St Brigid’s Catholic School Evanston

A Journey towards a

Reggio Inspired philosophy of

Reggio Emilia

“Our task, regarding creativity, is to help children climb their own mountains, as high as possible. No one can do more.”

Loris Malaguzzi
From the Principal

St Brigid’s Catholic School made a decision to adopt a Reggio Inspired Approach to learning at the end of 2014. This was after much research and consideration as to how best meet the learning needs of both young children and children across all year levels.

The principles of Reggio Emilia are designed to guide us in our work with children as we adapt them for our own specific learning environment at St Brigid’s Catholic School.

These principles include:

- The image of the competent child
- Pedagogy of listening
- Pedagogy of relationships
- Documentation of learning
- The “Hundred Languages” of children
- The rights of every child
- The environment as the third teacher
- A commitment to professional learning and dialogue

Each of these principles will be described in this booklet and what it means for our school. They are accompanied by quotes from Loris Mallaguzzi, the founder of the Reggio project in Italy, Professor Carla Rinaldi – a profound speaker and current president of the Reggio Children Project and many other educators from whom we have drawn inspiration.

Since commencing our research into and adopting these principles, we have noticed some subtle as well as more obvious changes in the learning culture of our children. We’ve always acknowledged our children as caring and concerned for the ‘other’ but we now see children happier to express that behaviour more freely. Learning spaces are calmer partly due to the impact of the environmental changes made by teachers and partly due to the agency and voice been given to them by their teachers. We have begun to see evidence of children seeing themselves as ‘Co-constructors of Knowledge’ as they take greater responsibility for their own learning. Teachers work collaboratively and are committed to continuing their professional learning through dialogue. Documentation of learning informs teacher’s practice and planning and also makes the learning process visible through capturing the child’s thoughts, words and ideas through their many languages.

We are a community where “Collaborative, Creative and Connected Learners Inspired by Love” work together in relationship with one another, where good learning and teaching takes place in an environment of mutual respect and responsibility between school, home and the wider community for the children in our care.

I trust this booklet provides a window into our world of living, loving and working together.

Paul Bennett
Reggio Emilia

Reggio Emilia is an affluent city in Northern Italy with a multi-ethnic population of over 171,000 people. The Reggio Emilia philosophy was founded by Loris Malaguzzi and the families of the villages of Reggio Emilia after World War 2. To rebuild their city and community after the war, the people identified that the children were key to their future and created a new approach to teach them. A program based on the principles of respect, responsibility and community were developed. It involved teaching where children were encouraged to explore and discover, in a supportive and enriching environment. Over the past 40 years this educational system has received enormous international interest and study tours were created to enable many people to learn about this particular approach of engaging with children.

We have two staff who have travelled to Reggio Emilia to experience the study tour and envisage more to attend in the future. In the meantime, 19 staff attended the Reggio Emilia ‘Landscapes of Imagination’ Conference in Melbourne in July 2015.

We use the Reggio Emilia approach as an inspiration for all our educators at St. Brigid’s. As a Research School in the Re-Imagining Childhood 0-18 Project, we share a thirst for knowledge and engagement and an eagerness to be part of the global commitment, to provide quality education for the children to engage in the excitement of learning.

It is not easy for people to connect everything that they see going on in Reggio Emilia. Rather take some things away and help create a nido (nest) of education worldwide.

~ Maddalena Tedechi
The image of the child

*Being in the image of God, the human individual possesses the dignity of a person who is not just something but someone....capable of the self – knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving and entering into communion with other persons.*

~ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1994 pp3

*The child is the active protagonist of their own discovery and learning*

Children possess extraordinary potential for learning. They have the right to be respected and valued in her, or his, own identity, uniqueness and difference. At St Brigid’s Catholic School we believe children from birth are competent and valued citizens who have enormous potential in constructing their own knowledge. The St. Brigid’s community shares the responsibility with families to raise and educate the children in our care. Educators are not alone in this journey.
“Children are the essence of Humanity. Children are Community”

~ Carla Rinaldi, 2012

**Pedagogy of Listening**

“*Why do we forget so easily that in order to talk, we first had to learn to listen?*”

~ Eulalia Bosch

Listening is an ongoing process that nurtures reflection while welcoming openness towards oneself and others; it is imperative for dialogue and change. Listening to children’s theories allows educators the possibility of discovering how children think, question and make sense of the world around them. At St. Brigid’s we value and use children’s conversations and interactions as a springboard for critical professional reflections and future learning opportunities.

*Listening is an act of love, it is an emotion. It allows us to glimpse into the children’s thought processes and co-construct learning with children NOT for children. Listening can encompass so much more than using our ears. We are encouraged to listen with all our senses.*

~ Carla Rinaldi
Through listening we are then able to lead children into a deeper understanding by asking the right questions. Provocations that offer children the opportunity to hypothesise and come up with their own ideas and possibilities tells the child, “I respect your voice. I value what you have to share, I am interested in what possibilities you can offer.” Thus the child expands their imagination and the educator gets an insight into the child’s thinking.

Documentation of Learning

A Reggio Inspired approach to learning places a strong emphasis on documentation. This may be different to your understanding of documentation such as learning completed in a child’s work or exercise book. The name of the latter itself restricts by definition the possibilities of what a child’s efforts can be and the value they might bring to both the child and the teacher’s understanding.

At St. Brigid’s we have the responsibility to foster and make visible the PROCESS of learning rather than focussing solely on the final product. As educators we do this by means of pedagogical documentation. Our teachers use documentation as a valuable learning tool. It is making children’s learning visible through anecdotes, digital photos and video, observations, drawings, raw pieces of data and transcriptions.
“We are all connected no matter that we are different colours and come from different backgrounds. We are like connector textas. You can put them in a circle and it turns into a circle of friendship..... I feel connected to school because I’m with all my friends and at home because I’m with my family....

