

Bridie Saveneh's Professional Philosophy

Introduction:

My professional teaching philosophy has continually evolved throughout my four years of university study. My experiences have developed my philosophy from several basic ideas to a series of passionate beliefs, values and aspirations. Through voicing these beliefs, I can confidently confer that my philosophy is strongly influenced by the Reggio Emilia approach to teaching and learning, and the different theorists that this approach has evolved around. I believe that the early years are the most important period of a child's development and that the experiences they undergo in this time heavily influence who they are. I believe that children's learning is heavily shaped by the experiences and encounters they have with their family, peers, teachers and community. I believe that team work is necessary amongst both teachers and children as it allows for the sharing of ideas, efficiency of tasks and development of relationships. I believe that children are unique, have diverse learning styles, express their thoughts in different ways, and develop at different paces. I believe that children's knowledge, communication skills and relationships develop through play and that it is important for children to explore their outdoor environment in its natural state. I believe that critical planning must go into the design of the learning environment, in order to stimulate learning and provide children and educators with a sense of belonging. I believe in consistency amongst educators in order to provide children with a reliable education, familiar teaching approaches and assist with the development of relationships. I believe that all children have the right to achieve success, and should be supported by their teachers in order for this to occur. Throughout this document I will describe each of these beliefs, and how they have been shaped by the Reggio Emilia approach to teaching and learning, and the theories related to each of these beliefs.

Firstly, I would like to express that to me, the early years are the most important period of a child's development. The human brain develops dramatically during this time and the experiences children undergo are crucial to the way they will develop (Stanley, 2007). Positive experiences assist with positive development, and negative experiences can cause negative development. It is not only children's early years that will be affected

from negative experiences, but these events can lead to issues affecting the child throughout the remainder of their life (Stanley, 2007). The learning that occurs during the early years needs to be positively supported by children's teachers and families. This is relevant to Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of child development, which proposes that children are influenced by all of the social systems that surround them. These systems have a significant effect on children's development, as well as their vulnerability in life (Talay-Ongan, 2004). As an early childhood educator, I will strive to ensure that children are receiving a positive start to life. I will also dedicate myself to ensuring that those children who are experiencing, or have previously experienced negative incidents are provided with the help that is necessary in order to prevent them from suffering future side effects of these experiences.

Children learn through their teachers, their families, their peers and their environment. Classroom teachers need to consider this in their practice (Edwards, 2009). I value the development of positive relationships between teachers and their children's families, as it assists teachers to better understand their students and their backgrounds. There is more to a child than the person you see in the classroom, and no one knows a child better than their own family. A child's home and community life affects how, what, when, why and where they learn, not just the formal education they receive at school (Edwards, 2009). This information is based on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory which contends that children learn from observing their families' and communities' daily practices, and develop their own ideas and knowledge of the world based on these experiences. Every child's family is different; therefore their understanding of the world will also be different to other children's (Arthur, Beecher, Death, Dockett & Farmer 2012). The Reggio Emilia approach to teaching and learning encourages close relationships between children, teachers and families. This has assisted the development of original curriculums, effective pedagogies and allows children to reflect, question, express feelings, problem-solve, experiment and theorise (Millikan, 2001). I will strive to develop positive relationships with the families of my students, through informal conversations, regular parent-teacher meetings, individual child portfolios, classroom reflections, letters, emails and telephone conversations (Arthur, et al., 2012).

While considering the concepts of socio-cultural theory, team work is essential amongst both teachers and children, as it allows for the sharing of ideas, efficiency and

development of relationships (Millikan, 2001). Malaguzzi, the founding director of the Reggio Emilia programs proposed the theory that learning environments should form a community where teachers and children can work together on shared projects (Edwards, 2009). Educators should work collaboratively with children to research, investigate and develop knowledge, as opposed to the educator being the sole transmitter of knowledge (Janover, 2000). The Reggio Emilia approach values positive relationships between children, teachers and parents and the advantages this has on effective collaboration (Janover, 2000). I value teamwork amongst teachers, children and parents, and will ensure it occurs regularly in my classroom through the implementation of group projects and games.

Children are unique, hold diverse learning styles, and develop both physically and mentally at different paces (Edwards, 2009 ; DEEWR, 2009). Our national early childhood curriculum, the Early Years Learning Framework guides educators in their practices by recognising that children have different abilities, capabilities, interests and strengths, and suggesting that educators are responsive to these within their programs (DEEWR, 2009). Gardner's constructivist theory of multiple intelligences contends that children do not possess just one single learning style and instead hold a variety of learning styles. These styles are described as being linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily-kinaesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal (Edwards, 2009). Educators' planning and implementation of activities should take into account the varying learning styles within the classroom and cater for each of these in their teaching. The Reggio Emilia approach to teaching contends that children express their ideas through "one hundred languages" which all take on different forms, such as visual, sensory, auditory, graphic, linguistic, scientific and numerical (Edwards, 2009). As a teacher I will provide activities that cater for children's individual needs and learning styles, by offering children a variety of resources for expressing their ideas, supporting children's interests, and acknowledging their ideas, questions and suggestions.

