

## REGGIO EMILIA APPROACH AND PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION IN DUBAI

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### Abstract

Early childhood education and care have become an important aspect of society and the well-being of people. A proper early childhood education can build a solid foundation for lifelong learning achievement and reduce the cost of lost talent and spending on social, health and even justice systems. Within early childhood education, the Reggio Emilia approach has gained popularity around the world and a number of countries in the West employ this approach in their early childhood educational system. In the young and prosperous country of the United Arab Emirates with its famous city of Dubai, this child-centred approach is also famous amongst affluent families with young children. This paper looks into early childhood education and the Reggio Emilia approach in the city of Dubai and how this is presented in the educational system of the UAE.

**Keywords:** early childhood education, Reggio Emilia approach, Dubai

**Discipline:** pedagogy

### Absztrakt

A REGGIO EMILIA MEGKÖZELÍTÉS ÉS A KORA GYERMEKKORI NEVELÉS DUBAIBAN

A kora gyermekkori nevelés és gondozás mind a társadalom, mind az emberek jólétének szempontjából fontossá vált. A megfelelő kora gyermekkori nevelés szilárd alapot teremthet az élethosszig tartó tanulási teljesítményhez, csökkentheti az elvesztett tehetség ígéreték költségeit, valamint a szociális, egészségügyi és még az igazságszolgáltatási rendszerekre fordított kiadásokat is. A kora gyermekkori nevelésen belül a Reggio Emilia az egyik olyan szemlélet, ami népszerűvé vált világszerte, és számos nyugati ország

alkalmazza ezt a megközelítést koragyermekkorai oktatási rendszerében. Az Egyesült Arab Emírátságokban kedvelt Dubaiban is ez a gyermekközpontú szemlélet vált híressé a kisgyermekes családok körében. Ez a tanulmány a kora gyermekkorai nevelést és a Reggio Emilia szemléletet vizsgálja Dubaiban, valamint azt, hogyan jelenik meg az Egyesült Arab Emírátságok oktatási rendszerében.

**Kulcsszavak:** kora gyermekkorai nevelés, Reggio Emilia szemlélet, Dubai

**Diszciplína:** neveléstudomány

### Introduction

It is universally agreed that education is a requirement for human beings. Therefore, it is only natural for families and parents to wish and desire a bright future for their offspring to have a better future through better education when they grow to become adults as well as arming them with the necessary skills and knowledge to survive and prosper in this ever-changing world that we live in. This knowledge-acquiring process, depending on different countries and their educational policies may start at different ages. However, Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) has become an important aspect of society and the well-being of people. According to the 2011 European Commission “if solid foundations are laid in the early years later learning is more effective and is more likely to continue life-long, lessening the risk of early school leaving, increasing the equality of educational outcomes and reducing the cost for society in terms of lost talent and of public spending on social, health and even justice systems”; therefore, it is only logical to offer all young people the chance to high-quality education to fully exploit their inherent talents. This advancement when given early, will in time cause a break in the cycle of disadvantages that are passed down to the next generations, regardless of race, nationality, religion, colour or the geographical area young children are born and live in. Another advantage of high-quality early childhood education and care is that it gives the parents, mostly young and inexperienced parents, the ability to organise their lives based on family

and work responsibilities. And finally, ECEC can support children in their future education and their process of integration into the wider society, especially in the globalized world that we are living in, it can also generate well-being, and contribute to future employability later on in life. These positive effects of ECEC are again more beneficial for disadvantaged families to give them a chance for a better future and particularly can help with the migration phenomenon and the migrant families with low income to survive in the fast-growing world.

Perhaps it could be due to all the reasons mentioned above or the fact that right after the disastrous World War two, the parents and citizens of a northern Italian city called Reggio Emilia in an act of unity and collective responsibility decided they needed to create a better society for their children and that begins with the nursery. The fact that the people of Reggio had come to this decision right after the war and the fact that they started this approach with early childhood education might have their message and a deeper understanding of the situation of the people at the time. This unity could also indicate the understanding of the people knowing how a properly raised child can affect the community they live in and the world as he is indeed a member of the global world and not just his community. With the extraordinary vision of a young teacher called Loris Malaguzzi and the efforts of the parents, a new philosophy was born, an approach known as the Reggio Emilia approach. The first local and municipal preschool establish-

ment for children between 3 to 6 years of age that followed this approach was opened in 1963 and since then the growth, improvement and advancement of this approach has been steady and constant. This was followed by the first infant-toddler centres for the age group of three months to 3 years. In 1995 the Reggio Children organization was founded followed by the global interest in this approach and has the full title of „The Centre for the Promotion and Defence of the Rights of Children”, to spread research in the field of ECEC education and the Reggio approach.

