development. Educators are seen as learners where continued evolutionary process is part of professional development. Since teachers work in pairs for every class, they are expected to learn alongside the children. They are teachers cum researchers, resources and guiders. They are encouraged to be committed to reflection on their own learning and teaching. Co-teachers work closely together for three years. They have therefore an opportunity to learn from each other as well as from more experienced teachers (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2006).

Part: C

Weaknesses of Reggio Emilia Approach:

The Reggio Emilia approach has many advantages making it to be considered among the highly valued approach in early childhood programs. Never the less it has some few disadvantages. This approach put a lot of emphasis on the importance of large space as is considered educational. This is one important factor that is overlooked by many educators
although the major reason is affordability. Thomsen (2013) argues that in most cases, public schools get limited funding while private schools mostly focus on results and not process and also the funding is limited. This explains why most Reggio Emilia schools are found in wealthy countries and are attended by children from wealthy families. The demand on space, rich environment and art supply is not affordable by many schools and as such the poor cannot opt for the Reggio Emilia approach. The approach also needs special training for teachers. This becomes a challenge because most of the teachers of early childhood are have a training which is theme oriented and teacher directed unlike the Reggio Emilia approach which advocates for child-oriented learning (Thomsen, 2013).

Applicability of Reggio Emilia Approach in UAE:

The Reggio Emilia approach is a very flexible model which can be incorporated in every culture. As discussed earlier, the approach requires that the needs of children which differ depending on the cultural background be met. As a result all the Reggio-inspired schools are unique in that they use an adaptation of the model that is specific to the needs of their individual community (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2006). The factor of affordability is out of question as the UAE is a rich country that can afford to meet the basic needs required by this approach. As such, the Reggio Emilia approach can be applicable in the UAE. A few schools such as Alphabet Street Nursery Dubai in UAE have adopted the Reggio Emilia approach and therefore other schools can adopt it as well (TRC, 2011).
References:


