

## EUROPEAN PROJECT: BOLOGNA, ITALY NOVEMBER 2019 CREATIVE APPROACHES IN EARLY YEARS



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Cheryl Buckle and Bex Underwood

### A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

**Bex Underwood**

As a Mum of two young children the trip to Italy has been a real time to reflect. My own life took a back seat when Beatrice came along four years ago as you have a little person that depends on you and indirectly I lost a little confidence in myself. Strangers on the trip have questioned how I could leave my children especially Monty, my 10 month old son at home for a week? Well, actually quite easily when you have a husband that dotes on his children and a supportive family. This was a chance for me to reconnect with my passion and concentrate fully on my own professional development without thinking what was for dinner, whether Beatrice had clean uniform for

the following day or what time I have to leave school to collect the children from their Grandparents' house.

The whole week has been enlightening, I have met some wonderful like minded individuals from local schools, and Sweden, and have been looked after by great leaders from the LEAP agency- Emilia and Rita. The two ladies exposed us to the Reggio Emilia approach through school visits, lectures and workshops, a visit to the Loris Malaguzzi International Centre and cultural visits a plenty! A highlight of mine was working together with new friends in a treasure hunt style activity in Bologna where we managed to gain access to the

underground city- something which hasn't been allowed for many years.

It's now time to return to my family and school life, tired but fulfilled. I'm excited to share with colleagues my experiences and will look in envy as the Miss Pattle and Mrs Clayton head back out here in March to experience what Mrs Buckle and myself have.



### A CULTURAL CONTEXT

**Cheryl Buckle**

The most exciting part of the training course for me was taking my learning to another country. I have been lucky to attend many professional development opportunities in my career as a teacher, but never one which immerses you in

another culture for a whole week. I was nervous about going somewhere new and leaving my family for a whole week. In 15 years of being a mum, I have never left them for more than two nights. It was emotional at times, but being able to

immerse myself in a new culture was incredible. The food, the people and the like-minded colleagues on the course enabled me to focus solely on my own learning and professional development. The experience has enabled me to

reflect and evaluate the creativity in our setting and think about what we can take from the approach in Italy. The culture is very different to ours in the UK and I have learnt a lot from the communities they create in their schools.

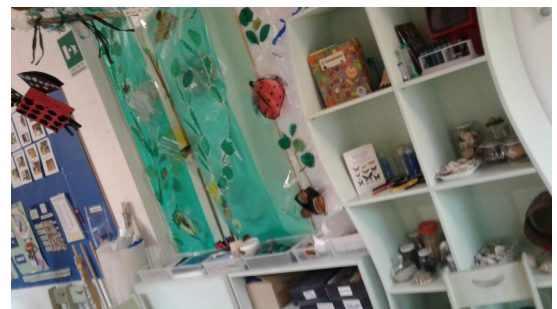
# THE REGGIO EMILIA APPROACH



## REGGIO EMILIA APPROACH

Part of our visit was to the 'Centro Internazionale Loris Malaguzzi' in Modena. This is the home of the Reggio Emilia Approach that we were immersing ourselves in. This approach to Early Years education was founded by Loris Malaguzzi. The approach is not based on a single theory, it is about applying lots of theories that are linked to the child. During our visit, we were encouraged to think about our idea of childhood and what kinds of opportunities and possibilities we want for our

children. Malaguzzi encouraged teachers to think about the 'image of child' and the 100 languages they have to express themselves. Meaning that children are incredibly competent at communicating in a 100 different ways. The Reggio Emilia approach is focused on the idea that children are researchers who come up with theories they need to explore. Our role as teachers is to provide a context and an environment for the child researchers.

