# About Reggio's Approach

Reggio Emilia, a small town in politically stable, prosperous northern Italy, has become an international focus of interest for educationalists working with young children.

The preschools there were originally established immediately after the Second World War by parents, and parents continue to have an integral part. Now the preschools are part of a network run by the Municipality which caters for almost 100% of three- to six-year-olds and 37% of under-threes. These democratically run centres offer full-day provision for children and families from all sectors of the community. The education of all children, including those with disabilities, is continually explored and developed by the staff, who always include an artist - an atelierista.

A sound and explicit philosophy, much inspired by the late Loris Malaguzzi who coordinated and taught in the Reggio preschools, underpins rigorous practice and has led to inspiring, thought-provoking and beautiful documentation—as seen in their exhibition The Hundred Languages of Children.

The Reggio approach is not just about practice, it is underpinned by a philosophy which still continues to grow and develop. Its early foundations were rooted in well-known sources among them - Maria Montessori's teaching, the British nursery/infant tradition, Piaget's insights into children's construction of knowledge, and Vygotsky's principles about adult and group engagement in children's learning.

Through their search, and on-going evaluation, the educators of Reggio have learned how to explore ideas in theory and practice. Most of all they have learned from the children. They have focused on listening to children's theories, observing how children represent their understanding of the world, and discovering how to support their explorations.

Children, however, are not seen as isolated and egocentric individuals; they are envisaged as members of families and communities, who in turn are connected with the preschool as part of that community.

What you will experience through the accounts of children's encounters with rain, shadows, light, birds, etc. - will also remind you of the intensity, the joy, the probing curiosity, the creativity of children everywhere, as they learn about the world.

It is not helpful to think of the Reggio preschools as a new educational recipe. Educators there insist that visitors should not try to reproduce their methods, but rather that every preschool, through their own observations, develop their own unique culture and research approach. What we can and should do is to examine Reggio's powerful ideas, and consider their potential in the UK for redeveloping early childhood services with fresh insight. This is especially relevant at the present time when our society is looking for sustainable quality, and looking critically at its own ‘vision of children’.

Mary Fawcett, from Brief Guide to 'The Hundred Languages of Children' exhibition UK 2000 tour

# Reggio Key Principles

**All children have potential**
'Our image of the child is rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent and, most of all connected to adults and other children.' (Loris Malaguzzi)
From birth the child has the need and the right to communicate and interact with others. Through energy and curiosity the child constructs her own learning.

**Children are connected**
The child is a member of a family and a community rather than an isolated individual. The child learns through interaction with peers, adults, objects and symbols. Preschool centres are seen as a system of relations embedded in a wider social system.

**The reciprocity of children**
'Children are very open to exchanges and reciprocity as deeds and acts of love which they not only want to receive but also to offer. These form the basis of their ability to experience authentic growth, dependent on the elements listed above, as well as on conflict and error.' (Carlina Rinaldi)

**Children are communicators**
Children have the right to use many forms of symbolic representation: words, movement, drawing, painting, building, sculpture, shadow play, collage, dramatic play, music (the hundred languages). In using many materials they discover, communicate what they know and understand, what they wonder about, question and imagine.

**The environment is the 'third' teacher**
Space is designed to encourage encounters, communication and relationships. There is order and beauty in the organisation of materials; every corner of space has an identity and purpose. The piazza and the atelier are at the heart of the preschool centre.

**Educators are partners, nurturers and guides**
Educators and artists (atelierista) facilitate children's exploration of themes - short- or long-term projects - and guide experiences of open-ended discovery and problem-solving. They know how to plan, observe and listen closely to children; how to ask questions, discover children's ideas, hypotheses and theories and provide occasions for discovery and learning.

**Educators are researchers**
In pairs, through discussion and interpretation of their own work and the work of the children, they see themselves as researchers, and are engaged in continuous on-going training and theoretical exploration.

**Documentation as communication**
Careful consideration and attention is given to the presentation of the thinking of the children and the adults who work with them. Transcriptions of children's words and dialogues, photographs, drawings - many different media - are used. Parents can see what has been happening and educators increase their understanding and exchange ideas. The children feel valued and take pleasure in the process of learning.

**Parents as partners**
Active partnership in children's learning experience. Exchange of ideas and sharing of different wisdoms. Parents are 'resource people' too. The centre is an open welcoming place.

**Education is about asking questions**
'The task of these resource people is not simply to satisfy or answer questions, but instead to help children discover answers and, more importantly still, to help them ask themselves good questions.' (Carlina Rinaldi) 'This leads to a process which may be called an 'emergent curriculum'