Third Teacher Handbook

A Reggio Emilia-inspired way to promote critical thinking in the primary classroom

J E S S I C A  K O O P
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About the Project

This handbook was designed as part of a project-based thesis for a Masters of Education in Educational Leadership at Vancouver Island University. It is intended to serve as a tool for other practitioners inspired by the Reggio Emilia Approach, as well as those who incorporate BC’s core competencies in their practice.

Thank you to all the Reggio-inspired practitioners who, despite never having met me, opened up their classrooms and allowed me to include their beautiful environments in this handbook.

This project is dedicated to all the educators and practitioners who strive to make a difference every day in the lives of the children they teach, learn and grow with.
YOUR IMAGE OF THE CHILD IS WHERE TEACHING BEGINS - LORIS MALAGUZZI
In 2015, British Columbia launched a revised curriculum. Geared at preparing learners for an unknown future, the new curriculum focuses largely on developing 21st century skills and proficiencies. Central to the new curriculum are three core competencies: Communication, Thinking, and Personal and Social.

Core competencies are taught from Kindergarten to grade 12 with the understanding that students will become more proficient every year. The BC Ministry of Education website provides detailed information about core competencies, including profiles, illustrations, and "I can" statements.

Core competencies are woven into the curriculum we teach. They help students talk about and connect to their learning and their experiences. The "I can" statements enable students to engage in self-reflection, goal setting, and ownership of their own learning. Below are some examples of “I can” statements for the core competency of critical thinking.

**CORE COMPETENCIES**

- **C** COMMUNICATION
- **T** THINKING: CREATIVE & CRITICAL
- **PS** PERSONAL & SOCIAL

**“I CAN” Statements**

- I can experiment with different ways of doing
- I can develop criteria for evaluating design options
- I can monitor my progress and adjust my actions to make sure I achieve what I want
- I can make choices that will help me create my intended impact on an audience or situation
What is critical thinking? There is much debate about how to define critical thinking, however, most theorists agree that it is a form of higher order thinking that is developed over time.

Proficiency in critical thinking requires practice. Many researchers believe that critical thinking skills need to be taught right from the start, beginning in the early years. The questions teachers ask and the experiences they provide move students to deeper understanding and deeper thinking.

The thinking core competency helps students to understand how they think and learn, how to come up with ideas, and what to do with ideas. The critical thinking component is divided into three interrelated facets: analyze and critique, question and investigate, develop and design. Like all core competencies, critical thinking can be woven into all subjects and disciplines. Authentic learning opportunities are one of the most effective ways to strengthen critical thinking; problem-based scenarios, inquiry projects, and group project work provide exceptional opportunities to challenge and develop thinking because they demand collaboration, discussion, and reflection.

One educational approach that has been supporting the critical thinking competency for decades is the Reggio Emilia Approach. Rooted in social constructivist theory, this approach favours collaboration, communication, and long-term interest-based research projects. Its unique principles and values, along with powerful and rich learning environments, make it an excellent approach to use to support critical thinking in the BC classroom.
Reggio Emilia is a philosophy of early childhood education that emerged in post WWII Italy during a time of great political, economic, and social change. Women in the region of Emilia Romagna were instrumental in rebuilding their schools and community. Together, with a man named Loris Malaguzzi, they established a school that reflected their emerging political, social, and cultural values. A thinker, researcher, and experimenter, Malaguzzi dedicated his entire life to the Reggio Emilia philosophy.

The Reggio Emilia approach has several unique principles: the image of the child, the atelier, relationships and interactions, the role of parents, project work, documentation, and the environment as third teacher. Central to this philosophy is the notion students are fully engaged participants who are active contributors to their own learning and who can demonstrate their understanding in a myriad of ways - often referred to as “the hundred languages of children”. Children routinely engage in unstructured play and exploration in a dynamic, evolving, and inviting environment. The adults in the classroom serve as mentors and guides who enable students to “see” their work through the process of documentation and to challenge their thinking through provocations.

The **Image of the Child** refers to what practitioners believe, understand, and assume about their students. In this philosophy, children are seen as capable, curious, and competent co-constructors of their learning. They are complete, knowledgeable communicators motivated to explore and experiment. The Image of the Child principles are found throughout this handbook. While you make your way through this resource consider your own image of the child. How do you view children in your school and community? What social, political, or cultural beliefs and attitudes contribute to your image of the child?
The Reggio Emilia approach believes that there are three teachers in education: the adults, the children themselves, and the environment. The environment is viewed as a powerful tool that fosters negotiated learning, promotes collaboration and co-construction, invites risk and exploration, supports student interests, and is pleasing to the eye. Powerful indeed!

