

## **AN ALTERNATIVE APPLICATION FOR TEAM SPIRIT: REGGIO EMILIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In the current research, Reggio Emilia, an alternative application model based on the problems experienced within the content of communication and cooperation in preschool education, was studied. In this purpose, the history, values and principles of Reggio Emilia, its curriculum, teacher-child, teacher-parent, child-child, teacher-teacher communication and cooperation and a sample Reggio Emilia project were explained. In the quest of an alternative application model to provide necessary communication and cooperation and work with all factors comprising education in the sense of a team spirit, it is likely to say that Reggio Emilia is a striking approach. Understanding the philosophy and process of communication and cooperation realized in Reggio Emilia approach would make teachers, parents and administrators attain a different point of view and in this way, would help form a strong and effective communication and cooperation between all the factors comprising preschool education.

**Keywords:** Reggio Emilia, cooperation, communication, early childhood education, teacher, parent

### **INTRODUCTION**

In order to realize education at a desired level and increase its efficiency, education must be considered as a whole as child, teacher, parent, administrator and community, and all these elements must be studied with the sense of team spirit in communication and cooperation.

School-parent cooperation is vital for holistic education in early childhood education (Bartolome et al., 2020; Bartolome et al., 2017; Berčnik & Devjak, 2017; Bicaaj et al., 2018; Mitchell & Furness, 2015). In a study carried out by Pepito (2019), it was pointed out that it is necessary to strengthen school-parent cooperation in order to make it functional and sustainable. In another study by Visković and Višnjić Jevtić (2017), it was indicated that current formal education is inadequate for the professional competency needed for the cooperation with parents. In a study by Köyceğiz et al. (2016), it was pointed out that even though family involvement studies were given enough place in the program, it was not at the desired level at the application dimension.

In a study carried out by Lau and Ng (2019), it was found that lack of knowledge of parents about school-parent cooperation and time limitation are the major handicaps for school-parent cooperation. In another study by Can and Kılıç (2019), it was determined that since parents do not give enough support and do not pay necessary attention to preschool education, some problems are experienced in education. In a study conducted by Tezel Şahin

and Yıldırım (2018), the fact that parents work/they do not have enough time was found to be a handicap for the application of family involvement studies. In another study by Bang (2018), it was found that the fact that families are passive, they have unreasonable wishes and they directly go to the administration to make a complaint were the factors preventing teacher-parent cooperation. In a study by Demir Yıldız (2018), it was determined that negative and indifferent attitudes of parents towards preschools were among the problems that school headmasters encountered in the administration process. In another study carried out by Mahmood (2013), it was determined that the first-year teachers pointed out that family involvement was difficult and despite their efforts, parents were not sensible. In a study by Kurtulmuş (2016), it was found that parents need supports in involving classroom activities.

In another study carried out by Bahçıvan et al. (2018), it was determined that parents desired to have more information about their children and involve in more social activities within the content of school- parent cooperation. In a study by Ok (2016), it was found that majority of parents pointed out that they had meetings twice a year and that in these meetings they talked the expenditures and incomes of the school and they wanted a qualitative education, a good educational order and rules. It was also found that parents and teacher communicated each other by means of telephone talk, corresponded and that these writings were mostly daily information notes but that there were not home visits and they could only make face-to-face talks in urgency.

In a study carried out by Einarsdottir and Jónsdóttir (2019), it was found that educators were unsure as to how to communicate with the parents with different culture and how to be in accord with them. In another study by Günay Bilaloğlu and Aktaş Arnas (2019), it was determined that teachers did not have adequate information and awareness about family involvement handicaps, the responsibilities they had in school-parent communication, the problems they experienced with parents in terms of family involvement. It was also found that parents were eager to communicate with the school and participation in education of their children, but they did not know about how to involve in the education of their children, they were not supported by the school and teachers in an adequate way and they had communication problems with the school administration and teachers in terms of family involvement.

In a study by Parbucu et al. (2018), it was found that teachers had some insufficiencies about communication with children. In another study carried out by Öztürk and Gangal (2016), it was found that teachers behaved away from professional attitude, they exhibited inconsistent behaviours, they tried to carry out an unconscious classroom management being unaware of the effects and results of applications on children, there was no consistence among their plans, applications and thoughts, they rather went on with product-oriented works and they mostly focused on the result rather than the process itself, they became harsh and unorganised in classroom management and classroom discipline while carrying out the activities which they planned out of their own will, they did not believe and they did not want such as celebrating certain occasions and school celebrations, and they had problems about the activity with which no planning was made.

