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The role of the environment and of space in the Reggio Emilia Approach.

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The theme of educational spaces stirs up a fundamental question: is the environment only one part of the educational process or is it like a neural network going through the whole body of education? In 1916 Dewey had laid the groundwork for one of the pillars of the Reggio Emilia Approach (REA): individuals seldom exist in isolation; instead, they usually interact with the objects and entities around them. The environment is made of the specific continuity of the surroundings with one's own active tendencies. [...] In brief, the environment consists of those conditions that promote or hinder, stimulate, or inhibit, the characteristic activities of a living being. Thus, the environment may be regarded as a space or a field in which networks of relationships, interconnections, and interactions between entities occur.

“Reggio Emilia is an inspirational early years’ approach that is not an educational model in the formal sense, with defined methods, teacher certification standards, and accreditation processes,” but rather it “embraces a progressive vision of education in seeking new kinds of schools for young children” (Aden & Theodotou 2019). In the Reggio Emilia Approach, attention to furnishings, shapes, colors, architecture, materials and to the relatedness of spaces and environments implicitly defines the roles of the pre-schools and their activities.

The REA environment is a multi-dimensional place, a hybrid space that is given shape by the relationship created within it. It is a multi-sensory place not so much in the sense of being simply rich in stimuli but having different sensory values, so that everyone can tune in according to his or her own personal reception characteristics. In other words, standard univocal space solutions cannot be conceived for everyone. The REA school is a collective environment, based on participation and community management, on collegiality and conviviality, on shared values and objectives. Creative spaces such as the atelier and focus on the ecology of the environment are paramount to understand the success of the REA educational approach.