The Reggio Emilia environment is warm, open, and comfortable. When setting up the environment practitioners are mindful of decor, placement of furniture, lighting, and colours. There are ample and varied materials beautifully and carefully presented to invoke curiosity and wonder. The layout of furniture and materials promotes communication between students; as students navigate the space, they ask questions, experiment, and engage in discourse with their peers.

The Reggio Emilia environment supports critical thinking in several ways: visible documentation of student learning and work provide opportunities for students to reflect on their work; easily accessible and fluid spaces allow for imaginative play, construction, and project work; the art centre, or atelier, encourages in-depth research; the central meeting centre, or piazza, invites students to communicate, collaborate, and share; and the intentional choices behind colour, lighting, and materials appeal to the senses.

A Reggio Emilia classroom is not random; it is the physical representation of core values and principles. Designed under the premise that a rich environment leads to rich learning, the third teacher can transform the entire learning experience for students and teachers.
Children need freedom to appreciate the infinite resources of their hands, their eyes and their ears, the resources of forms, materials, sounds, and colours - Loris Malaguzzi

Teaching all over the world have been inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach. This handbook features environments from early childhood educators, classroom teachers, and other practitioners from across Canada, The United States, Australia, and New Zealand.

Having ample space with large windows, a piazza, a centrally located atelier, and connected classrooms are unrealistic expectations for many classroom teachers. That being said there are many ways to incorporate ideas and values of Reggio Emilia into every workspace. The key is to accept the space you are in and to use your environment to your advantage.

The first step is to consider your own beliefs about the nature of children. What do you believe to be true about children? Do you view them as competent, capable, and curious? Secondly, a Reggio environment is filled with a wealth of varied materials of the highest quality. Take a look at your classroom and make note of what kind of materials your students have access to. By acknowledging the potential of your environment and by making changes to reflect the needs and interests of the children you work with, you can create a magical, Reggio-inspired room that promotes critical thinking!
Space

A Reggio environment is designed with movement in mind. As space is viewed as active and social, the learning environment is set up to facilitate interaction, communication, and cooperation. Furniture, structures, and materials are carefully placed to encourage shared learning.

The Reggio Emilia classroom boasts ample space, large bright windows, few walls, open and inviting spaces. This is often challenging in our crowded public school classrooms. Even if your space is lacking aesthetic appeal, there are some tricks and tips to open up your space to make it more inviting. Keeping your image of the child at the forefront consider how much of your room reflects your students. Are the walls cluttered with commodity materials? The Reggio room is constructed by the students. Its walls promote their voices, feelings, and thoughts. Begin by seeing your room through the eyes and bodies of a child. Crouch down. What does your classroom say to you? Do you feel drawn to certain areas? Is your library inviting? Is your art space (atelier) colourful and organized? Does the construction area look crowded? Is each space well-designed so that there is little confusion as to what to do?

Traditional square room?
Position furniture like bookcases to create the illusion of multiple smaller rooms. Hang fabric from the ceiling to divide space or invest in some room dividers.

Teacher-made materials everywhere?
The Reggio-inspired classroom reflects the student, not the teacher. Try starting your year with nothing on the walls. Invite students to create word walls, number lines, colour words etc promotes shared and visible learning.

Small room?
Consider the vertical space. Can you create more space up? Can you add shelves, bookcases, fabric walls? Using vertical space may open up your room for greater movement.
Reggio Principle: The Child as Protagonist

Children are active agents in their own learning. They require ample space to explore and experiment. How might these Reggio-inspired environments promote exploration? Cooperation? Collaboration? What messages do these spaces convey? Are the intentions clear?

Art Studio, Childcare Centre, Australia
Ages & Stages Event for Preschoolers, BC
Senior Preschool, Nova Scotia

The environment should act as an aquarium which reflects the ideas, ethics, attitudes and culture of the people who live in it. This is what we are working towards. - Loris Malaguzzi
Materials are instrumental in encouraging ongoing investigation. Authentic materials like artifacts, real telephones, cutlery, and environmental print allow children to manipulate objects from the real world. Authentic materials are aesthetically pleasing, sensory-invoking, and open-ended tools that invite students to touch, construct, and experiment. Unlike plastic or close-ended materials, authentic materials can be used to ignite curiosity, engage, and stimulate thinking. Children are the experts at unleashing the potential of real materials. The significance of these materials in learning centres is that they provide multiple and varied representations of ideas; as children investigate them, their understanding of the world is enhanced. These materials not only provoke, they also challenge thinking and expression.