### Literature Review

The national and municipal programme that was founded by citizens of the city of Reggio Emilia in Italy has captured the attention of many educators worldwide but what makes it unique is not a significant curriculum filled with rules and strict guidelines, but a liberal understanding and consideration that tiny human beings have rights too. (Pálfi et al., 2020) In his own words Malaguzzi explains (1993, 9) „we continue to be convinced that without attention to the central importance of teachers and families, our view of children is incomplete, therefore, our proposition is to consider a triad at the centre of education, children, teachers and families”. Rinaldi (2013, 18.) believes that the key concept of Reggio Emilia is „the concept of child as citizen right from birth”. Rinaldi argues further that „when we define the child as a competent subject, we mean competent first of all in learning and therefore in living and when we talk about the child as a possessor of rights, we want to affirm something even more innovative” (ibid). Valentine (1991, 1.) believes that the Reggio model is of much interest to educators in Scotland. Valentine argues that Reggio is an approach that „is a socio-constructive model” and it is „influenced by the theory of Lev Vygotsky, which states that children and adults co-construct their theories and knowledge through the relationships that they build with

other people and the surrounding environment”. Therefore, it is obvious that this approach draws attention to an image of the child as a „strong, capable protagonist in his or her own learning, and importantly as a subject of rights” (ibid). According to Gandini (1993, 5.) „the educators in Reggio Emilia speak first and foremost about the image they have of a child” as for them „all children have preparedness, potential, curiosity, and interest in constructing their learning, in engaging in social interaction and negotiating with everything the environment brings to them. Based on this point of view educators must focus on each child. However, this focus is not on a child in isolation, but each child is viewed in his relations with other children, his family, the teachers at the school and the environment of that school, as well as the community he is living in and the wider society. Hence, Reggio Emilia implements a system where all the relationships are interconnected, supported and improved. It goes without saying that in any curriculum the safety and wellbeing of pupils should be guaranteed, however, Reggio Emilia considers the safety and wellbeing of the children connected to that of their parents, teachers and educators whom they meet daily at the schools. It is also imperative to keep in mind that in Reggio Emilia approach, Children’s rights are recognised and based on this recognition they should be provided with the highest quality of care and education that society can offer. All the above-mentioned specifications of Reggio Emilia are vividly understood with the famous saying of Malaguzzi himself with “the hundred languages” metaphor. Tijnagel-Schoenaker (2019, 139.) stresses that „children can express their ideas, feelings and thoughts in many different ways, he/she can do that in hundred languages”. Tijnagel-Schoenaker believes that „respect for the talents of the child and the way the child develops is a starting point of this approach and is up to adults to offer a rich environment, opportunities, and materials and to create situations

that allow children to further develop these opportunities. To put it simply Edwards et al (1998, xvi) explain that the „Reggio system is a collection of schools for young children in which each child’s intellectual, emotional, social, and moral potentials are carefully cultivated and guided”. Edwards et al. believe that „this principal educational vehicle involves youngsters in long-term engrossing projects, which are carried out in a beautiful, healthy, love-filled setting” (ibid).

According to the Reggio Emilia approach’s website (i.1), eleven values are the core of this approach.

*Children are active protagonists in their growing processes.* The first value focuses on the fact that children are indeed equipped with an extraordinary potential to learn, while this learning process can be an exchange of cultural and social context. Since every child has rights, therefore, every child in isolation and their relationships with groups can construct the experiences to the extent that makes them capable of attributing meaning and sense.

*The hundred languages.* The second value indicates that children, as any human being, have in them a hundred languages in many different forms. They possess a hundred ways of expressing themselves, understanding the world around them, and different ways of thinking via which they can understand the otherness and yet this does not separate them from each other because of the diverse world that we live in. The phrase “the hundred languages” has since become a metaphor to indicate the extraordinary potential that children possess, their knowledge and creativity, and the myriad forms with which living is manifested and the ways knowledge is formed.

The original poem “The Hundred Languages” which was written by Malaguzzi was translated by Gandini into English (i.1). In an extraordinary attempt a Hungarian and enthusiastic scholar of early childhood education has translated the poem into Hungarian which is the only version of the

poem in this language (Vargáné Nagy, 2018, 135-136). The Persian version of the poem was translated by the author and under the supervision of a native Italian/Persian enthusiast and the Arabic translation is also added at the end of the paper for the reference of those interested (Appendix1).

*Participation.* The third value which can be seen as an educational strategy focuses upon the fact that via participation in different activities, the hundred languages of children, as well as human beings, is implemented, understood and the plurality of points of view and different cultures is practised and given a chance to be familiarized. Participation also invites positive attitudes such as inclusion, expressing feelings and the culture of solidarity, and responsibility and enables change and invents new norms and cultures.

