

**THE THEORY OF MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES AND THE REGGIO EMILIA APPROACH®'S EFFECTIVENESS IN INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN DUBAI**

**Authors:**

Fatemeh Faroughi <sup>1</sup>  
University of Debrecen (Hungary)

Foroozan Hajian <sup>2</sup>  
University of Debrecen (Hungary)

Ilona Fekete Dabney (PhD)<sup>3</sup>  
University of Debrecen (Hungary)

**Lectors:**

Ágota Szabóné Balogh (PhD)  
Gál Ferenc University (Hungary)

Katalin Mező (PhD)  
University of Debrecen (Hungary)

...and two other anonymous reviewers

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**Abstract**

This paper investigates the theory of Multiple Intelligence and the Reggio Emilia's effectiveness in international institutions of Early Childhood Education in Dubai. The goal is to see if the combination of the two groundbreaking hypothesis can indeed help educators implement and use the combination of the two assist with the very sensitive topic of education at early stages. This paper assumes if used in a proper and careful manner the implementation of the multiple intelligence and Reggio Emilia can indeed be effective and assist children and educators alike.

**Keywords:** The theory of multiple intelligence, Reggio Emilia Approach®, Early childhood education, Effective education

**Discipline:** pedagogy

**Absztrakt**

A TÖBBSZÖRÖS INTELLIGENCIA ELMÉLETE ÉS A REGGIO EMILIA SZEMLÉLET HATÉKONYSÁGA A DUBAJI KORAGYERMEKKORI NEVELÉS NEMZETKÖZI INTÉZMÉNYEIBEN

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<sup>1</sup> Fatemeh Faroughi: PhD-jelölt, Debreceni Egyetem, Neveléstudományi Tanszék.

E-mail: [Fatemeh.faroughi@gmail.com](mailto:Fatemeh.faroughi@gmail.com). ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-2874-6110>

<sup>2</sup> Foroozan Hajian: PhD-jelölt, Debreceni Egyetem, Neveléstudományi Tanszék.

E-mail: [hajianforoozan@gmail.com](mailto:hajianforoozan@gmail.com). ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-8715-1974>

<sup>3</sup> Fekete Dabney Ilona (PhD), Debreceni Egyetem, Neveléstudományi Tanszék. E-mail: [feketeid@gmail.com](mailto:feketeid@gmail.com). ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2534-1429>

Jelen tanulmány a többszörös intelligencia elméletét vizsgálja, valamint a Reggio Emilia szemlélet hatékonyságát a koragyermekkorai nevelés nemzetközi intézményeiben Dubajban. A cél, hogy megvizsgáljuk, vajon a két úttörő szemlélet kombinációja valóban segít-e a pedagógusoknak megvalósítani, és a kettő párosításának bevezetése támogatni a nevelés érzékeny területét a korai szakaszban. Ezen tanulmány azt feltételezi, hogy a megfelelő és óvatos módon történő használata a többszörös intelligenciának a Reggio Emilia megközelítés esetében hasznosnak bizonyulhat és mind a gyermekeknek, mind pedig a nevelőknek segítséget jelenthet.

**Kulcsszavak:** többszörös intelligencia elmélete, Reggio Emilia megközelítés, koragyermekkorai nevelés, hatékony nevelés

**Diszciplína:** neveléstudomány

### Introduction

Early childhood education is the first step in the journey of becoming a literate and learned person. Due to the young age from which children are sent to nurseries and kindergartens, usually around the age of 3 or 4 years old, it is the desire of the parents to send their youngster to an educational institution that is effective, safe and yet a fun and happy place for children to spend most of their day. Therefore, nurseries and kindergartens are expected to play the caring role of parents when they admit a child to their institutions. One of the important roles these institutions play is to successfully educate children, prepare them for primary schooling years ahead as well as the process of integrating into the wider society where parents and sometimes grandparents are not the only ones the children interact with during the day. Amongst the many different teaching methods within the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), one such method famous by the name of the city it originated in stands out. The Reggio Emilia Approach® (<https://www.reggiochildren.it/en/reggio-emilia-approach/>), that was established right after the second World War, has a liberal and unique teaching technique that makes it desirable to parents who happen to be familiar with it. The people of the northern Italian city of Reggio Emilia in an act of unity and collective responsibility decided