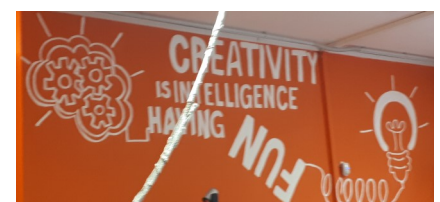


## CREATIVITY IS INTELLIGENCE HAVING FUN

In the Reggio Emilia schools, teachers encourage creativity by providing children with a proposition. E.g. Does the digital world help nature? The teacher will make suggestions with resources and give the children time to explore. The teachers listen to the children and make observations of the approaches and theories the children are coming up with. This approach is very different to English schools where we are limited by the National Curriculum and

the knowledge and skills the children need to learn. This approach in Italy is so open ended. The children can spend months exploring the same topic. In one school we visited, the children had been learning about insects for 9 months. We thought about this and saw that both approaches had pros and cons. Our National Curriculum encourages a breadth of study, with children having opportunities to explore and discover talents and

interests. The Italian way allowed for time to be spent on topics that interested the children without the restriction of having to cover certain topics in certain year groups.



## CREATIVITY IN ACTION

During our time in Italy, discussing with colleagues our observations of the settings we visited, we noticed several things that we can take away with us for our own practice. The Italian schools set up their learning environments like an extra teacher which enables children to be creative independently. They encourage children to approach tasks in different ways so each child's learning journey is personalised. There is a huge focus on families and communities and how they can play a role in the children's creativity. We saw families providing fruit and vegetables from their allotments, which the children then made juice and soup with for their lunch. The children are encouraged to give back to the city in which they live and work on many creative community projects.

We saw one school that had set up a community café, which enabled the children to create menus and food to sell. In another school, children had helped a failing shoe shop by creating art work to entice customers into the shop. There was a real purpose to the creativity and a quote that stuck with us was 'children can be creative when their logic and imagination are kept together.'



## LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

In the area we visited, all schools had a space called an Atelier. The space is set up to enable the children to explore and research independently. In here they can go on a learning journey with all resources readily accessible. We visited an Atelier in Reggio Emilia that was open to the community and advertised a research space for people aged 0 to 99. The Atelierista, who manages the space and supports the researchers, told us that his role is to welcome the human being and all their characteristics. He was not an specialist and was not there to 'teach'

skills. We saw the role as more of a facilitator of learning. The space we saw was incredible! We spent many hours exploring and learning using the resources. It was filled with light, colour and natural resources. A really rich context for learning.



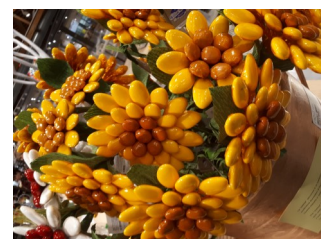
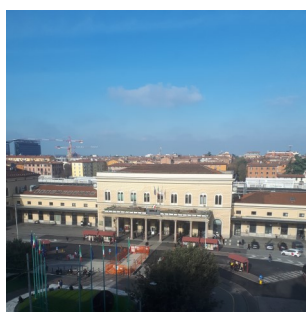
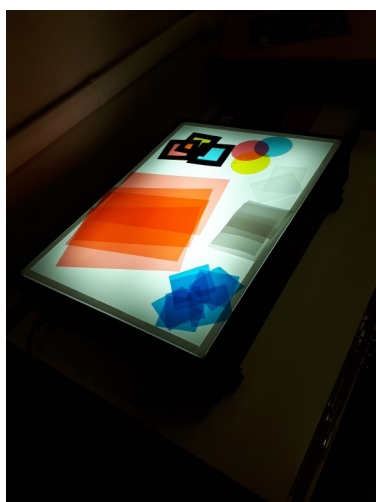
## IMPACT FOR MAWSLEY

We are going to share our Italian story first and foremost with our classes. We will teach them some of the Italian we have learnt and we have a catchy song about 'un elefanti' to share. We have been thinking about the learning environment and how we can embrace the Italian philosophy of beauty, light and life in our classrooms.

We are lucky that our colleagues Miss Pattle and Mrs Clayton are able to at-

tend the same course in the Spring. We are excited for their return as we will all have had a similar experience. From that point we will be able to discuss and plan for which elements of the Reggio approach would be of benefit for our children and community. We are excited to think about creativity and encouraging that in our children. We have both returned inspired by a new approach and look forward to discussing our ideas with the team.





Visit our Facebook Page for more photographs and the diary from the visit.