Play in the early childhood years is essential for the development of children's social and communicative skills, and assists children to develop ideas and knowledge (Fleer, 2010). I value uninterrupted, child-centred play time, so children can discover their world and build relationships in ways that make sense to them. Effective play allows

children to relate their family and community experiences to their everyday activities as well as develop their imagination and sense of identity (Fleer, 2010). Vygotsky contends that play-based learning is closely related to concept formation amongst children (Fleer, 2010). It is essential for early years teachers to consider Hedegaard's notion of implementing a 'double move' which involves relating children's every day activities and interests to the content they plan on teaching (Fleer, 2010, p. 140). When a double move is implemented in a play-based environment it can assist children to develop their knowledge and is likely to result in concept formation (Brooker & Edwards, 2010 ; Fleer, 2010). Outdoor play in natural environments is essential for children as it not only assists with concept formation, but also allows children to investigate and explore their world and can reduce their stress levels and improve overall wellbeing (Brooker & Edwards, 2010). Louv contends that outdoor play experiences are necessary in order to increase learning and develop children's attitudes and actions towards nature (Brooker & Edwards, 2010). The Reggio Emilia approach to teaching contends that children should be allowed adequate time and opportunities to explore and discover their world through play, in order to develop their communication skills, expand their knowledge and articulate their ideas through their different forms of expression (Millikan, 2010). As an early years teacher I will ensure I provide a play-based curriculum both indoors and outdoors, and regularly incorporate the natural environment into the everyday curriculum. This will assist my students to explore their environment as a means for developing their ideas and knowledge.

The design of the learning environment is essential when creating opportunities for effective learning to occur. The learning environment should be seen as a child's "second teacher" and be set up in a way that achieves this (Millikan, 2001, p.9). Malaguzzi theorised that the design of the learning environment significantly impacts children's learning (Edwards 2009). The environment of an early years educational setting should reflect the ideas, beliefs, and attitudes of those who belong in it, and encourage exploration, social interaction, and learning, as well as being a stimulus of educational experiences (Janover, 2000). Teachers should document children's work around the classroom, and in Reggio Emilia-based schools, teachers do this through methods of voice recording, video recording, written transcripts, photos and samples of children's work (Edwards, 2009). Documentation of children's work and achievements

is necessary in early years classrooms as it provokes children to reflect upon their own learning, informs parents of the experiences the children have engaged in, assists children to feel as if their work is valued, provides opportunities for conversations between teachers, children and parents, and it adds to the development of the school's documented history (Janover, 2000). As an early years teacher I will ensure that the design of my learning environment is one that stimulates and encourages effective learning experiences, and one that provides children with a sense of belonging.

Consistent educators within classrooms are essential for ensuring that children are provided with quality education. Children who are forced to experience multiple changes in classroom teachers throughout the year cannot develop stable relationships. As a result, these children will not be able have the same content taught to them each day, in the same style, and will not necessarily be able to trust those teaching them (Rockell, 2009). There needs to be a secure relationship between teachers and the students in their classroom, in order for effective learning to occur. This idea stems from Bowlby's attachment theory, which contends that a secure relationship between a child and their caregiver is necessary in order for the child to feel comfortable and content with their circumstances (Riley, 2011). The Reggio Emilia approach to teaching and learning aims to provide children with consistent educators throughout their early years of education, and children often have the same teachers for multiple years in a row (Millikan, 2001). Educators following this approach see this as necessary for the development of relationships between teachers, children and families, understanding children's needs and providing children with a familiar learning environment (Millikan, 2010).

As a final point, I believe that all children are capable of achieving success in their lives, and it is a teacher's role to assist each of their students to achieve success, by providing equal opportunities in their teaching. This is relevant to Gardner's constructivist theory of multiple intelligences, which proposes that children have different approaches to learning, have different interests, different needs and different goals in life (Edwards, 2009). Teachers following a Reggio Emilia approach are recognised for seeing their students as being productive and capable from the moment they meet them. Teachers should make the effort to recognise children's interests, provide children with a desire for learning, assist children to recognise their goals, and provide all children with the

support they need to achieve their goals (Edwards, 2009). As an early years teacher I will assist each child in my classroom to achieve success, by allowing them equal opportunity to discover their goals and providing the necessary encouragement and support to work towards these.

Conclusion:

In summary, I believe that there are a number of factors that teachers need to consider to ensure that all children are provided with positive learning experiences throughout their education. My philosophy has so far been heavily shaped by the Reggio Emilia approach to teaching and learning, and all of the theorists that this approach has been formed around. I believe effective teaching and learning requires educators to consider the importance of the early years; work collaboratively with children and their families; cater for the variety of learning styles, interests, abilities and needs within their classroom; allow children to engage in effective play-based learning both indoors and outdoors; create a positive learning environment; ensure there is consistency amongst educators; and support all of their students to achieve success. As a beginning early years teacher I will strive to ensure I consider these factors in my classroom. I am looking forward to watching my philosophy develop and acting upon these changes as I enter my teaching career.

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