Documentation informs educators’ choices for designing learning contexts in collaboration with the children and the community. It is about leaving traces of children’s thinking, about giving visibility to actions and about being committed to ongoing dialogue and reflection.

Documentation is a powerful tool for discussing and sharing our “language’ of making explicit the ethical act of showing ourselves and expressing our thinking.

**Pedagogy of Relationships**

At St. Brigid’s we believe that authentic learning and effective teaching cannot take place unless educators and children are in a positive trusting relationship. We also believe that we are a community of educators as we are a community of learners; together adults and children alike. We believe that these relationships are based on mutual respect and responsibility for working collaboratively. We are all nourished by our relations with others.

At St. Brigid’s we value highly the involvement of our families to support us on our learning journey. Families play a vital role in their child’s development and education. We encourage family involvement and challenge them to look deeper into their child’s way of thinking and understanding. So, together with families we collectively ‘raise our children’ to think beyond what they believe they are capable of.
How do I connect here? (R-2)

“I feel connected to the trees at St. Brigid’s because they are near to each other and are connected.” Liam. (Rec)

“Jesus loves us every time and that makes me feel connected at St. Brigid’s.” Alex. (Rec)

“I am connected to everything, like in the middle of a spider’s web. I can see everything and can feel what everybody is feeling.” Jack. (Rec)

“I am connected to the school because I have lots of friends and I am connected to God and the environment.” Louisa. Year 2

“I am connected with God through prayer.” Tino. Year 1

“I am connected to my friends and the community.” Miah. Year 1

Communication is dynamic and within a conversation two worlds are brought together and in turn create their own world of possibilities.

~ Maddalena Tedeschi

The Hundred Languages of Children

As human beings, children possess a hundred languages, a hundred ways of thinking, of expressing themselves, of understanding and encountering relationships. This creates connections between the various personal experiences in children’s lives. The Hundred Languages are a metaphor for the extraordinary potential of children. We value the many different ways children can express their thinking, knowledge, theories and understandings. We give dignity to all the verbal and nonverbal languages they possess. At St. Brigid’s, the hundred languages are communicated and expressed in infinite ways.
The wider the range of possibilities we offer children, the more intense will be their motivations and the richer their experiences. We must widen the range of topics and goals, the types of situations we offer and their degree of structure, the kinds and combinations of resources and materials, and the possible interactions with things, peers, and adults.

~ Loris Malaguzzi

The Hundred Languages of Children

No way. The hundred is there.

The child is made of one hundred.

The child has

a hundred languages
a hundred hands
a hundred thoughts

a hundred ways of thinking
of playing, of speaking.

A hundred,
Always a hundred ways of listening of marvelling, of loving a hundred joys for singing and understanding a hundred worlds to discover a hundred worlds to invent a hundred worlds to dream.

The child has a hundred languages (and a hundred hundred hundred more) but they steal ninety-nine. The school and the culture separate the head from the body.

They tell the child: to think without hands to do without head to listen and not to speak to understand without joy to love and to marvel only at Easter and at Christmas.

They tell the child: to discover the world already there and of the hundred they steal ninety-nine.

They tell the child: that work and play reality and fantasy science and imagination sky and earth reason and dream are things that do not belong together.

And thus they tell the child that the hundred is not there. The child says: No way. The hundred is there.

~ Loris Malaguzzi

Founder of the Reggio Emilia Approach

Rights of the Child

At St. Brigid’s Catholic School we value our children as competent citizens of our community with a strong voice. Each child is the subject of rights, first and foremost possessing the right to be respected and valued in their own identity, uniqueness, difference and developmental journey. Children, both individually and collaboratively have the right to feel safe and confident in their own learning environment and in their relationship with others.
It is the right of all children to be seen surrounded by competent adults who will marvel at their side.  

~ Carla Rinaldi

The Environment as the Third teacher

At St. Brigid’s our focus on the environment forms an integral part of a child’s learning. They are places that foster interdependence, exploration, curiosity and communication. It is the place for children and educators to research and live together. This can be the innovative layout of learning spaces, furniture and the visible connection with nature and the outdoors.
The connection with the outdoors/indoors is a vital component of the learning environment for our children. We use furniture that allows for collaboration and conversation. Natural light and space are crucial elements of a Reggio Inspired learning environment. Documentation of learning is carefully considered for its role in sharing the learning process; an essential part of reflection and ongoing learning possibilities.

Children can express their own reflections on the effects of the environment on their learning........
Professional Learning

At St. Brigid’s we have a unique and talented group of educators who bring their own individual gifts and talents to the learning table. The phrase ‘Teacher as researcher’ resonates with each of our educators in their quest to deepen their understanding of the Reggio Emilia Approach to learning. Our people are and model a collaborative, connected, and creative vision inspired by love for our children and community.

As educators, the Reggio philosophy inspires and demands in each of us that learning is life-long. We continue to learn each and every day. We listen and reflect on ideas shared by colleagues or professional reading. We reflect and critique each other’s work in an open dialogue with the aim of continual improvement. When the children see us as learners in partnership, they too begin to understand the value of expressing thoughts, ideas, successes and failures that ultimately nurtures and inspires the learner that is within each child.
At the start of each year, we spend time getting to know our children and how they learn. Over a period of 3 weeks, the normal curriculum is suspended and an intimate understanding of children’s strengths and abilities is explored. The building blocks for healthy trusting relationships is established and the role of teacher and child as co-constructors of knowledge for the year ahead are laid down. We provide planning programs that reflect the Australian Curriculum Framework which are informed and inspired by the children that genuinely places the child at the centre of learning.