*Learning as a process of construction, subjective and in groups.* This value aims to consider children as human beings regardless of age and considers them as constructors of knowledge, competencies and autonomies, which then lead to the process of learning research strategies, exchanging ideas and discussions, and participating with peers.

*Educational research.* It is an undeniable fact that research is essential in life, as it leads people towards knowledge and understanding of truth. In the Reggio Emilia approach, the priority is given between adults and children on daily basis to discover and interpret the complexity of the world first-hand.

*Educational documentation.* The sixth value focuses on the important aspect of documentation as an integral part of educational theories and practices. It allows documenting the learning process to be evaluated, and this can be done on individual pupils or their interactions in groups with peers as well as adults.

*Progettazione/Designing.* An Italian word and not so easy to translate, “*progettazione*” is considered an act of designing didactics, of environment, participation, and professional growth on personal and

group levels. However, this does not mean to be achieved by pre-defined programs and lesson plans per se. *Progettazione* is achieved via the close cooperation between how the works should be designed and how educational research should relate to it.

*Organisation.* Nothing works perfectly or effectively if some kind of organisation is not implemented to achieve a goal. Therefore, the organisation of work, spaces, children's time, and their interactions with adults are considered an important part of the values of this educational approach. From the perspective of the institutional level, organising takes place by constructing a network of responsibilities that are always co-shared at different levels such as administration and pedagogy.

*Environment and spaces.* To send our children to a venue where they will spend almost half of their day requires that place to be safe in every sense. This is the reason that the interior and exterior of Reggio Emilia infant-toddler centres and preschools are specifically unique. They are designed and organised in an interconnected manner, and they offer every requirement to the children and adults to live together and conduct their research. The environment, however, changes based on the projects and learning experiences and based on the needs of little humans.

*Formation and professional growth.* This value specifically focuses on the Reggio Emilia educators and those who are involved in this approach. Professional growth is considered the right and the duty of everyone be it a person or a member of a group. This growth is included as part of the working hours and is organised in content and form and every person's particular participation.

*Evaluation.* As part of every aspect of school life, evaluation is the final value of the Reggio Emilia approach. Every infant-toddler centre and preschool is equipped with tools such as the Charter of Services, the pedagogical coordination group, the school's collective work group etc. as well as documentation and the participation of the families

and the local community makes evaluation unique and one of a kind. Bearing the above values in mind and because Reggio Emilia identifies environment as the third teacher, after parents and teachers at the school, the way Reggio Emilia infant-toddler and preschool works differs from traditional schools or nurseries. In Reggio Emilia, parents hold an active part in their children's learning process. The physical spaces of the schools encourage positive communication and friendly relationships. The layout of the classrooms gives the possibility to the children to spend time with their teachers or other peers or to spend time alone. However, small group cooperation is emphasised as educators are aware that children learn better if they work with peers. However, children's rhythm and sense of time in planning activities and projects are also considered, as this way educators get to know their pupils individually and this is an important factor as each teacher remains with the same group of children for a three-year cycle. During the learning process the environment is changed based on the developmental needs and interests of the group, and to effectively plan and proceed with the day's lesson teachers observe the children closely and plan their work by providing occasions for discovery and learning. In the Reggio Emilia approach teachers consider themselves as learners and enjoy spending time discovering and seeing the world from the children's perspective and there are no dominant teacher/pupil relationships between them. This equal relationship extends beyond teacher and student as each classroom has a pair of co-workers instead of the traditional head teacher and assistant, and this system is further supported by a team of pedagogical coordinators who support all the teachers, parents as well and the community.

The influence of Reggio Emilia around the globe has been magnificent. According to Foerch & Lupsa (2016, 337-346), several countries have been positively affected by the Reggio Emilia approach

and philosophy. In the United States of America, the Model Early Learning Centre (MELC) which is in Washington DC follows the Reggio approach. The claim is that the Reggio Emilia approach has “positively affected students from some of the most difficult and underprivileged preschools in the United States” (Foerch & Lupsa, 2016, 337). Gambetti as the international Reggio liaison spent a year at the MELC to understand the approach fully, and interestingly one of the most difficult tasks for Gambetti was to „convince parents to get involved in their children’s education” (ibid). Although Reggio Emilia approach is only implemented for preschool children and is used as an early childhood education methodology some educational experts and researchers at Harvard University believe that this approach can also be „highly effective with older children and adults” (2016, 338). A project called “Project Zero” led by Gardner, Krechvesky and Siegel looked into the „power of documentation and individual and group learning” (ibid).

In South America, The REDSOLARE is the Latin-American association that supports the Reggio approach in Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Chile, and Uruguay.

For instance, the RedSOLARE (RSB) in Brazil is a network to coordinate and disseminate ideas on education based on the Reggio Emilia approach. The idea is to defend childhood culture from an “integral perspective, integrated with real changes between Brazilian states and Latin American countries” (Foerch & Lupsa, 2016, 340).