that they needed to establish a new teaching method for their children and this should begin with early childhood education. Although the philosophy behind this approach needs further and wider research, in a nutshell one can claim that the main goal of the Reggio people at the time could have been to raise the kind of generation who would become community members of the global world that we live in today. With the extraordinary dream of its founder Loris Malaguzzi and the hard work of the parents at its first steps, a new approach was born that later on become the world famous Reggio Emilia Approach®. The first local and municipal pre-school establishment for children of 3 to 6 years of age joined this Reggio Emilia nursery in 1963 while the Reggio Children organisation was established in 1995 making the approach famous around the globe.

Looking at education and its importance from a different perspective, there is the issue of learning and different learning styles that makes one person good at memorising and another perfect in solving mathematical questions or a person who understands sciences better than literature. In this area of study, American psychologist named Howard Gardner introduced the theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI) to illustrate the differences seen between individuals even at a very young age. With his seven groups of intelligences plus one that was

added to the list later, Gardner introduced a theory according to which every human being is born with these eight intelligences (Gardner, 1983, 2009). The only important point to keep in mind is that not all intelligences are active in every individual, or in other words one or a few of these intelligences may be bolder than others and it differs from person to person. Therefore, one might assume this could be the reason behind different capabilities parents can see in their children, although they are raised in the same household with similar opportunities given to them.

Due to the importance of early childhood education and care and accepting the theory of multiple intelligences this paper will look into the Reggio Emilia Approach® from the perspective of the multiple intelligence theory (Gardner, 2024). The aim is to examine and assess if the founders of Reggio Emilia had the same ideas behind the approach they introduced that collaborates with Gardner's theory of multiple intelligence theory some 50 years later. The paper will first take a look at the previous literature written about both the Reggio Emilia Approach® and the theory of the multiple intelligences. Section three will be devoted to comparing and contrasting the two phenomena to see if there are any similarities between them. Finally, section four will conclude the paper.

### **Literature review**

The world was introduced to the Reggio Emilia Approach® around the end of 1930, originating in the city of Reggio Emilia in Italy. Soon it started capturing the attention of educators around the world for its unique and one-of-a-kind curriculum that offers guidelines on how to educate young minds. However, it is liberal enough to agree that young children, like grown-ups, have rights too. In its founders' own words regarding the approach Loris Malaguzzi claimed that "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, teacher and families" (1993, 9.). Rinaldi (2013, 18.) complements this idea of Malaguzzi that children should be considered as "child as citizen right from birth". Rinaldi continues to elaborate 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".

A Scottish researcher working on early childhood education introduced a unique and possible connection between the Reggio Emilia Approach® and Vygotsky's teaching theory. Valentine (1991, p.1) argues that the Reggio Emilia Approach® could be "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". This claim could be considered from a socio-constructed perspective where society play an important role in every individual's life regardless of their age. In other words, the Reggio Emilia Approach® brings about the image of a child as a "strong, capable protagonist in his or her own learning, and importantly as a subject of rights" (Valentine, 1991, 1.). In this regards Gandini (1993, 5.) elaborates that "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". Therefore, educators need to direct their focus on children and not the child in isolation but to understand that "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" (Faroughi & Varga Nagy, 2023, 83.). To add to this wonderful approach the famous saying of Malaguzzi "the hundred languages of children" is the

core of this teaching method, as according to its founder children can express their feelings, thoughts, and ideas via their own specific and unique language. This in turn then leads to a specific teaching and learning goal that is and has been the aim of the Reggio Emilia Approach®. The eleven core values of the Reggio Emilia according to their website (i.1) is listed as follows:

- Children are active protagonists in their growing processes
- The hundred languages
- Participation
- Learning as a process of construction, subjective and in groups
- Educational research
- Educational documentation
- Progettazione/Designing
- Organisation
- Environment and spaces
- Formation and professional growth
- Evaluation

Considering these eleven values as the core of the Reggio Emilia and also the fact that the approach “identifies environment as the third teacher, after parents and teachers at the school” makes this infant-toddler/preschool teaching approach different from the traditional teaching techniques (Faroughi & Varga Nagy, 2023, 85.). Another important point to keep in mind is that in the Reggio Emilia Approach® by implementing these different values the children will develop and advance in their educational journey based on their needs and capabilities.

