

Reggio Emilia Inspires T4T's Found-Objects Programs

Reggio Emilia schools are founded on certain beliefs about who children are and how they learn. One of the central tenets of the Reggio Emilia Approach is that every child is a creative child, full of potential, with the desire and right to make meaning out of life within a context of rich relationships, in many ways, and using many “languages.” Children are communicators, developing intellectually through the use of symbolic representations, including words, movement, drawing, painting, building, sculpture, shadow play, collage, dramatic play, and music, all of which lead children to surprising levels of communication, symbolic skills, and creativity (Edwards & Springate, 1993). Trash for Teaching (T4T) is a materials resource and an arts education provider, implementing various Reggio Emilia practices in its programs.

Connecting Materials

At Reggio Emilia schools, open-ended materials are considered “intelligent” being inherently free of intention or prescribed use. Clean and safe materials are found in out of the way places, sorted and made accessible for students to use as tools of communication, cognition and expression. T4T’s pedagogical roots derive from the materials it accesses from local industries’ discards: the materials are the lesson. Cones, ribbons, wires, cardboard strips, plastic, wood and fabric of every description are organized into bins and aesthetically arranged on the visiting *Treasure Trucks* and in the warehouse. Exposure to these materials creates awareness and a re-valuing of what may have been previously called ‘trash’ in the teaching community and for these young environmental stewards. The care and imagination that the T4T programs use in choosing materials can be cultivated in all classrooms and even at home.

Connecting the Rings Supporting Children

When Steve and Kathy Stanton founded T4T, they saw first hand how a Reggio Emilia preschool program inspired their son. That in turn inspired them to support their son’s school and education by sourcing and providing materials for use in the classroom; the lesson being that partnerships between parents, teachers and children create a powerful means of expanding learning potential. T4T programs and teaching artists help to build a classroom community based on shared experiences sequenced from first exposure to the materials, to the design and sketching of projects, to their construction and final exhibition. In every step, students are encouraged to discuss their choices and reflect on their decisions and discoveries, building relationships and confidence effortlessly. Children are passionate about their projects and giddy about their accomplishment because they have gone through the creative process, making choices based on their own interests; children are allowed the freedom to create with their own ideas.