In European countries, in Sweden, the Reggio Emilia Institute is the responsible body of the approach offering different kinds of programs and what is more significant about the approach in Sweden is it is open to all. The two divisions of Reggio working in Stockholm and the rest of the country, Reggio in Sweden provides „opportunities for professional developments at the location of schools” (Foerch & Lupsa. 2016, 341). While in

Denmark the Danish Reggio Emilia Network was set up under the acronym REMIDA named after King Midas because everything he touched turned into gold, a very appropriate name for the approach and what it hopes to achieve. The Danish Reggio Emilia Network offers a biannual publication called Reflections, which is free for those interested. In Germany, Reggio Emilia is a profit-making association that invites participants to regular professional exchanges. The German initiatives welcome participants to exchange their professional experiences on a regular basis, therefore research, development and documentation of the project conducted in Germany can be considered as an expansion of the works done in Reggio Emilia in Italy (ibid). United Kingdom’s Sightlines Initiative is the national organization that collaborates with Reggio Children Network. This organization aims to nurture creativity and explore reflective practices and „action research as tools to investigate and improve early childhood education in the UK” (Foerch & Lupsa, 2016, 344) while in Spain this responsibility is given to DIIP which stands for *Desing Infancia* (Childhood), *Innovación* (Innovation), and *Proyectos* (Projects). In South Africa, for example, St. Mary’s independent school for girls from infancy implements the Reggio approach. At this school, like all other Reggio Emilia approach schools the teacher and child relationship is at the core of the educational practice. According to the school’s website, „teachers are held in high regard and enter an intellectual dialogue with children. They provoke occasions of discovery through inspired listening and join the children in their excitement and curiosity in creating, exploring, and learning (St. Mary’s School Waverly, paragraph 2. Cited from Foerch & Lupsa, 2016, 345). And finally, in Australia, the Reggio Emilia Australia Information Exchange (REAIE) Organization was established in 2000 with more than 3000 members to represent a form of understanding, sharing of resources, and development in

Australian schools. According to the Australian organisation, Reggio Emilia is an approach that focuses on ongoing thinking, research and advocacy. This organisation has over 3000 participants and it represents understating and development as well as sharing of resources to implement the Reggio Emilia in the Australian preschool system.

### **United Arab Emirates and Educational System**

The country located on the shores of the Persian Gulf under the name of the United Arab Emirates consists of seven emirates that include the capital city of Abu Dhabi, the second largest city, or emirates as they are famously known, and the financial heart of the country Dubai and five smaller emirates of Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al-Quwain, Fujairah, and Ras al-Khaimah. These seven emirates under the provision and leader of its founding father Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan were united in 1971 and formed a country that is now known worldwide as the UAE. With a population of slightly over 10 million inhabitants out of which 89% are expatriates (Global Median Insights, Dubai, 2021) the educational system operates in 2 diverse directions. The first one is the government schools specifically for UAE national students where there are no fees to be paid to attend these schools for nationals, and the private schools which are fee paying and both national and expatriate students can join. The Ministry of Education (MOE) is the responsible body overseeing educational affairs in the country; while in Dubai the Educational affairs are handled by the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) and in the capital this responsibility is given to Abu Dhabi Education and Knowledge Department (ADEK).

Like every other country, education is considered one of the priorities of the country in its quest for advancement and finding its place amongst the countries in the region and worldwide. The way the

UAE government values education is proven by the improvements and restructuring of the educational system in the country in the last two decades. According to Alhosani (2022, 285), since 24% of the UAE population is under the age of 18, the high level of investment and governmental support to improve the educational system has become the core goal of the country. Alhosani stresses that „laying the foundation to work towards the aspired outcomes is achieved by incorporating the values of Vision 2021 into the objectives, methods, content, resources, and assessment of teaching and learning” (ibid). As per vision 2021 statement „the UAE vision 2021 National Agenda emphasizes the development of a first-rate education system which will require a complete transformation of the current education system and teaching methods” (UAE vision 2021, 2018B, cited from Alhosani, 2018, 286). It is also worth mentioning that this reformation and improvement of the education system in the UAE, although necessary and stressed, comes with the government’s goal to still preserve their roots and culture. Alhosani argues that the traditional aspect of education has „a high level of importance placed on culture and religion” with the government stressing on „promoting an inclusive environment that integrates all segments of society while preserving the UAE’s unique culture, heritage and traditions and reinforces social and family cohesion” (2018, 286.). Having this vision in mind the UAE government has set its focus on the education system and started with Early Childhood education.