Howard Gardner (2009), on the other hand, believed that the knowledge acquiring process in human beings differs from one person to another. Therefore, he proposed eight different intelligences that every person possess with one caveat, that some intelligences may be bolder than the others in individuals. According to Gardner the intelligences that everyone possess are:

- Linguistics
- Logical-mathematical
- Spatial
- Bodily-kinesthetics
- Musical
- Interpersonal
- Intrapersonal
- Naturalist

Stressing upon the fact that the functionality of these intelligences differ from one person to another, Armstrong (2009, 16.) claims that “there are many ways to be intelligent within each category” as well. This statement could be regarded as a claim that one should not seek a standard set of attributes based on which one should be regarded as intelligent in a specific area. Focusing on children Gardner also elaborated that since each child possesses all eight intelligences, once at school and at the beginning of their learning journey they begin to show inclinations towards specific intelligences. This could be the answer to the question why some students learn a topic much more easily than the others and a valuable question for teachers and educators “how can we help pupils to learn more effectively yet in a more fun way?”

### **Theory of the Multiple Intelligences and the Reggio Emilia Approach®**

To understand how the theory of multiple intelligence work and to see if the Reggio Emilia Approach®’s teaching techniques could be in line with the theory of multiple intelligence, this section will first look at the table provided by Armstrong (2009). In his book Armstrong elaborates on the different methods and technologies that can be employed by teachers and educators within classroom to assist the students in their learning process provided their specific intelligence(s) is recognised by the teacher and educator (Table1). Today, the use of technology within classrooms has become a norm regardless of the age of the pupils. It is very

common that a teacher uses music, songs or animation to teach a lesson to his/her students even at the very young age of 3. Therefore, the teaching strategies and the proposed technology columns are very useful for instructors.

On the other hand, the eleven values of Reggio Emilia Approach® that has been collected in table 2 below, gives a clear understanding on how these values are important and how they can be in

collaboration with the multiple intelligences theory. One of the pillars of the Reggio Emilia Approach® is the important role the environment plays in children's lives. By naming it the third teacher, after parents and teachers at the school and one of the main reasons Reggio Emilia performs differently is that the children have the opportunity to connect with the environment.

Table 1. Eight ways of learning (cited from Armstrong, 2009, 33.)

| Children who are highly ... | Think ...                                       | Love...  | Need...   |
|-----------------------------|---|--|---|
| <b>Linguistics</b>          | In words  | Reading, writing, telling stories, playing word games  | Books, tapes, writing tools, paper, diaries, dialogue, discussion, debate, stories  |
| <b>Logical-Mathematical</b> | By reasoning                                    | Experimenting, questioning, figuring out logical puzzles, calculating                        | Materials to experiment with, science materials, manipulatives, trips to planetariums and science museums                           |
| <b>Spatial</b>              | In images and pictures                          | Designing, drawing, visualizing, doodling  | Art, legos, videos, movies, slides, imagination games, mazes, puzzles, illustrated books, trips to art museums.                     |
| <b>Body-Kinesthetics</b>    | Through somatic sensations                      | Dancing, running, jumping, building, touching, gesturing                                     | Role-play, drama, movement, building things, sports and physical games, tactile experiences, hands-on learning                      |
| <b>Musical</b>              | Via rhythms and melodies                        | Singing, whistling, humming, tapping feet and hands, listening                               | Sing-along time, trips to concerts, playing music at home and school, musical instruments   |
| <b>Interpersonal</b>        | By bouncing ideas off other people              | Leading, organizing, relating, manipulating, mediating, partying                             | Friends, group games, social gatherings, community events, clubs, mentors/apprenticeships   |
| <b>Intrapersonal</b>        | In relation to their needs, feelings, and goals | Setting goals, meditating dreaming, planning, reflecting                                     | Secret places, time alone, self-paced projects, choices   |
| <b>Naturalist</b>           | Through nature and natural forms                | Playing with pets, gardening, investigating nature, raising animals, caring for planet earth | Access to nature, opportunities for interacting with animals, tools for investigating nature (e.g., magnifying glasses, binoculars) |

