

Reggio Influenced Education at Meadowbrook Elementary

At Meadowbrook, we have interpreted the Reggio approach based on our own cultural traditions, experiences and environmental influences. Our students are encouraged to participate in choosing what to study while the teachers ensure that the topic is explored in a way that meets the BC curricular outcomes. The process of learning is ultimately more important than the product – as we observe student learning, and make that learning visible through documentation, we honour the child’s intellectual capacities and intense curiosity. Our goal is to create a culture of learning where students, families and staff are engaged, motivated and valued.

The image of the child

We believe that children have potential, curiosity and interest in engaging in social interaction, establishing relationships and constructing their learning. Teachers are aware of children’s potential and construct their work and environment to respond appropriately. Each child possesses skills, talents and abilities and we work to find the spark that ignites the joy, curiosity and passion for learning.

The environment as a teacher

The school environment conveys many messages - the most immediate is that this is a place where adults have thought about the quality and instructive power about space. The layout of physical space, in addition to being welcoming fosters the development of communication and relationships. The arrangement of structures, object and activities encourages choices, problem solving and discovery. The space is also highly personal and full of the children’s work. Documentation is displayed – photographs and dialogue – to help the viewer understand the process of children’s thoughts and explorations, making learning visible.

Relationships

The Reggio vision is of an ‘education based on relationships’. Education must focus on individual children in relationship with the family, other children, the staff, the school environment, the community and society. These relationships are interconnected and reciprocal. The rights of children to a high quality education that supports the development of potential are recognized, as are the rights of parents to be involved in the life of the school and the rights of teachers to grow professionally.

Working and Learning Collaboratively

When creating the classroom space, teachers consciously create room for students to interact in small groups, to work individually or meet as a class. Teachers understand that children learn in exchanges with others, both guided by adults and on their own. It is important the students are provided with opportunities to practice and model active listening, to respond to others ideas in a respectful way and to be able to express their own thoughts and ask questions in a safe environment. As professionals, teachers also collaborate to further their own learning.

Documentation

Transcriptions of children's conversations, photographs, videos and representation of student learning and thinking are carefully selected and displayed to document the work and process of learning. The purpose of this documentation is to make parents aware of their child's experiences, to allow teachers to understand the child better and to further guide further instruction and to evaluate the teacher's own work. This serves to promote their professional development and to facilitate communication and exchange of ideas between teachers. Having students view documentation allows them to reflect on their own learning and ensures that they know that their efforts are valued. They are then better able to express, revisit and construct and reconstruct their feelings, ideas and understandings.

The Emergent Curriculum

Meadowbrook is part of the BC public school system and thus curriculum is mandated by the province of British Columbia. Teachers express general goals and make hypotheses about the direction activities and projects might take and make appropriate preparations. After observing students in action, they compare, discuss and interpret their observations and make choices that they share with the children about what to offer and how to sustain curiosity and support the children in further learning. The curriculum emerges in the process of each activity or project and is adjusted accordingly through continuous dialogues among teachers and children.

Inquiry Projects

Projects provide the backbone of the learning experiences. They are based on the strong conviction that learning by doing is of great importance and that to discuss in groups and to revisit ideas and experiences is the best way to develop deep understanding. Ideas for project arise from student and teacher experiences as they construct knowledge together. Projects can last from a few days to several months. They may start from a chance event, an idea or a question posed by one or more children, or be initiated directly by teachers. Teachers help learners make decisions about the direction of study, the ways to research the topic and which medium will best showcase their results.

Social Emotional Learning

Research indicates that the better a child can self-regulate, the better he/she can rise to the challenge of mastering increasingly complex skills and concepts. The first step in developing self-regulation skills must begin with being self aware - students must be able to identify emotions in themselves and others before they can learn to respond appropriately to them. A child can become overwhelmed by his emotions unless he develops the capacity to understand and express them. Once a child is aware of his/her emotions, he is able to learn strategies that allow him/her to move from one emotional state to another that is more useful to the particular situation.

Learning to identify and label emotions is a critical step toward cultivating emotional intelligence. Using the Mood Meter, students and educators become more mindful of how their emotions change throughout the day and how their emotions in turn affect their actions. They develop the self-awareness

they need to inform their choices. Students at Meadowbrook are learning to expand their emotional vocabulary, replacing basic feeling words with more sophisticated terms to better express and share their emotions. We looked at the RULER skills, which are developed along a continuum. It is assumed that if a student can regulate emotion, he/she is also able to recognize, understand, label and express emotion as well.

Recognizing emotion
Understanding emotion
Labeling emotion
Expressing emotion
Regulating emotion

Restorative Processes

At Meadowbrook, we have embraced the use of restorative practices to develop and maintain our community. The basis of restorative practices is relationship – it aims to restore the power imbalances that affect relationships by focusing on a problem-solving rather than a punishment model of discipline. Rather than simply punish, this approach teaches those responsible for harm to understand and accept responsibility for the impact their actions have on others while giving them the support they need to become involved with their community in a more positive way. At Meadowbrook, helping students develop and maintain positive relationships is a key element of social-emotional learning and our work in recognizing and responding to emotions is a natural fit.

“... Restorative programs reintegrate those responsible for the wrongdoing back into the school community so that they may become resilient and responsible members of that community, upholding its rules and values. By recognizing the potential for healing, empowerment of individuals, bringing relationships back into balance and strengthening communities, schools have begun to adapt and to adopt restorative justice practices for dealing with conflicts. These practices are acknowledged as an important alternative to traditional systems of discipline within our schools.” (from www.law.berkeley.edu)

Questions asked:

When things go wrong

What happened?

What were you thinking at the time?

What have you thought about since?

Who has been affected by what you have done? In what way?

What do you think you need to do to make things right?

When someone has been harmed

What did you think when you realized what had happened?

What impact has this incident had on you and others?

What has been the hardest thing for you?

What do you think needs to happen to make things right?