

The Image of the Educator



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The Reggio Emilia Approach greatly emphasizes a rich image of the child.

For me, the image of the child is by far the most important principle of the approach. I believe that we cannot truly provide a trusting working relationship with a child unless we sincerely believe that she is able to make logical decisions and able to direct her own learning by experiencing through her many senses. Only the Hundred Languages of children can be considered equally important.

The relationship between the child and the educator is the second most important principle. Without this relationship, learning cannot occur organically. The image of the child and the relationship between the educator and the child have a direct and strong bond. Without a rich image of the child, formation of a trusting relationship is impossible, and without a mutual relationship, the rich image of the child cannot be seen and appreciated. In this strong bond, there is a third important component that cannot be missed by practitioners, especially those in leadership and mentorship positions.

The image of the educator is critical to the success of the other two components. For a close and trusting relationship to be formed, the child must be able to see a rich image of the

educator and vice versa: for the child to discover a rich image of the educator, a strong relationship must be built.

The educator in a Reggio-inspired program does not only believe in the rich image of the child but also guides the child in discovering her rich image by trusting her in making decisions, allowing her to discover through trial and error and adding to her self-confidence and expansion of self-image.

I believe as leaders and mentors we have the duty to guide our educators to discover their own rich image of the educator by working side by side with them, listening to their different thoughts and opinions, trusting them in their decision making and supporting them when they fail.

Unfortunately, the traditional educational system not only holds an image of an incapable and dependent child, but the same untrusting, impersonal image for its educators as well.

Teachers in the traditional educational system are seen as agents of delivery. Their job is to deliver predetermined knowledge to their students. The system mandates the curriculum to be taught by the teachers, it expects outcomes that meet the standards and tests the teacher's teaching skills by conducting exams and testing their students. There is no trust in the teacher's knowledge and personal experiences. There is no room for the teacher to experiment, to expand her own knowledge in natural settings and there is no room for error.

The empty image of the educator is truly a unfortunate concept:

- The educator never truly believes in herself and her ways of doing things. She depends on the systematic methods imposed on her and she stops thinking outside of the box
- She feels alone and unsupported, trapped in a rigid system
- She loses interest in the teaching because it is dry, inorganic and limited, accompanied by no new learning

Furthermore and very importantly:

- The educator never truly understands how to search for the rich image of the child
- She can never trust a child because she herself is never trusted
- Without a rich image of child and with no trust, the educator will never be able to build a close relationship with the child

The equation is invalid, the cycle is broken and learning is unsuccessful.

As mentors and leaders we must see our educators as rich, capable individuals, each with their own vast amount of experience and knowledge, energy and commitment, hundreds of languages with both strengths and areas that need extra support.

We must give our educators:

Resources – The material and the personal support that is needed to research a child’s learning, the information and

a mentor to problem-solve with, to discuss challenges with, and to feel supported by throughout the research.

We must recognize that educators, like children, have a hundred ways of learning and expressing themselves. The adult may lose her imagination when losing touch with natural learning and we must provide our educators with enough stimulation that they remember how to be creative, to be a child at heart again, and thirsty for learning so that their learning never ends.

Trust – a mutual trust such that the educator wants the best for the child, that she will use her resources to research the best way possible, and that her rich character will influence the child in the best way possible.

Time – the time to spend with the child, the time to sit alone and reflect, the time to observe, document, share and discuss, the time to research, brainstorm and plan.

Self-respect – our educators must know that they are recognized and appreciated. They must know we see their successes. They must be able to find their own rich image through our support and leadership.

It is through this rich image of the educator, I believe, that we can train truly rich educators with confidence to embrace uncertainty and share control with children in their care.

Only an educator who holds a rich image of self can hold a rich image of a child, and it is our duty as leaders and mentors to help educators discover their own rich image.