

Experiencing Reggio Emilia

EARLY LEARNING CENTRE



ELC Educators in Reggio Emilia, Italy

THROUGH THESE OPPORTUNITIES CHILDREN ARE ABLE TO EXPLORE DIFFERENT POINTS OF VIEW, GAIN SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE AND ENHANCE THEIR CREATIVE ABILITY, WHICH ENGAGES THEIR CURIOSITY AND FOSTERS LEARNING.

LIZ BAWDEN DIRECTOR OF ELC

In April this year five educators from the Early Learning Centre - Jane Stafford, Stephanie Pender, Jane Smitten, Nina Sofo and myself - travelled to Reggio Emilia in Italy to participate in an International Study Tour.

The early childhood educational system in the city of Reggio Emilia in northern Italy was developed by Loris Malaguzzi, an educational theorist. This approach began over 40 years ago and has been recognised internationally as best practice. The schools in Reggio base their teaching and learning on the recognition of the amazing potential of young children to question, reflect, theorise, problem solve, experiment and express their ideas through 'the hundred languages'. *No Way, The Hundred is There* is a poem written by Loris Malaguzzi which recognises the way children construct knowledge and make sense of their world as they explore many different types of materials and expressive languages.

The St Leonard's College Early Learning Centre was established in 2004 and built on strong foundations influenced by the educational project in Reggio Emilia. The way the ELC building was designed, how the learning environment is set up, and our teaching practice are all based on Reggio Emilia principles. In line with this approach, we continue to gain knowledge, experience and understanding of the principles that influence educators to foster rich learning environments that promote and value strong relationships with children and families.

The opportunity to participate in the study tour with educators from all over the world was a very exciting proposition. As educators we looked forward to new inspiration and a provocation for our thinking and practice at St Leonard's College.

Our week of lectures and school visits began with the question so central to our practice: What is education for? Maddelenna Tedeschi, an educationalist for the school at the Loris Malaguzzi International Centre in Reggio Emilia, delivered the introductory lecture. This was a good starting point for our reflection on what we do and how we can continue to offer a high quality program which enriches children's learning.



Playing with futuristic glowing rocks in the St Leonard's College ELC

The highlights included visiting schools and preschools, seeing their inspiring learning environments and the way their educators worked with young children. It was obvious that the whole community was committed and genuinely valued the importance of early childhood education.

The research projects that children and families experience at St Leonard's College are an integral part of the program and enable small groups of children to research an idea in more depth, engaging them to develop theories in collaboration with others. The children's learning is then acknowledged and celebrated by inviting the ELC community to find out what they have discovered.

At the Loris Malaguzzi Centre in Reggio we had the opportunity to experience some of their project based inquiries at *The Wonder of Learning* exhibition which included the *Ray of Light*. We were inspired particularly by their exploration of light and digital technologies and how they present these to children. Through these opportunities children are able to explore different points of view, gain scientific knowledge and experience and enhance their creative ability, which engages their curiosity and fosters learning.

On our return, a small group project was initiated by the PYP unit of inquiry 'Where we are in Place and Time' which enabled the children to explore their understanding of what the future means. The children explored new technologies such as the data projector, a web camera and different effects of light. The children had confident theories of the future. Taya (5 years) said: "You can't remember anything about the future because you haven't been there." James (5) said: "In the future things will be different." As a class the children explored alternative energy sources such as solar energy and designed vehicles for the future. Families were invited back to the ELC after dark, enabling all the children to demonstrate their learning. We all enjoyed the future world projected on the screen, reading their ideas and seeing their designs and inventions: how their moon rocks were charged up by light to glow, invisible messages illuminated by UV light and interacting with the web camera to create a future world.

All educators, including Bree Phelan who attended the 2007 study tour, gained invaluable experience and knowledge by participating in the tour. We continue to gain more of an understanding about this approach to teaching and learning to enrich our program offered to the children of the Early Learning Centre.