In a study carried out by Zayimoğlu Öztürk et al. (2015), it was determined that preschool teachers indicated their problems with their colleagues as using the same class (25.5%), having competition because of having no common plan and experiencing enviousness (21.6%). In another study carried out by Zembat (2012), it was found that preschool teachers had some conflicts with the parents, administrators and their colleagues.

In a study carried out by Ata and Karayol (2019), it was found that the undesired behaviour that teachers encountered in the classrooms the most was “disobeying the instructions”. In another study by Atış Akyol et al. (2018), it was found that preschool and elementary school teachers expressed that they mostly experienced physical bullying in their classes. In a study by Yılmaz Ünal and Deniz (2016), it was determined depending on the views of parents and teachers that 23.8% of the children had compliance problem and the compliance problems they experienced the most were obstinacy, enviousness and introversion. In a study carried out by Priolo Filho et al. (2016), it was found that the aggressive behaviours encountered during the free time activities the most were pushing/pulling, fighting over objects/taking an object from someone else, and kicking/throwing objects. In a study by Uysal et al. (2010), it was found that the undesired behaviours observed in the children of 5-6 year age group were distracting others’ attention and interrupting the activity (cutting in, making a noise, walking around), making fun of someone, complaining about a friend, teasing, hitting and fighting, harming materials, disobeying instructions and rules. In another study by Moon (2001) children’s control of others was found to be the most serious problem in peer relations.

Upon the review of the studies conducted, it is likely to see that there became some problems regarding both the program and application in school-parent cooperation, parents lacked information about school- parent cooperation and they did not pay necessary importance and support to school- parent cooperation and there was a time problem, they needed contribution about the involving in the classroom activities, they wanted to learn more about their children and to involve in social activities more, they experienced communication problems with school administration and teachers, educators were not able to make an adequate and qualitative parent-teacher cooperation and they did not have enough information and awareness, teachers had some insufficiencies about interaction to children, experienced various problems in their relations with their colleagues and administrators, and children exhibited some undesired behaviours which would prevent their cooperation with their peers. Depending on all these results, upon the review of the alternative models for the reduction of the factors preventing communication and cooperation to minimum and making child, teacher, parent and environment work as a teamwork, it is likely to see that Reggio Emilia approach is absolutely striking in this sense.

## **History of Reggio Emilia Approach**

Reggio Emilia approach started with the construction of first Reggio Emilia school by parents themselves by selling a tank, a few trucks and a few horses following the Second World War. Loris Malaguzzi guided educators and parents. Thanks to strong commitment and cooperation through long ages, parents and educations in Reggio Emilia developed the current, excellent program which became a reference point and a guide for many educators in different places in Italy and in various countries (Gandini, 1993).

## **Values and principles of the Reggio Emilia Approach**

- The image of the child
- Children’s relationships and interactions within a system
- The role of parents

- The role of space: amiable schools
- Educators and children as partners in learning
- Not a pre-set curriculum but a process of inviting and sustaining learning
- The power of documentation
- The many languages of children
- Projects (Gandini, 2003).

### **Reggio Emilia Philosophy and its Curriculum**

Reggio Emilia approach results from the views of a lot of great thinkers, but it is more than a mixture of eclectic theories (Hewett, 2001). In Reggio Emilia approach, there is the opinion of "Children well-being has to be provided; such well-being is connected with the well-being of parents and teachers". Children have the right to have a qualitative education (Gandini, 1993). The objective of Reggio Emilia is to create an amiable school where research, learning, re-review and re-evaluation are realized, children, families and teachers work together in intensive relations and feel themselves at ease (Malaguzzi & Gandini, 1993). There is no unit plan, weekly-detailed lesson plan in Reggio Emilia (Cadwell, 1997). Teachers explain the general objectives, hypothesize as to how to carry out the project and make the necessary preparations. Curriculum appears in the process of the project and goes on in a flexible way accordingly. Teachers are aware of the potentials of children and they arrange the all activity and educational environment in a way to answer the potentials of children (Gandini, 1993). The project is planned and realized with teachers and children together (Cadwell, 1997). Project could start out of a coincidental event, of an idea or problem emerged by one or more than one child or of directly by teachers. It could last a few days or a few months (Gandini, 2003). Sense of time and rhythm by children is taken into consideration in the planning and conduction of the activities and projects (Bartlett & Gandini, 1993).