The wider the range of possibilities we offer children, the more intense will be their motivations and the richer their experiences - Loris Malaguzzi
Reggio Principle: Children form an understanding of themselves and their place in the world through interactions with others.

How might these authentic materials promote interaction?
How might they inform a child’s learning and thinking?
In the Reggio Emilia approach careful attention is paid to what message the environment sends. Classrooms have a balanced colour design, which favours soft neutral colours. Floors and walls are neutral in colour, allowing images and student work to be accentuated.

Many people feel calmer in environments that reflect nature. Brown, beige, white, blue, green, and yellow remind us of the colours we find outdoors. The third teacher uses colour create a calming, yet intriguing, environment. A primary classroom can be a chaotic and stimulating place for both teachers and students. With enough seating and furniture for up to 22 students, BC primary classrooms can often feel suffocating. By controlling the colour palette of a room, teachers can influence how the room and the students feel.

Soft, neutral colours soften the landscape and focus the eye.

Vibrant colours in the atelier pique interest and provoke.
Notice the colour palette in each of these Reggio-inspired environments. Are they warm or cool? What are the dominant colours? Notice your emotional reaction. How do these environments make you feel? Cozy? Comfortable? Overwhelmed? Anxious?
Loose parts are any found objects that can be manipulated through play. They are collections of objects used to extend learning, exploration, and play. Whether man-made or natural, loose parts are all open-ended. While the Reggio Emilia approach does not use the term "loose parts" to describe the materials in their environments, these objects reflect Reggio values. Loose parts are valuable objects because they can be interpreted and manipulated countless different ways. They provide infinite possibilities, are visually appealing, and can be easily added to any centre. Moreover, they are relatively cheap and easy to find. Loose parts allow students to construct and deconstruct, problem-solve, experiment, create, and collaborate. All of these nurture critical thinking.

Types of Loose Parts

- Natural
- Plastic
- Metal
- Ceramic/Glass
- Fabric
- Packaging
Loose parts provide endless manipulative possibilities. How could the loose parts shown below be interpreted and used? How can they extend learning?
Light is considered a living material in the Reggio Emilia approach. Both natural and artificial light are mediums for children to manipulate and experiment with. The use of differentiated, varied, textured, polychromatic, and dynamic light facilitates inquiry, communication, and investigation.

Like colour, lighting can affect the mood of a room. It can communicate that a space is warm, safe and welcoming or that it is cold, dark, and uninviting. Adding a few table lamps or strings of twinkle lights can instantly and dramatically change the look and feel of your environment.

Creating a light and shadow centre in your classroom is another great way to incorporate lighting. A DIY light box, an old projector, or a Lite Brite are easy ways to encourage light and shadow play.
Reggio Principle: The Child as Communicator

Communication is a process used by children to problem solve. How might light and shadow be used to inspire play, discovery, and communication?

Senior Preschool, Nova Scotia

Telus World of Science, BC

Grade 1 French Immersion, SD47, BC
The Reggio Emilia environment is about provoking thinking, feeling, curiosity, and wonder. It is not surprising then that attention is paid to how the room and its materials physically feel. Malaguzzi maintained that children were born capable of expressing themselves in a hundred different languages; a room that is comfortable, intriguing and beautiful respects the image of the child and supports natural curiosity and discovery. Adding soft, textured pillows to a library or quiet space generates a feeling of safety and comfort. Sheer fabric draped from the ceiling makes a space feel light and whimsical. Authentic materials throughout the environment stimulate the senses. It is also important to pay attention to the dominant lines in your space. Straight-edged furniture can feel severe and overwhelming. Incorporating a round table or flowing fabric can soften the lines. Finally, consider the placement of heavy furniture and seating. Ensuring your room is balanced is key to creating an inviting and engaging space.
A Reggio environment is designed with sensory in mind. Natural materials in a learning space invoke the senses. Branches, dried, leaves and flowers, shells, rocks, and feathers provide textured and aromatic stimuli. As multisensory materials, natural objects invite interaction and manipulation; they are captivating, open-ended, and mobile. Children actively explore and experiment with these materials, and as a result they assist learners in constructing their knowledge.

Children are inherently drawn to nature. They enjoy being outside and seem to instinctively know what “to do” when interacting with nature. Adding natural materials to your space is the easiest way to introduce the third teacher in your environment.

**Natural objects checklist**

- branches
- stumps
- sticks
- rocks
- stones
- sea glass
- shells
- pinecones
- plants
- acorns
- leaves
- flowers
- fossils
- driftwood
Reggio Principle: The Environment as Third Teacher

The environment should pique student interest and evoke a sense of wonder.