Table 2. Eleven values of the Reggio Emilia Approach®. Source: Authors.

| <b>Values</b>   | <b>Specifications</b>   |
|---|---|
| <b>Children as protagonists in their growing processes</b>              | Children have the potential to learn and have the right to construct the experiences to the extent that makes them capable of attributing meaning and sense in isolation or in groups   |
| <b>The hundred languages</b>  | Children possess a hundred ways of expressing themselves, understanding the world around them, different ways of thinking via which they can understand the otherness and yet this does not separate them from each other as a consequence of a diverse world that we live in         |
| <b>Participation</b>  | Via participation in different activities the hundred languages of children as well as human beings is implemented, understood and the plurality of point of view and different cultures is practiced and given a chance to be familiarised.  |
| <b>Learning as a process of construction, subjective, and in groups</b> | Considering children as human beings regardless of age, as well as considering them as constructors of knowledge, their competencies and autonomies, which then leads to the process of learning research strategies, exchanging ideas and discussions, and participation with peers. |
| <b>Educational research</b>   | Research as an essential tool in human life is a priority in Reggio Emilia Approach® which gives adults and children an opportunity to discover and interpret the complexity of the world first hand.   |
| <b>Educational documentation</b>  | Documentation of education and practices allows the learning process to be evaluated and can be done on individual pupils or their interactions in groups with peers as well as adults.   |
| <b>Progettazione/Designing</b>  | Roughly considered as an action of designing of didactics, of environment, participation and the professional growth on personal and group level.   |
| <b>Organisation</b>   | Organisation of work, spaces, children's time and their interactions with adults.   |
| <b>Environment and spaces</b>   | The interior and exterior of Reggio Emilia 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 and conduct their research.                                |
| <b>Formation and professional growth</b>                                | 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 from the very person's particular participation.                                     |
| <b>Evaluation</b>   | As part of every aspect of school life, evaluation is the final value of Reggio Emilia, using different means to evaluating students.   |

In order to achieve the optimal goal of the Reggio Emilia, the educators will remain with their classroom for the duration of three years, and throughout the teaching session/lesson plan, the environment will change based on the pupils needs and interest for the day.

It is also worth to mention that in Reggio Emilia classrooms the teachers consider themselves as learners as well and they try to have a deep understanding of the pupil's needs and capabilities, as one of the reasons the teacher stays with her/his classroom during the cycle that lasts at least three years.

#### **The possible collaboration of the Theory of Multiple intelligences and the Reggio Emilia Approach®**

As parents, educators, and policy makers or to put it simply as grown-ups, it is widely agreed that a successful career later on in life starts with a good education and providing enough opportunities for the young.

This is exactly the reason educators around the world constantly try to find innovative ways and methods to help students from the early stages of their education journey to benefit from the opportunities and possibilities available to them. However, as far as is known no study has been devoted to the possible collaborations of the theory of multiple intelligences and the Reggio Emilia Approach®, as both of them base their core on early childhood education and how we should assist our youngsters.

According to table 3 above, it is obvious that the different intelligences of Gardner's multiple intelligence theory are in line with the different values of the Reggio Emilia Approach® that Malaguzzi introduced. Although there is almost half a century between the two of them it is clear to see that they both focused on education, especially early childhood education, and care from different perspectives. To see how these intelligences and values collaborate with each other the table needs to be studied carefully.