Children work in groups and learn by doing and discussing. Cooperation is a strong method allowing Reggio educators to reach the targets they determine for themselves (Gandini, 2003). A relation-based education is realized by bringing the elements in interaction in line with a common objective (Malaguzzi & Gandini, 1993). The cooperation in Reggio Emilia schools is realized with the belief that the best experiences could be offered to children by making cooperation. The details of the program, the organization of the meetings with parents and almost everything up to the nutrition of children are planned carefully in cooperation (Gandini, 1993). A common task starts among adults, teachers, parents, atelier officials and pedagogues (Rankin, 1998). Enjoying the relations and working together are of great importance. It is essential that children enjoy being at school, like their schools and the interactions realized there (Malaguzzi, 1994).

After preparing a rich environment in terms of materials and facilities, teachers observe and listen to children in order to understand the process of the works. They discover the views, hypotheses and theories of children by asking questions. They regard learning as a spiral progress rather than a direct process and they regard themselves as a partner of the learning process. They record their observations with regard to children, share them with other teachers and comments on them (Gandini, 2003). Written observation, voice and video tapes, photographs and two and three-dimensional works of children make their works visible, so making them accessible for commenting and thinking (Goldhaber, 2007). By

means of documentation method, the thoughts and discussions of children and the photographs of the activities are examined carefully. These documents help determine the direction of the study, make parents be aware of the experiences of their children and maintain their involvement, help teachers understand children better and evaluate their work, and support their professional development. Children become aware of the fact that their efforts are appreciated. In addition, an archive is formed for the school (Gandini, 2003).

### **Teacher-Child Cooperation**

In Reggio Emilia, children are not considered alone but with other children, their parents, teachers and school and community environment. Each school in Reggio Emilia is a system where all these relations which are connected and supported to each other and mutually (Gandini, 1993). Teacher is not a protector and care taker teaching basic skills to children but a learner with children (Gandini, 2003). A teacher is a collaborator, guide, facilitator and a researcher (Hewett, 2001). He is a guide, a shaper but does not control. Educators must also have fun and be surprised like children. In order to make children carry on their games, educators must catch the ball that children throw and throw it back. The objective in Reggio Emilia is to help every individual and so set up information as a whole group. Reggio Emilia educators use the expression of “I am us”. It is quite important to learn as a group and create the consciousness of “us”. The project realized depends on the group. Every child is a significant part of the project. The content or the subject of the project is not so important as the thought, feeling, work of the child and his progress process with others. Every child tries to do his best. At this stage, the role of teacher is to support the involvement and so development of every child in a group research (Rankin, 1998). In this purpose, adults in Reggio Emilia ask suitable true questions and listen to the answers given by the children carefully. In this way, teacher learns from and about children (Cadwell, 1997). In this basis, they decide how to plan the following works (Gandini, 1993). They encourage children to make them involve the activities children would decide and they focus on both cognitive and social development of children (Rankin, 1998). The talks that children make while studying make teachers and children complete one another. These talks create an exchange of views between both children themselves and teachers. Both sides enjoy this application (Cadwell, 1997). Relational networks support mental development (Rankin, 1998). During the process, while children develop and test their theories, teachers enter a similar discovery and questioning process (Goldhaber, 2007).

### **Teacher-Parent Cooperation**

Cooperation in Reggio Emilia approach is considered with the approach of “If just the child and teacher relation is thought in educational process, it is not possible to think of a real world” (Malaguzi & Gandini, 1993). Parents and teachers work together with the principle of communication and interaction (Rankin, 1998). Reggio Emilia schools is a part of a public system trying to meet the social needs of parents. Parents take place actively in the education of their children is an active part of the experiences of their children and they help all the children to have welfare (Gandini, 1993). Educators are always open to new ideas and projects are of importance in terms making a contribution to the consciousness of joint working among adults (Rankin, 1998). Parents could involve in the activities actively, discuss educational and psychological issues, take place in special occasions, excursions and celebrations (Gandini, 1993). It is essential that both children and adults feel themselves

