

Our Forest and Nature Centre and the Reggio Emilia Approach

Tuesday, October 24, 2023

I thought it would be useful to share with all of you, how we are trying to blend the philosophies of forest and nature schooling with the principles of the Reggio Emilia Approach, in our daily work.

This article offers a broad description of the Reggio Emilia Approach. In our parent handbook you will notice the connections we are trying to make. <https://learningmaterialswork.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/ValuesAndPrinciples.pdf>

Forest School principles from Forest School Canada are here: https://childnature.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/2020-Principles-of-Forest_Nature-School-.pdf

I was able to participate in a two day conference with Pedagogista's from Italy last week. One of the things that I have been challenged recently to think about is:

"Where do you connect?"

If we begin to ask this question of all the people that are involved with Blueberry Creek, we begin to see these "relations" or the invisible structure that binds us together as a "community."

Loris Malaguzzi was the Pedagogista from Reggio Emilia, that began the cultural project of these schools in the 1970's. We read his work, we study with the educators from that city and we learn about other ways of being in schools. Our provincial documents that guide Kindergarten and Childcare are founded on the RE Approach. We are privileged here at Blueberry to be able to work out the ideas in our everyday work.

"We think of a school for young children as an integral living organism, as a place of shared lives and relationships among many adults and very many children. We think of school as a sort of construction in motion, continuously adjusting itself."

(Malaguzzi, 1998, p. 62)

Robyn recently asked us as educators to think about how we could connect with community visitors.

Who would we like to invite to come and share with us?

Who in our community within Blueberry could we offer a way to share their knowledge and gifts with us?

Organically this has been developing in our group. Andreyia (Sam's mom) offered to bring pumpkins for everyone to take home. This gesture of sharing and connecting us all together through the harvest and the tradition of pumpkin carving is one in which binds us together as a group.



Lisa and I discussed how we could introduce our carving tools with the children that honours our intention of teaching tool use in ways that are interesting and useful and connected to what is happening.



Parents arrive in the morning, they are welcome to chat, to be together, to watch their children, to be gentle in partings, we see the bonds forming between families, between moms, dads and grandparents, and between siblings. These few moments of connectedness at the beginning and end of the day.



*These moments are important for
"seeing" each other.*

To be known.

I suggest to Mary (Basil and Sheppy's mom) and Andreyka, that we are thinking about participation here at Blueberry. I ask the questions:

How would parents see themselves participating at Blueberry?

How do we connect with each other?

Mary "I mean it's not really **connected** to the learning part, but I think the **connection** part is good when we have certain outings together, I like that a lot."

Andreyka: "The families are **connecting**."

Mary: "Making an effort to gather. It does feel like we become a **community**, rather than a school."

They both appreciate being able to chat and be together without these time constraints of a five minute drop off and pick up. It's also seeing the same people every week, it adds a consistency, a **familiarity** that is comfortable.

Mary "It's a chance to **connect**."

Mary: "I wonder about jobs for the parents to do?" animal jobs, tidying jobs.

Andreyka: "Or maybe like coming in and doing some kind of activity **with** the kids?"

Kathy: "What would bring you **joy** to come and share with the children?"

Andreyka: "I love to make maple syrup, or cheese, some sort of **making thing with them**..like we do at home. "

We begin to make plans to have Andreyka come, Lisa and I can work on a list of a few jobs that maybe parents could help us with that might take 5-10 minutes a week....this "school" we have is a **community** of learning where we exchange knowledges with each other.

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I move over to Katie, she has brought a guest who is visiting her. He attends the Guelph Forest School. They have amazing school age programs and Katie suggests a field trip up there might be kind of cool, she happens to know one the long time educators there. More connections, more relations, an unexpected gift that could be a possibility for us.

I know Katie has taught Renny to sew. I ask her if she would be interested in coming in the winter months and helping to teach the group to sew. She will! We discuss needle use and steps in learning. Together, we can look at Froebel's work on sewing with young children <https://www.froebel.org.uk/uploads/documents/FT-Sewing-with-Young-Children-%E2%80%93-interactive-pamphlet.pdf>

I offer you this quote again:

“We think of a school for young children as an integral living organism, as a place of shared lives and relationships among many adults and very many children. We think of school as a sort of construction in motion, continuously adjusting itself.”

(Malaguzzi, 1998, p. 62)

I believe Blueberry Creek is continuously adjusting itself, a living organism that changes with interactions, exchanges, and a willingness to share lives. We are living out this value we hold. This was all in the space of twenty minutes.



Responding-An act of participation

Parent comments:

Janet Bufton (Coraline)

Matt and I would be interested in teaching the kids about salt or salt and smoke preserving. We could do bacon (needs to cure for 1-2 weeks, depending on thickness, and if Scott still has the Big Green Egg we could use that to smoke it) for those who eat meat and ferments for everyone. We could also smoke tofu but it doesn't need to be cured. If that's something folks would be interested in! (though perhaps you already do ferments in the winter months)

Kathy Boelsma in response:

Janet, this would be incredible, we would be so delighted to welcome you both for this. I can chat with Matt and the others who have offered to work out times, when would be the preferred month for you both?

Janet :Kathy, yes chat with Matt! We will figure it out. I think we are pretty flexible.

Mary Howard (Basil)

Love these reflections, and that this question is being asked! And wow - Janet, a meat curing class would be AMAZING

Educators comments:

Michelle Wolford

This is wonderful! Once you start looking for connections and being intentional about strengthening them they appear everywhere and the possibilities are endless. Thank you so much for making visible the threads that can be easily overlooked Kathy! I also love when we ask each other to share, it really helps us to see how talented and generous our communities are :)

Kathy response: These "relational intentions" build the school. If we can create a different way of school, a community of learners from many different interactions, we are 'resisting' the ideas of information transmission where we all learn the same thing. In my opinion.

Kathy Boelsma RECE