*Table 3. The collaboration of the multiple intelligences and the Reggio Emilia values. Source: Authors.*

| <b>Intelligence</b>  | <b>Reggio Values</b>  |
|----------------------|---|
| Linguistics          | Children as protagonists in their growing processes <b>AND</b> the hundred languages                                    |
| Logical-Mathematical | Learning as a process of construction, subjective, and in groups <b>AND</b> the hundred languages                       |
| Spatial              | Participation <b>AND</b> learning as process of construction, subjective and in groups <b>AND</b> the hundred languages |
| Bodily-Kinesthetics  | Progettazione/Designing <b>AND</b> organisation   |
| Musical              | Formation and professional growth <b>AND</b> Environment and space <b>AND</b> Organisation                              |
| Interpersonal        | Educational Research <b>AND</b> Educational documentation <b>AND</b> Organization                                       |
| Interapersonal       | Educational Research <b>AND</b> Educational documentation <b>AND</b> Organization                                       |
| Naturalist           | Environment and space <b>AND</b> Designing <b>AND</b> organisation  |

The first row shows that there is a possible connection between at least two Reggio values. The linguistics intelligence, or the learning of words, phrases and language knowledge is called linguistics intelligence according to Gardner. In the Reggio Emilia Approach® the famous “hundred languages” of children, which has become the motto of the approach sits well with the linguistics intelligence.

However, in Reggio, they believe in different ways of expressing oneself or extending one’s message and it is not only the spoken words or linguistics used by children. In essence, even a drawing of a 5 years old child that has a message within it could be considered a linguistic way of expressing itself though it might not be in words but in another form and shape. The second possible collaboration with linguistics intelligence is the value of children being protagonists in their growing processes. This means that children have an immense potential to learn, and this learning process can take place in different settings and via different forms, one of which could be via linguistics intelligence.

The second intelligence is connected to the Logical and mathematical abilities of human beings. This intelligence is visible in every aspect of human life and can be in collaboration with the hundred languages of the Reggio Emilia and the learning as a process of construction, subjective and in group. Children working in groups in each classroom is a positive teaching method as they all can learn from each other and although not every one learns equally or similarly this collaboration of the logical and mathematical intelligences with Reggio values match perfectly together.

The third intelligence is the spatial which is in close connection with participation, learning as process of construction, subjective and in group as well as the hundred languages of the Reggio approach. With the spatial intelligence, children have many different ways of learning and exp-

ressing themselves via visualisation, colour cues, picture metaphors, and idea sketching are a few activities that is performed with spatial intelligence. These activities are then in line with the hundred languages, participation and learning as process of construction, subjective, and in group value of the Reggio Emilia Approach®. According to these values these activities can collaborate perfectly with each other and with the spatial intelligence.

The fourth intelligence is the bodily-kinesthetics intelligence that is again in close collaboration with hundred languages as well as designing value of the Reggio. With these values children are familiarised with the didactics, environment, participation in order to assist with their professional growth on personal as well as group level. Designing is a value that is not preplanned and is not based on lesson plans that teachers prepare, rather it focuses on closed cooperation with all involved.

The fifth intelligence is musical that is in close connection between many Reggio values, ranging from hundred languages to participation, organisation, designing, and even educational documentation. Here, the musical intelligence comes handy to create a pleasurable atmosphere for both children and their teachers and educators, and the process of teaching and learning is done via the use of music. It is obvious that most children as well as adults enjoy such techniques and it must be the case that they remember lessons much better when it is taught in a fun and interesting manner.

The sixth intelligence being interpersonal is an intelligence that deals with how children work with peers and in groups. Making group activity more fun even with those pupils who suffer from low confidence, this intelligence can collaborate with hundred languages, educational research, educational documentation, and organisation.

All these Reggio values are in line with the interpersonal intelligence, giving chances and opportunities to pupils to advance and progress effectively in their learning process.



Closely related to the sixth intelligence is the seventh intelligence known as intrapersonal that encourages children to work in groups learn from each other, make learning and teaching sessions more fun and exactly like the sixth intelligence is in close collaboration with hundred languages, educational research, educational documentation and organisation.

The final intelligence is naturalist and as the name suggest it is in close relation with environment and space, designing, and organisation values of the Reggio approach. As mentioned before, at the core of the Reggio Emilia Approach® lies the element of nature and how it can influence, educate and help the progress of pupils not only at personal level but as social, mental and physical health.

#### **United Arab Emirates and Early Childhood Education and Care in Dubai**

The city of Dubai, mostly known as the economic hub of the country is home to a population made up of almost 89% expatriates. The diversity of nationalities, their culture and many different languages spoken in the country has resulted in the mushrooming of international schools. With English being the main language of the country and Arabic the standard but not the language of instruction at the schools, the educational system of the country goes into two diverse grouping of national and international schooling system. The national schools where free education is provided to national and local Arab population, while the international schooling system is the only educational system offered to the 89% of expatriates living in the country. However, national Arabs too have the choice of sending their children to international schools provided they are willing to pay the fees, while on the other hand, expatriates cannot send their children to national schools that are free for national Arabs.