active and important. What is to be taken into consideration here is that adults must be active commensurately. Since it would lead to make the child remain passive in learning process, adults' being too much active is a risk factor for children (Malaguzzi, 1994). Plenty of recycled materials are used in Reggio Emilia schools. Teachers make a contact with parents to procure these materials. They encourage parents to come to school with their children and place the materials they bring on the shelves. Knowing that the materials at school are brought from home reinforces the sense of belonging of children and parents. There is a space for parents and teachers to exchange ideas (Bartlett & Gandini, 1993). Reggio teachers encourage parents to make a cooperation with the communities supporting the school (Gandini, 2011). The products obtained at the end of the project allow parents to learn about the learning process of their children (Schroder Yu, 2008). In addition, Reggio Emilia's sense of education based on relations fighting against such things as violence, loneliness, indifference etc. symbolizing modern life is welcomed by parents (Malaguzzi & Gandini, 1993).

### **Child-Child Cooperation**

Child is a social being and knowledge is built socially (Hewett, 2001). Interaction is a need which each child carries in him and children would like to be in a positive interaction with both their peers and adults. The interaction they set forms the basic experiences of their life. Children learn together by making a contact with both themselves and others through tangible experiences (Malaguzzi & Gandini, 1993). In particular, children learn from each other by interacting with each other in small group works. For that reason, Reggio Emilia schools are arranged to enable children encounter each other and communicate (Gandini, 1993). Each age group has their own class. These classes are divided into parts depending on the interests and activity fields of children. Children are oriented to the activities they wish to do when they come to school in the morning, and they communicate with their friends they would like work. The relations children make are so strong and it is felt that they are willing to see each other and communicate (Bartlett & Gandini, 1993). Children can work with teachers, with other children or only with a few children, even alone if they wish to do so (Gandini, 1993). Problem status lead to cognitive conflicts and these cognitive conflicts start cooperation process (Malaguzzi & Gandini, 1993). Thanks to transparent walls in Reggio Emilia schools, children are able to see what is being done at school while they are studying and, in this way, the community consciousness is created (Bartlett & Gandini, 1993). The interaction between the project group and the whole group is the key point. In this way knowledge and ideas are shared (Rankin, 1998). Children become aware of their talents while working in cooperation with other children, go beyond their limits and feel the satisfaction of learning while struggling (Schroeder Yu, 2008). Children involve in the identity formation process of both their own and of others. The sense of identity of the children who are recognized by their peers and adults develops. When children feel themselves in safe and have the sense of belonging, they involve in works actively. They discover that their and the group's autonomy will increase by means of communication. The group develops its own ways of communicating, thinking, and acting and so it comes self-sustaining. A relation based education is realized in the form of groups having individual or different abilities by means of a great many activities such as drawing, painting, modelling, drama, playing puppet, counting, playing symbolic games and through discussion, agreeing and disagreeing. Educators decide on the activities to be used by observing how children are motivated and what their interests are. Small group works made up of two, three or four children are quite suitable for a relation based education. Children realize complex interactions in small groups.

Constructive conflicts happen. They attain self-regulatory skill. They get in new curiosities. Their listening, verbal and non-verbal communication skills develop. Problems drops to the minimum level (Malaguzzi & Gandini, 1993).

### **Teacher-Teacher Cooperation**

Two teachers are on duty in each class. One teacher is not the assistant of another. Both are at the same level. Teachers constitute a strong cooperation with other teachers and the personnel. They comment the works of children together and exchange ideas (Gandini, 1993). They trust in the views and guidance of one another. A platform where an open discussion is initiated between teachers is formed by means of documentation method (Schroder Yu, 2008). Some children are interested in the projects that are going on while others can work in the atelier, go to another class or even go in the kitchen to work with the cook. In such a case, cooperation between the teachers is made active and while one teacher works with a small group, the other teacher oversees other children (Bartlett & Gandini, 1993). In a space called as atelier where there are various tools and source materials, the teacher called atelierista equipped with the visual arts education works with other teachers and children together (Gandini, 1993). It is of importance that teachers enjoy working with other teachers together (Malaguzzi, 1994). At the same time, cooperation is realized with the team of pedagogical coordinators supporting the relations between all the teachers, parents, and community and city administrators (Gandini, 1993).

