



# What to Look for in a Reggio Inspired Head Start Classroom

Across the United States, there are an increasing number of Reggio inspired Head Start programs. Inspired by an approach to early childhood first developed in the Reggio Emilia region of Italy in 1947, each Reggio inspired program holds itself accountable for developing a unique approach adapted to the children in the classroom, their families, and their community context. The approach blends structure, routine, and teacher-directed learning with wonder-filled, curiosity-driven, child-led emergent curriculum. When you visit a Reggio Inspired Head Start classroom, here are some things to look for:

## Environment

- **Classrooms are seen as the third teacher:** the materials and the way the classroom is set up indirectly guide the children in the choices they make while exploring topics.
- Teachers consider every element of the space thoughtfully to create an atmosphere where children can feel a **sense of organization and belonging**.
- The materials used within a classroom are a mix of purchased, natural and recycled materials that foster imagination and provide **open-ended invitations/possibilities** for the children to explore and learn.
- Based on their observations and the children's interests, teachers **set up provocations** as an invitation for children to experiment, explore, encourage discussion, and expand their theories. Teachers provide general support as needed.



## Children

- The **image of the child** is held in high regard. Every child is viewed as unique, strong and full of potential. Children are invited to participate throughout the daily schedule; they have the right to participate; they are respected and listened to.
- Children **learn through exploration**, by exploring materials that "invite" them to play in a creative, non-directive way, with no criteria and free from constraints.
- Children with disabilities are seen as having "**special rights**" rather than "needs." The educational aim is to integrate the children into all events of the classroom.
- The child's role in the classroom is to **construct their knowledge and develop skills** through exploration, self-expression and collaborations with their teachers and peers.



- Play is driven by the children’s interests, questions, and the world that they live in. The opportunity for children to **create their own play and explorations** helps to develop independence and creative thinking.
- Learning is led by each child and structured around **in-depth projects**. Teachers often call these projects “studies” or “research projects.” They might last a week or two—or they might extend the entire school year. Teachers guide the children in choosing an area of research and following it to the project’s conclusion.
- Children **represent their ideas in many forms**: print, art, drama, dance, music, puppetry, stories, and so on. Giving the space for all these efforts to flourish supports equity and helps each child build confidence and excitement about their learning.
- As children guide their own play, **social interactions** take place and relationships are built. **Language** is developed, **math and science** are explored, **creativity and art** go hand in hand, **nature** finds its way into many play scenarios and explorations, and the **culture of others** is discovered in meaningful ways.

## Learn More

[North America Reggio Emilia Alliance](#)

[Edwards, C.P. \(2002\). Three approaches from Europe: Waldorf, Montessori and Reggio Emilia.](#)

[Gambetti, A. \(2001\). A conversation with a group of teachers.](#)

[Haigh, K. \(2009\). Reinterpreting the Reggio Emilia approach in the USA: An approach for all children.](#)

## Adults

- The teacher’s role is to learn alongside the children and foster independent behaviors in the children. The teacher is a **facilitator, a co-investigator, and a co-researcher** with the children, building a relationship with each child. There is a balance between child-led and teacher-led learning.
- Teachers **adapt to the opportunities** that arise in the course of a day. A class discussion may lead to an entirely different activity from what the teacher had planned.
- Teachers **document the process of the children’s thinking and the progress of studies done in the classroom**, while tracking each child’s individual development. They share the documentation of projects with the children, families, and the community.
- The **parent is viewed as an essential resource to the child’s learning**. The exchange of ideas between parents and teachers is vital in creating a more positive and productive learning environment.
- Families and communities are very involved in the classroom and in **taking the children out into the community** to learn.
- Teachers are active participants within the school and larger community and work to **provide community members with information and updates**.

## Structure of the Day

- Morning Meeting
- Invitation to Play/Indoor Guided Exploration
- Nature Exploration/Outdoor Play
- Group Times (small and large) including group discussions and reflections.
- Afternoon Invitation to Wonder/Create/Learn