How might the natural objects in the photos below inspire inquiry and wonder?
At the heart of every Reggio Emilia school is the atelier, a space dedicated to creating and exploring art. The teacher in charge of the atelier is called an atelierista. The atelierista provides opportunities for interest-based research and guides students in their art exploration.

The atelier is equipped with rich and varied materials, including clay, fabric, paint, pencils, recycled materials, as well as digital materials and tools. Rather than copy or reproduce art, children are encouraged to express their thinking and communicate their ideas in an uninhibited and fully supported environment.

While having a large, fully stocked atelier is likely unrealistic there are ways to incorporate aspects of this magical space in your classroom. Rich, varied materials are a start. More importantly, however, is having the mindset that art is about expression, communication, and exploration. Children are artists and are capable of creative expression and critical thinking. They develop critical thinking skills as they explore art with others, experiment with materials, and express their feelings.
Reggio Principle: The Hundred Languages of Children
How do these Reggio-inspired art spaces foster creativity? How do they support the hundred languages of children?
Provocations are powerful component of the third teacher. They are hands-on opportunities to explore and experiment with colour, light and shadow, loose parts, nature and authentic materials. However, they are more than just invitations to play. Provocations are designed to challenge and engineer higher level thinking through meaningful engagement.

Provocations naturally lend themselves to promote communication, cooperation, and curiosity. They are set up in response to student interest, making them enticing and engaging. As students interact with the provocation, the teacher listens and observes. What are the children doing with the materials? What are they saying to each other? What ideas are emerging? What are they interested in now? From there, the teacher reflects on her observations and wonders how she could adapt, edit, or change the provocation to support deeper thinking.

Provocations are:
- based on observation, wondering, deep and inspired listening
- student-driven, open-ended, fluid
- designed to support student interest and challenge thinking

Provocations are not:
- invitations to explore materials
- teacher-driven, teacher-directed
- designed to elicit a prescribed outcome
The atelier, or art centre, serves as one of the best places for researching and wondering. Rich, varied resources like paint, clay, fabric, ribbon, natural materials, paper, coloured pencils are carefully displayed to inspire, invite, and provoke.

A provocation can be set up with a written question or just with materials. What is important is the intent behind the provocation and the process in designing it.

The atelier, or art centre, serves as one of the best places for researching and wondering. Rich, varied resources like paint, clay, fabric, ribbon, natural materials, paper, coloured pencils are carefully displayed to inspire, invite, and provoke.
Documentation is another extension of the third teacher, and when used correctly can be tremendously useful in promoting deep thinking. Documentation is a visible trace of thinking and a record of learning. It is different from displaying student work in that it is based on process, not product.

Like provocations, documentation supports critical thinking. When we make learning visible we open the door for discourse, dialogue, and deep thinking. Students see not only their thoughts, feelings, actions, and work displayed in the classroom, but also those of their peers. They are able to reflect on their own process and see multiple ways of doing and thinking. Malaguzzi maintains that visible learning allows children to “become even more curious, interested, and confident as they contemplate the meaning of what they have achieved” (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman p. 70).

Documentation is also powerful for teachers. Like designing a provocation, it is based on observation and recording. The teacher becomes like a researcher as she studies her students’ thinking, makes a record of her observations, and showcases them in a public space. The process of documentation deepens the teacher’s awareness and focuses her intentions and direction.

Documentation can look like:
- Photographs of children learning and doing
- Transcriptions of children’s thoughts and learning
- Student work and art
- Words and drawings
Reggio Principle: Documentation
Documentation is about making learning and thinking visible. How do these examples of documentation in Reggio-inspired classrooms promote thinking and reflection?

Observe and listen to children because when they ask “why?” they are not simply asking for the answer from you. They are requesting the courage to find a collection of possible answers - Loris Malaguzzi
Teacher Resources
Developing the Third Teacher

Draw your current classroom environment below. Include windows, doors, teacher desk, tables, carpets, windows, and special areas. Consider the following questions:

What do I love about my space?

What do I wish I could change?

What area(s) are children gravitating towards?

What area(s) are they avoiding?

Where do I see the third teacher working?

Where is it lacking?

What area do I desire to transform the most?
Transformation Journal

What area gives me the most joy? Why? What area bothers me? Why?