### **Dinosaur Project (Rankin, 1998)**

Dinosaur project is a four-month (44 sessions) project starting in mid-February and carrying on until June with the fact that 5-6 year old age group brings their dinosaurs to the class and teachers decide to examine the dinosaurs in detail with children. Before the project starts, adults come together to discuss all sides of the project. Questions are prepared to understand what children know about dinosaurs and ask them during the discussions to be held with children. Children start to draw dinosaur pictures as they wish, talk about their drawings and ask questions. After children finish their drawings, the educator talks to each child about their drawings. Following that, teacher asks such questions as “Where did dinosaurs live?”, “What did they eat?”, “Do they still live today?” in order to make them think together. The questions asked comprise a part of the children plays. Plays are extended. All the talks regarding the project are recorded. The recordings are analysed by the educator and they are documented by a few volunteer parents. What is learned from television, films, shops, magazines, books, elder siblings and other relatives about dinosaurs is shared. Following day, children go to the library, borrow a lot of books and bring them to school. They compare what is in the books with their drawings. When they have some question marks in their minds, they use these books. They invite their friends and relatives to share their knowledge. They prepare invitation letters. They prepare one question for each visitor and the visitors coming a few weeks later are welcomed in excitement. In this while, they draw dinosaurs with watercolor paint or chalk. A group which is made up of four boys model into a very large dinosaur using clay and this collective work starts the conversation of big dinosaur. Then, children reflect dinosaur figures on the wall and play shadow game. After discussing what kind of dinosaur they will model, children decide in the end to vote. Following that, they discuss which materials and techniques they will use. They proceed to the working setting as such and they are divided into small working groups. Four girls come together to form a small group. They

make a wonderful, three-part and almost 1.25 cm high very decorated tyrannosaurus rex. They plan to model a dinosaur standing on its feet. The recommendation by the educator to model a dinosaur in its real dimension is welcomed by the children and they discuss about how to realize it. They start to look up into the books to determine how to draw the dinosaur. They place the drawing into a triangle in the form of blocks about 3 metre. The drawing is at the size of 27m x 9m. The group made up of six children change the physical features of the dinosaur when they understand that they cannot use the sports hall before they form the drawing of diplodocus in real size. They have to draw it as 13m x 6m in order to fit it into the playground of the school. Later on, they understand that the main problem is how to fit the dinosaur into a certain space. A few days later, they go to the playground with new drawings. A triangle at the size of 13m x 6m is formed by the group. Horizontal and vertical lines are determined. The upper part of the dinosaur body and the rest of the body is completed, and the hardest task is succeeded. During the following several days, dinosaur is painted on a big plastic part with the participation of a class having five-year old children. Children in the dinosaur group prepare an exhibition showing what is done and the stages they pass through. They choose drawings and sculptures for the exhibition. They prepare invitations and posters. They think of the ways how to pass their experiences to their classmates. Both the children in the dinosaur group and teachers and other children are quite excited. They plan such a festival as an opening ceremony. Adults help them to attach dinosaur to the high fences in a part of the sports hall to show it standing. It is one of the most exciting and magnificent parts, in particular for the children in the dinosaur group since their work now is on their feet. Finally, the dinosaur group come together to write a consent letter to the mayor to hang the dinosaur which is too big to keep at school. Children meet with the mayor who praises their work and say that he will do his best to find the best place to hang the work.

## **CONCLUSION**

In the quest of an alternative application model to provide necessary communication and cooperation and work with all factors comprising education in the sense of a team spirit, it is likely to say that Reggio Emilia is a striking approach. Based on communication and cooperation philosophy and adopting the philosophy of “I am us”, Reggio Emilia approach is a program where children, teachers and parents work together in intensive positive relations, aiming at their wellbeing, children learn by doing by means of projects, they produce new ideas, discuss, investigate, discover and produce, process-oriented rather than result-oriented works are realized, the teacher is a very good observer, a guide both a teacher and a learner, teachers share their experiences with the their colleagues through positive interaction, exchange ideas and guide each other, parents involve in the education process actively in positive relations and in addition, teacher-parent-community cooperation is realized.

Understanding the communication and cooperation philosophy and process realized in Reggio Emilia approach would attain teachers, parents and administrators a different point of view, so helping to form a strong and effective communication and cooperation between all factors comprising preschool education.



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