There is also one major difference between the two schooling systems in the country. In the national schools the language of instruction is Arabic while in the international schooling system the language of instruction is English, however, teaching and learning of Arabic is also mandatory to every child admitted to international schools in Dubai. According to the Knowledge and Human Development Authority, famously known as KHDA, the organisation that oversees the performance of international schools in the country, there are 249 early childhood centres functioning in the city of Dubai only with 23,799 children admitted in ECEC schools in January 2024 (KHDA - KHDA's data & statistics). Out of the 249 early childhood education schools about 6 of them provide the Reggio Emilia Approach® to the population and are considered as international schools or privately owned establishments that are overseen by the KHDA. These international schools usually aim at hiring native speakers of English as teachers, and offer prestigious facilities for children such as in-school swimming classes, dance lessons, music classes that are not common in Islamic countries etc. Depending on the extra facilities and the number of native English-speaking teachers in that school the fees vary immensely. However, due to cultural and religious diversity, the wide variety of languages spoken in the UAE, Islamic laws of the country and the desert environment of the country, implementing the Reggio Emilia Approach® fully in the nurseries in Dubai seems impossible (for further discussion see Faroughi & Dabney-Fekete 2023).

#### **Conclusion**

The fact that early childhood education is of utmost importance is clear to everyone, and educational systems around the world are on constant look out for new and innovative ways to improve their teaching techniques as it guarantees a brighter future for the generations to come. Today's life and

the advancement of technology demands educating people and responsible use of the advancement of the technology that is available. Although this advancement has been criticised now and again until the COVID 19 pandemic happened and societies and countries realised that technology on its own is not a threat to humans. This education and the responsible use of the technology is best done with young age and those who will become tomorrow's adults. Therefore, it is obvious that educational systems should try to familiarise youngsters with technology from a very young age and yet make them understand that it is expected from them to use it responsibly.

With Newton's famous metaphor of "standing on the shoulders of giants" this paper looked into two very famous achievements of last century's scholars. The first is the Italian founder of the Reggio Emilia Approach® who right after the second World War, felt the need for an entirely different educational system that is liberal enough to stop disasters like World Wars happening again and he believed it should be started at a young age and from the nursery. The second scholar was American psychologist who proposed that even though every human being is born with the eight multiple intelligences, and although the learning process in every person is different than others, some intelligence(s) might be bolder from person to person. This then leads to one thinking if parents, educators, policy makers and schools try to identify every child's unique learning process and needs, and combining it with the values of the Reggio Emilia Approach® at the very early stages of the learning journey, we might have a generation of people who know exactly what it is they are good at and how and where should they pursue their dreams and work to achieve.

Tables one, two and most specifically table three tried to illustrate the unique yet invisible ties that these two approaches have in common. The Reggio Emilia values although designed for Italian

and European culture might not be suitable for countries like the UAE that has an entirely different culture, language, religion and specifications, but with some modifications even Islamic societies can benefit from the cleverly organised teaching method that is famously known around the world. As it is obvious due to the reasons mentioned above the Reggio Emilia nurseries functioning in Dubai are not following the exact Reggio Emilia as it works in Italy and the rest of Europe due to many issues such as different climate, religion, language and societal values, but it is still one of the most sought-after nurseries for those parents who are enlightened enough to know the value of the teaching method. By adding the multiple intelligence theory and understanding each child's unique needs and requirement in their learning process, and with the help of the Reggio Emilia Approach®, educators can section classes based on the most dominant intelligence(s) of children. This will help with the learning process, effective processing of the knowledge, hiring of professional teachers for that specific classroom, and to assist youngsters to understand and value the differences they have without self-minimising and affecting their self-confidence. As after all humans are unique in their own rights and that is the beauty of the world we live in, a cause to celebrate and respect each other, to set the basis for a better world for the future generations.

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