The area I wish to transform: ________________________________

I want to focus on: adding authentic materials light & shadow incorporating natural objects integrating loose parts adjusting colour palette improving line patterns documenting learning designing provocations texture

Materials I have: ______________________________________________________________________________________

Materials I need: ______________________________________________________________________________________

I can set a realistic timeline for this transformation: 1 week a few weeks 1 month a few months a school year

I know the transformation of this space will be done when: ______________________________________________________
Authentic Materials

What authentic materials do I already have?

How am I using authentic materials right now?

What area in my class could use some authentic materials?

Where could I acquire authentic materials?

Are my authentic materials aesthetically pleasing?
Colour

Your classroom should be a reflection of you. Think about your style. What colours do you gravitate towards? What elements do you love about your home? Your classroom? Your favourite places in the community?

What does my space look like? (organized, messy, coherent, inviting...)

How does my classroom make me feel?

What colours are predominant? ____________________________  Is the palette warm or cool?

Dominant Colour: _________________  Secondary Colour: _________________  Accent Colour: _________________

What do I want to change? ______________________________________________________________________

What do I have at home / in storage / at school that I could use? _________________________________________

What can I change? What can’t I change? __________________________________________________________
Loose Parts

What loose parts do I have already?

Where can I get more?

How do my students use loose parts?

How do I want my students to use them?

What containers can I use to store loose parts?

Are my loose parts safe for the age group I instruct?

Where in my classroom can I add loose parts? Why?
Where is there natural light?

What area needs a light source?

What kind of lighting do I already have?

How can I use lighting to affect mood?

Is there a dark area? Can I make a dark area?

How many outlets do I have? Where are they?

Do I have a surface to project onto for light and shadow play?

How do my students currently use light and shadow?

Lighting Ideas

- White Christmas Lights
- Hula Hoop Lights
- Lanterns
- Rope Lights
- Light Box
- Flashlights
- Draped fabric with lights
- Branches with lights
- Fake tea lights
- Curtains with lights

Layered Lighting

- Background Light:
  - Floor Lamps:
  - Table Lamps:
  - Strings of Lights:
Texture, Line & Balance

What textures do I see and feel?

What materials are scratchy? Squishy? Soft? Rough?

How can I add more texture into my space?

What lines do I see? Is my furniture rounded or straight edged?

Are the lines overwhelming, repetitive or dominate?

Do I have curved furniture or soft items (ex: driftwood)?

Does my room look symmetrical and feel balanced? What do my eyes focus on? What about my students’ eyes?

What is the intention of each area? Does one area of my space have many heavy or large pieces of furniture?

What do I want my students to focus on?

Can students move freely between furniture and materials?

Are student work spaces too close or too far from each other?
Spend some time reflecting on your own experiences in nature. Get outside and observe how you react and feel. Make a note of what your senses are picking up on.

Take stock of what natural objects you already have. Then, pick an area to bring some nature to.

How does nature make me feel?

How do my students react when in or around nature?

Where do I see nature in the classroom?

How can I incorporate more natural elements?

How can I involve my students in adding nature to the classroom?
Provocation Process

Listen & Observe

Design & Implement Provocation

Record Student Interest

Develop Ideas
My observations
The students are interested in:

My provocation
question is:

My wonderings
I wonder if...

My actions
I’m going to set up a provocation in the _________________.
The materials I need are:

Follow up: What happened? How did the children react? What did the provocation teach me? What do I wonder now?
Ma Provocation

J'observe :

Ma question :

Je me demande :

Je vais :

J'ai besoin de :

En sommaire :
Core Competencies

CRITICAL THINKING
Competency Profiles

“1 CAN” STATEMENTS

1 can experiment with different ways of doing.
1 can develop criteria for evaluating design options.
1 can explore materials and actions.
1 can ask open-ended questions and gather information.
1 can consider more than one way to proceed in an investigation.
1 can show if I like something or not.
1 can identify criteria that I can use to analyze evidence.
Les compétences essentielles

Profils
COMPÉTENCES de PENSÉE CRITIQUE

Exemples d’édoncés au « je »

Je peux expérimenter de nouvelles façons de faire.
Je peux mettre sur pied des critères pour évaluer des options de conception.
Je peux examiner du matériel et des actions.
Je peux poser des questions ouvertes et collecter de l’information.
Je peux déterminer les critères à utiliser pour analyser des faits.
Je peux prouver que j’aime ou non quelque chose.
Je peux faire le suivi de mes progrès et modifier mes actions pour m’assurer d’atteindre mes objectifs.
Recommended Resources


Websites

BC Ministry of Education - Core Competencies  https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/competencies

Fairy Dust Teaching  https://fairydustteaching.com

North American Reggio Emilia Alliance  https://www.reggioalliance.org

School within School  http://atelier.schoolwithinschool.org