### **Early Childhood Education in Dubai**

No one can deny the importance of the early developmental years of every human being which starts from birth to the age of 6 or 7 years old when the child is sent to school. During these years along with physical development, other achievements like language, emotional, social and cognitive advancement are acquired. These developments are

the foundation of later years' success when the child is an adult. According to Vandebroek (2022, 172-173) based on several research on Early Childhood and Care „there is now robust evidence that all children benefit from ECEC, as ECEC has the potential to increase language development, pre-academic skills, cognitive outcomes, as well as social and emotional development”. However, for the ECEC to function and become effective enough to help young minds to improve and grow, it needs to provide a good quality of education and care. Vandebroek argues that „the core of the quality of ECEC resided in the educational and emotional support that childcare and teaching staff provide for the children as well as on their relations with parents” (ibid), and therefore, it is obvious that a high-quality ECEC can benefit not only parents and in the short term but the society in the long run.

Alhosani indicates that „in the UAE, the term ‘early childhood’ covers the ‘preschool stage which includes any form of education and organized care for children from birth until the age of 6” (2022, 287). Based on the Ministry of Education’s policies „the framework of the ‘Emirati school’ describes the ideal start for every child, which can be provided through the provision of high-quality education and care and is viewed as part of the national strategies (ibid). This is then better achieved by having an additional focus on the culture as „the culture as a defining element of the community’s traditions and lifestyle is thus an integral part of the early childhood curriculum” (ibid). Within the national curriculum for ECEC and mostly in the kindergartens, children of national/Arab background aged four to six years of age can attend nine different areas of education taught in these schools. The first topic that is introduced in kindergartens by the Ministry of Education is Arabic literacy, followed by English Literacy, Islamic studies, social studies, math, science, visual arts, computer sciences, and health and physical education.

In this national curriculum and under the supervision of the Ministry of Education, the child is the centre of teaching, and all the elements are implemented according to the child’s needs and abilities, their learning styles, and the fact of whether they possess prior knowledge of the topic or not. Of course, the child’s safety, mental well-being, and health are also considered and stressed. However, the above-mentioned policies and guidelines are in place for national ECEC centres where only local/Arab parents send their children. While keeping in mind that 89% of the UAE’s population are expatriates these guidelines and strategies need to be modified. To facilitate an educational programme for the 89% expatriate population who live and have an essential role in the development of a very young country, an international school system was implemented in the UAE. According to the Knowledge and Human Development Authority’s website (i. 2), in the academic year of 2022-2023, 216 inter-national schools are functioning in Dubai alone. The table 1 below shows how the gradual addition to the list of schools indicates the importance of the proper functioning of international schools in the UAE and more specifically in Dubai.

*Table 1. Dubai private school open data based on online KHDA 2023 report*

Academic Year	Number of schools
2011-2012	148
2012-2013	153
2013-2014	158
2014-2015	169
2015-2016	173
2016-2017	181
2017-2018	194
2018-2019	209
2019-2020	209
2020-2021	209
2021-2022	215

A quick look at the Dubai private school open data report indicates the wide variety of curriculums under which these schools function. Accord-



ding to the KHDA 2023 online report, the school's curricula range from the UK curriculum to Chinese, Japanese, American, Indian, international Baccalaureate to Australian, French and German. However, according to the KHDA website, these multi-disciplinary functioning schools are under the supervision of a branch of KHDA, named as Dubai School Inspection Bureau (DSIB). According to the DSIB, a yearly inspection is conducted for all international schools in Dubai to monitor and help schools improve their education quality to world standards.

### Early childhood education and different systems in Dubai

According to Edarabia (i.3), a trusted educational source in the field of education functioning in Dubai since 2005, over 263 registered early learning centres are functioning in Dubai. This website indicates that the first licensed nursery to be established in the country was in 1984, and it also states that in the academic year, 2022-2023 over 80% of children under the age of 5 attend kindergartens. According to the website, different curricula are functioning in Dubai, and they range

from Montessori to UK EYFS, French, Swedish, IPC and Reggio Emilia. The website also gives a detailed list of the nurseries that advertise as working within the Reggio Emilia approach. The table below gives the ranking and the curricula of each nursery.

*Art Village Nursery*: the "Art Village Nursery" (2018, Reggio Emilia Philosophy) website (i.4) indicates that the organization is a branch of 'award-winning Amadeus Preschool in Stockholm' that is inspired by Reggio Emilia where their pedagogical approach is deeply rooted in a humanistic philosophy of life. They stress that "a nursery should be fun, safe and educational for all children" and to achieve that they have four parallel profiles of "song and music, dance and movement, theatre and drama, art and design". Their policy accepts children from the age of twelve months to four years of age where they aim to provide an environment where every child is given a chance to „express, share, investigate, research, create, explore, try on hypotheses and much more". The aim is to challenge and develop the children's ability and train them to socialise with respect, and accepting, encouraging freedom to express themselves and explore the world around them.

