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Sunday 6th Oct 2019

The Reggio Emilia Approach: two days between theory and practice

Ciro Migliore – Current News (/index.php/current-news) – 22 May 2019



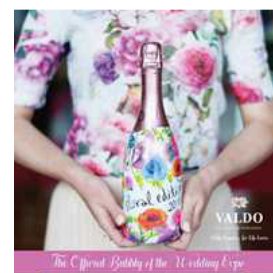
Annalisa Contrafatto -

The Friends of Thandolwethu NPO (<http://friendsofthandolwethu.org/>) organised two days rich of events on the Reggio Emilia and decolonised education inspired approaches to early learning.

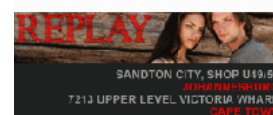
This non-profit organisation is assisting members of the local community in setting up and running the Thandolwethu Early Childhood Development Centre in Samora Machel township, on the outskirts of Cape Town. Their goals are: raise funds to support training of the staff, build the centre, ensure quality educational activities, promote and disseminate innovative educational practices inspired by the Reggio Emilia pedagogic approach. (<http://friendsofthandolwethu.org/reggio-emilia-inspired/>)

The recent initiatives included visits to local Early Childhood Development centres, participating to a radio programme, and organising a seminar and a workshop.

(<https://www.facebook.com/LaGazzettaDelSudAfrica/>)



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On Friday 17th May Catherine Collingwood, Reggio Emilia inspired Early Learning Practitioner and Deputy Chairperson of Friends of Thandolwethu, accompanied local and international academics to visit two ECDs in Samora Machel. This was followed by a panel interview with community radio IQFM, where the panelists - Dr Fikile Nxumalo, ECD consultant Joanne Peers, and Catherine Collingwood - touched on what is inclusive education, what are parents' expectations about education, how is the community of Samora Machel involved in early learning of children, how to introduce and maintain diversity in education, and more. The audience was encouraged to interact by phoning in and ask questions or offer their opinion on the subject.

Educators, parents, teachers, atelieristas, ECD staff, academics, volunteers, and students got together on Friday afternoon at iThemba primary school in Capricorn for a seminar on the same subject. The keynote speaker, Dr Fikile Nxumalo, elaborated on "What is a Reggio Emilia and Decolonising Inspired Approach to Early Learning and how appropriate is it in the context of Cape Town?". Born and raised in eSwatini, and now based in the US, Dr Nxumalo is a specialist in Reggio Emilia Inspired, decolonising early learning practices. She introduced key elements and values of the Reggio Emilia Approach to deepen knowledge of this practice, sharing her experiences of learning within place/context and introducing decolonial Early Childhood Education perspectives.

Her "provocation", to use a Reggio Inspired language, was followed by reflection, discussion, and practical work in groups, facilitated by Joanne Peers, co-researcher in the project "Decolonising Childhood Discourses". Professor Karin Murris, main investigator in the project "Decolonising Childhood Discourses", closed the session with observations and left some open questions for the audience to continue this reflection in the next days and weeks, within their context. Artist Andy Mason captured the contents discussed during the day in a series of visual story-telling tables, while Claire Homewood drawings of contextual flora and fauna helped to ground the participants and to bring the attention to the immediate surroundings.

The inspiration, enthusiasm, and ideas shared on Friday culminated into a workshop held in Samora Machel on Saturday 18th May. Interestingly, in the true spirit of acknowledging community-based pedagogical inspirations, the participants were not only teachers and academics, but also parents, volunteers, and children. Community leader Nokubonga "Sbosh" Mepeni opened the event, and introduced the Consul of Italy, Emanuele Pollio, who encourages and supports the vision of a Reggio Inspired ECD in Samora Machel. Dr Fikile Nxumalo invited participants to share views on how learning happens in Samora Machel, what is the community role in learning, and what is quality education in Samora Machel; she then shared her reflections on the theme of a Reggio Emilia and Decolonising Inspired Approach to Early Learning.

The children engaged with natural and recyclable materials (shells, stones, plastic bottle lids, fabric pieces, cardboard boxes, ribbons, buttons, paint, clay...), while the participants observed what the children were doing, how they were doing it, what items interested the most, and what were the processes taking place, with the goal of sharing their observations later with the group.

Catherine Collingwood offered an overview and history of the Reggio Emilia Approach and presented some of Loris Malaguzzi's ideas about the child as well as parents and community in the Reggio Emilia Development perspectives, exploring the resonances with the context of the opening conversation. The contribution of director, actor and puppeteer, Siphelo Mtshetsha connected the potential of creative arts in youth development to the discourse of the 100 languages of children in Reggio Inspired Approaches; he also demonstrated how to create puppets with inexpensive or recycled materials, and how to bring them to life.

For Friends of Thandolwethu NPO (<http://friendsofthandolwethu.org/>) those were the first two public events. Much effort was invested in the organisation, and they were both successful, highlighting the interest for the theme of education and the need to create more opportunities for individuals with different perspectives such as parents, teachers, artists, and children to share their views.

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