

# Susan Dennison

# Sabbatical Report

# 2015

## Topic:

To find out more about the Reggio Emilia approach and how that might enhance our PB4L and Pastoral Care systems.

## Acknowledgements:

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- \* My patient husband and family who support me in my quest for excellence.

Places I went to find information:

- Articles: NZ Principal- “Moving on up in Manurewa”; NZ Gazette Rolleston
- Publication: The Third Teacher 79 Ways You Can Use Design to Transform Teaching & Learning. A Collaborative Project.
- Discussions with leaders and staff at Longford Kindergarten, Otatara School, St Leo’s Devonport, Manurewa Intermediate, Sylvia Park School, St Joseph’s Devonport.
- Reggio Emilia National Conference Te Anau. Connecting Children to the Atelier of Nature  
Speakers: Elena Giacomini- Pedagogista; Loretta Flauto
- Youtube
- Pinterest

## **What is Reggio Emilia?**

The Reggio Emilia Approach originated in the town of Reggio Emilia in Italy. It was developed by Loris Malaguzzi, who was a teacher himself, and the parents of the villages around Reggio Emilia in Italy after World War II. The core idea of this approach is teaching children how to make the “hundred languages of learning” useful in everyday life. A child’s is based on the principles of respect, responsibility, and community through exploration and discovery in a supportive and enriching environment. It uses the student’s interests as the direction for learning.

There are four guiding principles:

1. Children must have some control over the direction of their learning;
2. Children must be able to learn through experiences of touching, moving, listening, seeing, and hearing;
3. Children have a relationship with other children and with material items in the world that children must be allowed to explore;
4. Children have endless ways and opportunities to express themselves.

Below I have listed the key points about this approach.

### **1. Children are capable of constructing their own learning**

They are driven by their interests to understand and know more. This includes taking ideas they formulate through play.

### **2. Children form an understanding of themselves and their place in the world through their interactions with others**

There is a strong focus on social collaboration, working in groups, where each child is an equal participant, having their thoughts and questions valued.

### **3. Children are communicators**

Communication is a process, a way of discovering things, asking questions, using language as play. Playing with ways to make sounds is important for children.

Children are listened to with respect, believing that their questions and observations are an opportunity to learn and search together. It is a collaborative process. It is a move away from the child asking a question and the adult offering the answers.

#### **4. The environment is the third teacher**

The environment around a child stimulates their thoughts and encourages them to explore more widely.

Space encourages collaboration, communication and exploration. Spaces in schools will mean the outside environment, the shared spaces such a library environment, and learning spaces such as classrooms.

#### **5. The adult is a mentor and guide**

An adults role is to observe children, listen to their questions and their stories, find what interests them and then provide them with opportunities to explore these interests further. See what they're interested in and add a curriculum lens over it to develop ideas further.

The Reggio Emilia Approach takes a child-led project approach. The projects aren't planned in advance, they emerge based on the child's interests.

#### **6. An emphasis on documenting children's thoughts**

In Reggio and Reggio-inspired settings that there is an emphasis on carefully displaying and documenting children's thoughts and progression of thinking; in many different ways: photographs, transcripts of children's thoughts and explanations, visual representations all designed to show the child's learning process.

#### **7. The Hundred Languages of Children**

Reggio Emilia believe that children have a hundred languages of learning within themselves. It ties with the belief that children show their understanding. There are a hundred different ways of thinking, of discovering, of learning. Learning and play are intertwined.

The Reggio Emilia Approach emphasises hands-on discovery learning that allows the child to use all their senses and all their languages to learn.