Table 2. Reggio Emilia Nurseries in Dubai

Name	Curriculum	KHDA ranking	Parental Rating	website
Art Village Nursery	Swedish/Reggio Emilia	None	41	<a href="https://artvillagenursery.com/">https://artvillagenursery.com/</a>
*Willow Children's Nursery	UK EYFS/Reggio Emilia	None	32	N/A
Odyssey Nursery	American/Reggio Emilia	None	27	<a href="https://www.odysseynursery.com/">https://www.odysseynursery.com/</a>
Green Grass Nursery	UK EYFS/Reggio Emilia/Montessori	None	18	<a href="https://www.greengrassnursery.com/">https://www.greengrassnursery.com/</a>
Blossom Nursery	UK EYFS/Reggio Emilia/Montessori	None	8	<a href="https://www.theblossomnursery.com/">https://www.theblossomnursery.com/</a>
White Dove Nursery	UK EYFS/Reggio Emilia	None	3	N/A

*Willow Children's Nursery:* The Willow Children's Nursery (2023, the willow approach) is functioning on both the UK's Early Years and Foundation state curriculum and Reggio Emilia, they have focused on an integrated early years programme. The nursery was established in 2010 and claims to have specially allocated areas within the school premises. They provide green landscapes with water play areas, sand play and bicycle areas to experience nature. There is also an atelier where the children can work on their creativity and explore life through touch, feel and discovering material, textures, mediums and techniques. According to the nursery's policy, they accept babies from the age of 45 days who are looked after by midwives who are trained as early-year educators. The nursery claims that the rest of the staff are also degree holders in early education with the minimum qualification of teachers being Cache level three.

*Odyssey Nursery:* the Odyssey Nursery (2023, the Odyssey methodology) was established in 2008 the nursery is famous for catering to children under the age of two. According to the nursery's website (i.5), the organisation focuses on offering a full-service, and all-inclusive child development facility. They accept children from the age of four months old up to four years of age. They follow Washington State Early Learning Developmental Benchmarks to care and develop and are accepted as a progressive and accountable system for early-year education. They incorporate the Reggio Emilia approach within the American curriculum and try to personalise the teaching method based on each child's needs and capabilities. The website claims that "the system stimulates the child as much as possible to give them the best foundation in life."

*Green Grass Nursery:* Green Grass Nursery (our mission, our vision) was established in 2013, Green Grass Nursery is a British boutique nursery that accepts children from the age of four months old to five years of age. With the UK EYFS framework, the nursery also implements the theories of

Montessori and Reggio Emilia. The nursery website (i.6) promises to take care of the children with staff and teachers who are loving, kind and caring.

*Blossom Nursery:* Blossom Nursery (2021, curriculum) was established in 2003, the nursery website (i.7) claims it has over 550 nurseries across Europe, the Americas, and the Middle East with more than 50,000 students in twelve countries. They cater to children from the age of four months old up to six years of age. The nursery claims to focus on a global mission to „build a better world by providing a strong and qualitative educational program to the future generation". This is achieved by focusing on „self-confidence and self-esteem, language and strong basic learnings, and positive relationship and openness to the world."

*White Dove Nursery:* White Dove Nursery (2023) was founded in 2018, the aim is to provide children with an environment that enriches, and nurtures experiencing life and offers numerous opportunities for children to explore, investigate and learn. They have UK EYFS and Reggio Emilia approach however there is no further information provided by the school or its website (N/A). As it is seen in Table 2 none of the nurseries listed in this table is ranked by the KHDA as one expects. The website of each nursery was visited for careful evaluations of the services they provide and the opportunities given to families and their children. The goals and objectives of each nursery were evaluated and among the list of the Reggio Emilia nurseries those who had rankings from parents were chosen for this paper. Aside from the year of the establishment of each nursery and sometimes the number of staff there is no other information about how the nursery recruits its staff. It is not clear to what extent they implement the Reggio Emilia approach and how trained and prepared the educators are. It is also unclear how each classroom is organised, as there is no indication of two co-teachers working with the children during the three-year cycle as it is customary in the Reggio

approach. It is also unclear how a European approach is functioning with the diversity of the culture/language/religion and ethnicity in these nurseries and how the staff are trained to professionally work in such a multinational environment.

