



FRONT PORCH SERIES BROADCAST CALLS

Promoting Creativity in Early Childhood Classrooms

by Dr. Nancy Hertzog



QUESTIONS FROM FEBRUARY 27TH FRONT PORCH SERIES BROADCAST CALL

Q: Why is the light box and light play so important to the Reggio Emilia approach?

A: What the light play does for children is it presents shadows and colors in ways that they haven't yet seen, and it allows them to manipulate materials and discover how objects interact with the light - again, developing great stories that they see. When I was there, I saw a child standing in front of it with a horse, making the horse go through the background. It's most valuable because it fosters this condition to inquire and manipulate the materials and give the students different perspectives for creative thought by giving them the opportunity to put things into the light and see the shadows.

Q: How can the ideas behind this approach be applied to those who work with infants and toddlers?

A: This can be done by thinking about the environment for infants and toddlers and thinking about the need to crawl and go through, the notion of what you can intentionally put in that environment to arouse the curiosity of the toddlers. There is an exhibit in Reggio Emilia where they have spaces that children crawl into or talk on, and they were white and black. This helps to show children the contrast of exploring two different aesthetic visuals as well as textures. So that concept would be applicable by putting things in the environment that arouse the curiosity for toddlers to crawl through or touch or feel or smell. In Reggio Emilia, the teachers are really inquirers themselves. They're researchers, they're observing. That's that pedagogy of listening. So they're putting things in the environment and watching how children interact with that environment. That in itself is an interesting concept to bring back to our country and our toddler and infant rooms. The practice of putting something that might provoke some attention and then standing back to watch and let the children manipulate it again - this is an important element for fostering creative thinking.

Q: If we look at parents as researchers, what are some of the Reggio principles that could be adapted at home? How could a home visitor help do that?

A: The reason why I focused on boxes and junk is because it's totally free. The value of representation can't be overstated. Home visitors can talk about setting up a place where children have access to materials that they can create things with. I didn't talk about the atelier - the studio - approach in Reggio, but when I talk to parents, I ask them, "Is there a little room that students can create in? Is there a place where you can put crayons and markers and materials that won't destroy the house, and is there a place for tape and boxes and things that children can put together?" Bringing home an empty box can be as much fun as a toy from the store.

Q: Please expand on the cultural responsiveness of this approach and give examples of practices that you employed at primary schools or that you've seen that infuse or invest in diverse cultures of the children and families that were served into this approach as well.

A: This is why I really start with the children's ideas, because the children bring with them a wealth of ideas from their own experiences. One example that we had at a university primary school was a project on foods of our families. The children did representations of foods that they eat at home, and we saw the diversity. Some of the children were vegetarian. Some of them were kosher. Some of them were vegan. They each drew vegetables and different types of sushi and meats. One of the children's father was a farmer, and he drew the combine as an illustration of how food gets to the table. So by asking children to draw from their experiences, it gets at what the children's home, culture, and home life are. Then together in the classroom, we put all those ideas together and we do murals of all their ideas and group products that share the wealth of their experiences. Starting with the families, even having families share experiences and the students' home experiences is a wonderful place to celebrate the diversity of the children that are in the classroom.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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