## What did I find out?

- That the Reggio Emilia inspired approach encourages children to deepen and explore their own ideas. In the kindergarten a group of children had built a motorbike through exploring their own interest. It was a long involved process with planning, problem solving, and hands on work needed.  
At the conference this was discussed in many ways. It was always a focus question about the play children do. Everyone needs to be “open” to the learning. Everyone needs to be aware surprises can happen. Everyone needs a part. We are all constantly making choices. All play is organic and exponential- play cannot be predetermined.
- The environment is the third teacher. If children are left to fend for themselves then they can become the problem solvers. If they are always with adults, they will always be like adults. Children have 100 languages to explore and play with.
- Natural materials are the preferred material in this process to deepen the understanding and appreciation of the environment. All centres visited had an abundance of natural material for students to use whether in a classroom setting or whether in the environment around the students.
- Students are encouraged to participate in the outdoors to develop their understanding of the world. Every child will gain a different perspective of the world through rich environments.
- Teachers are encouraged rigorously to know each child and to “wonder” about that child. Connections between the teacher(s) and child are recognised as vitally important for each child’s success path. One principal used the phrase “noticing, recognising, responding”.
- Developing a child’s learning path usually needs to be responsive to the daily learning to deepen what has gone before. A teacher can help make the links to what the prior understanding is, what the new learning is, and what the next step will be. It is important for children to be able to understand this process.
- Teachers are encouraged to listen to students, then hear through a curriculum lens.
- Reggio Inspired spaces are typically minimalistic with clean areas. Everything in them has a purpose for learning.
- Several schools visited had simplified their Inquiry Model across the school. Two that interested me were: excite, investigate, act; and I know, I do, I use.

- Reggio inspired learning usually starts with a provocation. Manurewa Intermediate have changed this to “get set, go”.
- The first teacher is always the parents. This may be expanded to also include the community and the environment.
- The tone of a school is set by staff. Staff have to be happy all the time, even if it’s an act.
- Schools visited didn’t talk about the Reggio Approach with students; instead they gave very clear messages about the important role everyone plays with the world around them. One school had developed chants for assembly to keep these messages getting through.
- The school environment is not just the physical stuff it is also the “culture”. The way people say hello to each other, the celebrations of work and progress, and the systems in place for smoothness.
- The Reggio pedagoga suggested that a “LOVABLE SCHOOL” is one that is active, liveable, documentable, and communicative.
- Giving children experiences is giving children opportunities to find love and to experience their personal 100 languages. We also need to be mindful that children don’t make mistakes, they try things out.
- Children are capable of self-evaluation. They know their own boundaries.

## What will I do with this information?

- The environment is the third teacher. This has made me consider classroom environments, hallways, and grounds at Matura School. We can do better. I think this will be a good starting point for us. There are obviously big projects that can be undertaken like the planting of harakeke and the dense tree area. However there are also smaller things people could do each week like mosaic tiles for stepping stones.  
We need to find a wall that can be covered in a mirror. At one school I visited the boys were fascinated by watching themselves dance, perform, move.  
I would like to see us using house groups more frequently. One idea is to have house groups in the library at lunchtimes instead of classes.  
We could provide brag boards- black boards outside for students to draw and write on.
- I would like to see us recognising passion in our teachers and students. We do this through PB4L for great behaviour, and to an extent for great learning. We now need to develop this further for great ideas, questioning, researching, discussion, and for passion about life! We need students leading this area of our school rather than just staff. Students are thought about in the process but their voice is not as strong as it could be.
- PB4L has also helped us get a set of guidelines in place at school for students to follow so that they are very clear what it means to be respectful, safe and responsible in different settings. They now need the opportunity to really explore this is the environment- the third teacher!
- Mutukaroa is a programme for linking “what happens in the class” with families. It helps give families the language of school. I have now seen this successful in several schools (Wellington and Auckland). I would like to pursue this initiative, as it is empowering parents. Parents are our students’ first teachers.
- I am concerned that the focus is heavily on being “respectful, safe, and responsible” and this is carried into our community. We know from our community survey in 2014 this message is very well known. Now we need to foster equal messages about being a “discovering kind of kid”. We need the messages to be as clear as PB4L that they will remember as life long learners.
- We have a rich environment in Matura; we need to build into our school charter or curriculum document all that we have available so that teachers don’t miss an opportunity.

I have been privileged to have had the time to think about our learners and what they need from us as a community school. The world is changing at an astounding speed. Our learners need to have a fluid set of skills that enable them to adjust and adapt as their world changes. The principles of Reggio Emilia will always underpin the changes we all go through in life.

I have enjoyed thinking about staff having control of their new learning, staff having different experiences, staff and their relationships with the world, and staff being able to express their new learning in different ways. This will help me become a stronger leader.

I am privileged to lead  
Susan Dennison