

ECEY6010 Curricula

Part 1

I will be comparing and contrasting the Early Years Foundation Stage in England, with the Reggio Emilia approach to early education.

In England, all settings must adhere to The Early Years Statutory Framework (Department for Education, 2024), which is supported by the non-statutory curriculum guidance; Development Matters (Department for Education, 2023).

The Reggio Emilia approach is a child-centred approach to learning, which originated in nineteenth century Italy, and has been influential in shaping early education in various other countries [\(Reggio Emilia Approach, n.d.\)](#).

Both the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework and the Reggio Emilia Approach consider play to be an important part of the curriculum, but each approach differs, with the Reggio Emilia approach being more holistic and child-centred, whereas the Early Years Foundation Stage is a more structured framework.

I will start by examining the curricula guidance. The Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework sets the standards for all early years providers and 'is about what children learn, as well as how they learn' (Department for Education, 2025, p.7). The Early Learning Goals state the skills and knowledge that children should have by the end of the early years foundation stage. The framework does not however, 'prescribe a particular teaching approach' (Department for Education, 2025, p.17), although the framework does state that effective practice should combine child-led play with adult-guided learning and teaching.

In comparison, the Reggio Emilia Approach does not have a formal written framework that practitioners must adhere to. The Reggio Emilia Approach is just that, an approach to childhood, rather than a standard for learning. Learning is driven by the interests of the child, rather than a pre-defined curriculum. Aden & Theodotou (2019, quoted in Mineo, 2023) state that the Reggio Emilia Approach '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'.

The Reggio Emilia Approach is influenced by the poem; the hundred languages, by Loris Malaguzzi (Reggio Emilia Approach, n.d.). The Reggio Emilia Approach facilitates children to discover and express themselves through a 'hundred languages'.

In contrast, the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework particularly focuses on ensuring that children become school ready, and prioritises literacy and numeracy over a more emergent curriculum (Ghasemtabar, 2022). Chicken, 2023 agrees with Ghasemtabar, 2022, concluding that despite practitioners' desire for children to have more autonomy of their learning, this is rescinded by the need to ensure their academic attainment. A concern about the prioritising of early literacy and numeracy at the expense of play is shared by Whitebread (2012), as well as Gleave and Cole-Hamilton (2012), who highlight concerns about limited play opportunities due to more structured

learning, as well as factors such as busy schedules, poor environments and a lack of appreciation for the many benefits of play. The need for play-based learning is also highlighted by Taylor and Boyer (2019).

The Reggio Emilia Approach is clear that children are capable and active learners, who learn through their own self-determined play, whereas the Early Years Foundation Stage is clear on the potential benefits and need for play, but advocates for balancing child-led play with adult-led learning. Pramling Samuelsson et al. (2008) propose a pedagogy that does not separate play from learning. The blended approach favoured by the Early Years Statutory Framework is similar to the approach suggested by Stephen (2010), who cites research to back up this approach, and discusses the influence of social interactions and the environment.

The Reggio Emilia Approach also considers the environment to be important for learning, where the environment is considered to be the third teacher, supporting the child and practitioner to learn together, through a variety of open-ended resources. The Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework also values the learning environment, with one of the four 'guiding principles' that 'children learn well in enabling environments with teaching and support from adults, who respond to their individual interests and needs' (Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework, 2024, p.7). The Early Years Foundation Stage advocates having 'continuous provision', which is core resources that children can always access (Early Excellence, n.d.). 'Continuous provision' is often made up of open-ended resources, that children can explore freely, and according to Bottrill, 2022, this can enable children.

Both the Reggio Emilia Approach and the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework view the role of practitioners as being crucial for learning, albeit in different ways. The Reggio Emilia Approach frames practitioners as facilitators for learning rather than instructors, passing knowledge on. The learning that takes place is unique to the child and determined by their own thoughts and creativity, rather than being pre-determined by the practitioner. Coşkun (2022) refers to Reggio Emilia teachers as 'guides' and advocates for enabling children to minimise their need for the adult. Conversely, the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework states that 'children learn through play, by adults modelling, by observing each other and through adult-guided learning' (Department for Education, 2024). Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development developed the idea that temporary support and guidance by someone more knowledgeable, could enable a learner to learn new things through their social interaction. Bruner further developed the idea of 'scaffolding' children's learning. The Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework is clearly influenced by the work of Vygotsky and Bruner (Dipper and Siraj-Blatchford, 2025). In recent years there has been a drive to improve the qualifications of early years practitioners and a drive for Continuous Professional Development for practitioners (Waters and Payler, 2015).

The Reggio Emilia Approach and The Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework are both influenced by the work of Piaget, who emphasised the importance of active exploration, which is facilitated through play.

In 2020, a research review by a coalition of early years organisations, concluded that play-based learning is beneficial particularly for communication and language skills, and that expressive arts play a vital role in mental health and overall learning (Pascal et al., 2020).

The Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework and the Reggio Emilia Approach differ in their approach to assessment. The Reggio Emilia Approach favours a narrative form of assessment, through projects, and using documentation to record and reflect on a child's learning journey. According to Coşkun (2022), documentation is part of the learning process, and process-oriented rather than product-oriented. Conversely, the Early Years Statutory Framework relies on formal summative assessments, with the requirement for practitioners to complete the Progress Check at 2, Reception Baseline Assessment and the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (Department for Education, 2024).

I will now briefly consider the challenges of implementing each approach. Both approaches are heavily dependent on the practitioner, requiring the practitioner to understand their role, how children learn, and have an excellent knowledge of the individual child. If practitioners do not have the knowledge and skills required, this will have a negative impact on the child's learning. The PISA Report (Ingram et al., 2022) calls for professional development for early years educators.

The documentation required to track children's learning journey with the Reggio Emilia Approach, may be time consuming for the practitioner. Similarly, the time required to continually plan and implement adult-led learning, and to undertake summative assessments, through the Early Years Statutory Framework may also be time consuming for practitioners.

The Reggio Emilia Approach does not advocate the use of summative assessment, so it does not produce data for practitioners to track progress or compare the effectiveness of the setting. Conversely, the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework requires practitioners to use summative assessment at age two, at the start of Reception and at the end of Reception. This does ensure a consistency across settings and enable practitioners to evaluate the setting

In conclusion, both the Reggio Emilia Approach and the Early Years Statutory Framework value play, and agree that every child is unique. The approaches differ, however, in how they plan to support each individual child in their play and subsequent learning. The Reggio Emilia Approach entrusts the child with controlling their learning through exploration, with the practitioner in the role of facilitator. The Early Years Foundation Stage takes a different approach, with learning and play being planned by the practitioner, who considers the child's interests, but ultimately is ensuring a pre-

determined curriculum is being delivered, and the practitioner then uses summative assessment to ensure that this particular learning is taking place.

Part 2

Many child development theories incorporate the concept of the unique child, recognising that every child is different with their own unique learning pace and learning styles. Piaget recognised that each child is unique, and takes an active role in their own learning.

One of the overarching principles of the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework (2024) is that 'every child is a unique child, who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured' (Department for Education, 2024, p.7).

I will be considering how the concept of the 'unique child' relates to assessment methods and progress tracking in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Firstly, I will examine the 'Progress Check at two', which is a statutory assessment that practitioners must complete between the ages of two and three. This requirement is set out in the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework (Department for Education, 2024) and aims to review a child's development, celebrate their progress, identify any areas of concern, and to help parents to understand and support their child's development (Department for Education, 2022).

The progress check at two provides a summary of the child's progress in the prime areas of learning, but does not consider other factors such as creativity. The progress check at two is somewhat mindful of the child's uniqueness, recording areas where the child has made good progress or where the child's progress is less than expected. The progress check at two should be completed by the child's key person, and according to the guidance document, should be informed by professional judgement, careful observation, the voice of the child, and the views of the parents and other involved professionals (Department for Education, 2022). Considering the voice of the child is important to embrace the concept of the 'unique child'. Practitioners can use the non-statutory guidance document; Development Matters (Department for Education, 2023) as a tool to assist them, as the guidance has 'checkpoints', which can help practitioners to notice if a child is at risk of falling behind. According to the Special educational needs and disability code of practice (Department for Education and Department of Health (2015), recognising if a child has a special educational need or disability early and ensuring prompt support, enables children to make the very best progress.

Next, I will examine the statutory Reception Baseline Assessment. The Reception Baseline Assessment must be completed within the first six weeks of a child starting in Reception, and assesses early maths and literacy (UK Government, 2024). The assessment is not used by practitioners to inform their curriculum, instead it is

used to track progress through school, meaning that the Reception Baseline Assessment is not very mindful of the concept of the 'unique child'. The assessment creates quantitative data for the government through a summative assessment, and requires the child to sit quietly for a period of time and engage with set tasks that may not interest them. The Reception Baseline Assessment also takes practitioners away from interacting with children in the setting, when they are required to sit with an individual child. If a child has a special educational need or disability, they can be disapplied from the assessment, so this aspect of the Reception Baseline Assessment is more mindful of the 'unique child'. Archer (2017) however, argues that the Reception Baseline Assessment 'prioritizes measurement over relational pedagogy and care ethics'.

The final statutory assessment that I will consider is the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile, which is completed in the final term of Reception. The child's level of development is assessed against the early learning goals, and children are judged to be meeting expected levels of development or emerging in an area of development, if they are not meeting the expected level of development (Department for Education, 2024). The Early Years Foundation Stage Profile is completed by the class teacher, using their professional judgement, based on their knowledge of the child through formative and summative assessments.

A strength of the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile is that a standardised assessment can be used as a benchmark for children's learning and development, and evaluation and accountability are possible. Identifying children who may have a special educational need or disability before they enter Key Stage One is also beneficial, as swift support can be sought.

A disadvantage of this assessment may be that children may be 'labelled' and an assumption made that they will not meet the expected level of development throughout their education. Bottrill (2022) states that children should not be defined by their ability.