### **Conclusion**

As an approach, Reggio Emilia has inspired many ECEC educators who would like to follow the steps taken by Malaguzzi more than 6 decades ago. However, according to Gandini (1993, 5), „educators in Reggio Emilia have no intention of suggesting that their programme should be looked at as a model to be copied by another country; but rather their work should be considered as an educational experience that consists of practice and careful reflection that is continuously readjusted”. However, as in all other sciences, Reggio educators are also keen to share their experiences with other educators so the knowledge of the Reggio Emilia will help with the teaching of the young people, as well as exchanging ideas and novel initiatives with other schools in other countries around the world. Since, UAE and more specifically Dubai is best known for its international structure and bearing in mind the fact that over 89% of its population consists of people with diverse cultures, languages and religions, it is a question that one might ask how an exclusively European approach can function and fulfil the needs and requirement of an educational system in such a multicultural country. As Gandini (1993, 5) stresses the fact that „education has to focus on each child” but „not each child is considered in isolation but each child is seen in relation with other children, with the family, with the teachers, with the environment of the school, with the community, and with the wider society”. Having the eleven values of the Reggio Emilia approach one needs to be careful to understand how this approach works and how it can be implemented in an international society like

the UAE. According to my understanding based on 4 decades living in the UAE it is safe to say that the schools and nurseries who claim to have implemented and follow the Reggio Emilia approach are only inspired by it and do not and cannot follow it for numerous reasons. For instance, one of the very strong barriers to following the values of Reggio Emilia is cultural differences. One can argue that Reggio is a national approach for the Italian population where the cultural differences and language difference for that matter is down to zero as every child is treated and respected based on the same culture and language that comes with it. However, this is simply not plausible in Dubai society as in one classroom even in schools that are specifically established by any one country, like Iranian schools in Dubai or German schools, there are students from other countries with different cultures and languages. This is because every school in Dubai is considered an international/fee-paying school specifically for expatriates living in the country. The second issue which is also related to the first issue mentioned above is the social ranking of the country itself. It is the norm in the UAE for the locals to have a separate lifestyle, schools, laws, and educational system separate from the expatriate population. Therefore, the liberal and democratic bases of the Reggio Emilia approach are simply not plausible as certain nationalities are hired for certain jobs. In ECEC establishments and educational organisations, educators are first chosen from the local applicants, and the ranking goes from top to bottom where teachers from the Philippines or Sri Lanka are considered assistants or school maids who handle the hygiene of the infants. Another issue that comes to mind is the involvement of the parents in the education of their children as another value stressed by Reggio Emilia approach. Due to the busy lifestyle of the UAE and the fact that expatriates are required to work hard to have a decent life in the promising land of Dubai, they

simply do not have any time to spare and prefer to pay the very high fees of the nursery and have someone else take care of their children while they can fulfil their professional responsibilities. Religion is another factor that can cause a barrier for the Reggio Emilia approach to true function in Dubai as most of the families are regarded as religious families and each family has their religion, ranging from the two sects of Islam to Buddhism, and Christianity. It is also worth mentioning that the staffing of the schools and nurseries is mainly done by the management of the school in the best case scenario. They hire mostly women educators and the aim is to hire native European/English teachers whose appearance can add prestige value to the school regardless of their educational backgrounds and the fact of whether they are trained ECEC educators or not. The assistance positions are then given to other nationalities where they can cooperate with the native first teacher of the classroom, which is simply against the Reggio values. Based on the few examples mentioned so far it is then obvious that the exact replication of the Reggio Emilia approach is almost impossible within the UAE's educational system. The best strategy would be to make good use of different Reggio values and change it to suit the norms and values of a specific country to provide an effective, all-inclusive, and liberal educational system right from a child's journey in life.

As regards the strategies and functioning of Reggio Emilia nurseries in Dubai, there seems to be a huge gap that needs to be filled with further research. It is imperative to understand to what extent each nursery follows the Reggio values, do they take the "environment as the third teacher" motto of Reggio seriously? How do they document the process of children's development? How much access do they have to nature due to the UAE's harsh weather? How much atelier time is given to children and how do they learn to use different elements to understand the world around them?

And finally, are the educators and staff working in Reggio nurseries in Dubai trained Reggio personnel, do they undergo special training, and do they have to have a certain certificate to be given the position they are working based on that?

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Appendix 1.

Original Italian version by Loris Malaguzzi (2016)*	Translated into English translated by Lella Gandini (i.8)	Translated into Hungarian by Dr. Aniko Vargáné Nagy (2018)	Translated into Persian by Fatemeh Farouhi (2023)	Translated into Arabic by: Rasha Esmail Al-Shafe'ie (2023)
<p><b>100 linguaggi</b> <b>INVECE IL CENTO C'È</b> Il bambino è fatto di cento. Il bambino ha cento lingue cento mani cento pensieri cento modi di pensare di giocare e di parlare cento sempre cento modi di ascoltare di stupire di amare cento allegrie per cantare e capire cento mondi da scoprire cento mondi da inventare cento mondi da sognare. Il bambino ha cento lingue (e poi cento cento cento) ma gliene rubano novantanove. La scuola e la cultura gli separano la testa dal corpo. Gli dicono: di pensare senza mani di fare senza testa di ascoltare e di non parlare di capire senza allegrie di amare e di stupirsi solo a Pasqua e a Natale. Gli dicono:</p>	<p><b>100 languages</b> <b>NO WAY.</b> <b>THE HUNDRED IS THERE</b> 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</p>	<p><b>100 nyelv</b> <b>AZ NEM LEHET.</b> <b>A SZÁZFÉLE LÉTEZIK</b> A gyermek százból van. A gyermeknek száz nyelve van száz keze száz gondolata százféle módon gondolkodik játsszik és beszél. A száz, mindig százféle ráfigyelés rácsodálkozás, szeretet az éneklés és belátás százféle öröme százféle felfedezendő százféle újítandó százféle megálmodandó világ.  A gyermeknek száz nyelve van (és még száz, száz és száz) de tőle kilencvenkilencet ellopnak. Az iskola a kultúra a fejet a testtől elválasztja a gyermeknek azt mondja hogy kéz nélkül gondolkodjon fej nélkül tegyen hallgasson és ne beszéljen</p>	<p>عدد ۱۰۰ همه جا هست کودک از صد ساخته شده است: هر کودکی صد نوع گفتار دارد صد دست برای انجام کار، صد فکر، صد راه برای تفکر، برای بازی، برای حرف زدن.  و همیشه صد راه برای گوش دادن و ابراز عشق و شگفت زده شدن، صد راه برای شادی و شعر خواندن و فهمیدن، صد جهان برای کشف کردن و صد دنیا برای خلق کردن و آرزو کردن.  هر کودکی صد زبان دارد و صدها راه ارتباط با دنیای پیرامون خود اما: نود و نه زبان از او نزدیده می شود.  مدارس و فرهنگ ها ذهن و جسم کودک را از هم جدا می کنند: از کودک می خواهند بدون استفاده از دست فکر کنند، بدون استفاده از فکر دستانش را به کار بگیرد، که گوش بکند اما حرف نزند، که یاد بگیرد اما لذت نبرد، که دوست داشته باشد و شگفت زده شود اما فقط در عید پاک و کریسمس، به کودک می گویند: دنیا را همانطور که هست کشف کنند و از او نود و نه راه دیگر را می دزدند.</p>	<p>الطفل مكون من مئة الطفل عنده مئة لغة مئة يد مئة فكرة مئة طريقة للتفكير للعب، للحديث مئة دائما مئة طريقة للاستماع للحظة للحب مئة فرحة للغناء وللهميم مئة كلمة لاكتشاف مئة عالم للحلم الطفل لديه مئة لغة ومئة ومئة ومئة أكثر ولكنهم سرقوا تسع وتسعين  المدرسة والثقافة تفصل الرأس عن الجسد يقولون للطفل: فكر بلا يدك واعمل بلا تفكير اسمع ولا تتحدث افهم ولا تتمتع احب واندهش فقط في عيد الميلاد وفي عيد الفصح يقولون للطفل اكتشف عالما اكتشف من قبل ومن المنة يسرقون تسع وتسعين</p>
<p>di scoprire il mondo che già c'è e di cento gliene rubano novantanove. Gli dicono: che il gioco e il lavoro la realtà e la fantasia la scienza e l'immaginazione il cielo e la terra la ragione e il sogno sono cose che non stanno insieme. Gli dicono insomma che il cento non c'è. Il bambino dice: invece il cento c'è.</p>	<p>to love and to marvel only at Easter and 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.</p>	<p>a megértést ne élvezze szeressen és csodáljon de csak húsvétkor és karácsonykor.  Azt mondják a gyermeknek: hogy fedezze fel a már megismert világot, így a száz világból kilencvenkilencet ellopnak tőle.  Azt mondják a gyermeknek: hogy munka és játék valóság és fantázia tudomány és képzelet ég és föld értelem és álom olyan dolgok amelyek nem tartoznak össze.  Ezért azt mondják a gyerekeknek, hogy a száz nincs. Mire a gyermek azt feleli: Az nem lehet! A százféle létezik.</p>	<p>آنها می گویند: که کار و بازی، واقعیت و افسانه، علم و تخیل، آسمان و زمین، واقعیت و رویا، پدیده هایی هستند که با هم نمی توانند باشند.  در نتیجه به کودک می گویند: صد راه برای کشف و درک وجود ندارد اما کودک می گوید: غیر ممکن است، همیشه برای کشف و درک صدها راه وجود دارد.  لوریس مالاگوتزی، ترجمه فاطمه اروقی</p>	<p>يقولون للطفل ان اللعب والعمل الحقيقة والخيال العلم والمخيلة السماء والأرض العقل والحلم هي أشياء لا تنتمي لبعضها البعض  ويهدأ يقولون للطفل المنة غير موجودة والطفل يقول مستحيل، المنة موجودة  الترجمة: رشا اسماعيل الشافعي منة لغة</p>

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