In addition to the three statutory assessments, practitioners will also be undertaking other less formal assessments. According to the statutory framework (Department for Education, 2024) 'formative assessment is an integral part of the learning and development process'. Birth to Five Matters (Early Education, 2021) agrees that learning is best supported through formative assessment, and details a cycle of observation of the child, followed by assessment and then planning how best to support and extend learning, before observing and assessing again, before planning how to further support, before the cycle continues.

Using observation as an assessment method is consistent with the concept of the 'unique child', as observation allows practitioners to view the child holistically and not focus on a particular objective, like with summative assessment.

summative assessments can be useful for providing a benchmark for the skills and knowledge that children need to ensure the very best foundation of their future learning. Consistency can be achieved through summative assessment, and summative assessments can also be used by practitioners to assist them to evaluate their

curriculum and pedagogy, and can even be helpful when wanting to discuss any potential special educational need or disability with parents (Palaiologou, 2024, p156). Summative assessments may be time consuming and take practitioners away from children, although in recent years there has been a reduction in the amount of evidence that practitioners are required to collate. The Department for Education stated in 2021, that reducing unnecessary paperwork was a key aim of the early years foundation stage. An increasing concern about practitioner workload and research into the benefits of quality interactions had led to a decrease in the amount of recordkeeping that is judged necessary. According to the Early Years Statutory Framework (2024), assessment does not require excessive paperwork and should not cause practitioners to spend long periods involved in record keeping, rather than interacting with children. Despite the potential benefits of summative assessment, formative assessment methods are more compliant with the notion of the 'unique child'. By observing children closely and taking the time to get to know them and develop a strong attachment, as detailed by Bowlby's attachment theory, practitioners can obtain a more accurate understanding of the child, thus enabling them to provide the very best learning environment, with the most appropriate support to enable the child to reach their full potential. Viewing a child holistically enables practitioners to truly embrace the 'unique child'. Grenier and Vollans (2023) favour formative assessments based on practitioner observations and their professional development, rather than rigid structured accountability assessments. Parekh (2017) is also not in favour of summative assessments, stating that such assessments may be used to rank and categorise students, which in turn reinforces systematic inequalities.

In conclusion, it is essential to use assessment to ensure that children are making progress and to identify if a child requires additional support. Formative assessment methods often adopt a more holistic view of the child than summative assessment methods, that assess something more specific.

The PISA Report (Ingram, 2022) advocates for assessment models that align with relational pedagogy and child-led learning.

Palaiologou (2024) states that assessment should recognise a child's abilities, rather than adopting a deficit model and focusing on what they cannot do. Every child is unique and this should be reflected not only in how they are supported to learn, but also how their learning is assessed.

Part 3

BLOG POST

Early Years Series

The Great Outdoors: Making the most out of outdoor provision.

By Elizabeth Llewellyn-Jones, Early Years Practitioner

15th June 2025

Children have a right to play, that is enshrined in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), and the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework (Department for Education, 2024) states that every early years provision must have daily opportunities for outdoor play (Department for Education, 2024), but are we making the most out of outdoor play?

With stretched budgets (Britton et al. , 2020), a pressure for academic attainment in early years taking precedence over more holistic approaches to early education (Chicken, 2023), pressures succeeding the Coronavirus Pandemic (Fox et al. , 2021), concerns about the perceived potential for children to be more likely to get hurt during outdoor play (Gill, 2016), and often a lack of facilities or practitioner knowledge about outdoor provision (Kelly et al. 2022), many settings are not making the most of their outdoor provision.

There is much evidence about the benefits of outdoor play for early years children (Bilton, 2010; Grigg et al., 2016; Harding, 2005; Waite, 2011), but how can practitioners offer the very best outdoor environment for their children? This blog will offer useful advice on how to enhance the outdoor provision.

On a budget

Enhancing your outdoor provision does not necessarily mean that you need to blow your entire budget on the outdoor provision. Here are some relatively cheap options that can enhance your outdoor provision:

- Water trays and water walls can be enhanced by adding containers, scoops, pipes, tubes, guttering, bath toys, sponges, and jugs.
- Sand trays can be enhanced through adding containers, scoops, plastic cones, and a cash till to make an 'ice cream shop' or similar role play.
- A car/bike wash can be created by adding containers of water and sponges.
- A play house/hut/tent can be turned into various role-play set-ups.
- A mud kitchen can be enhanced with water, mud, acorns, conkers, sticks, leaves, pinecones, shells, logs, containers and pipettes.

- Pots of water with paint brushes provide an excellent mark making opportunity, as do chalks.
- Balance scales can be explored with natural resources.
- Crates, wooden planks, tyres, and pallets can be used for constructing or providing opportunities for risky play.
- Ground sheets, tarpaulin, blankets, rope and large sticks can be used for den building.
- A small area of soil or a tuff tray/container with soil, tools, plant pots, seeds, watering cans/jugs can provide hours of planting fun.
- Pallets can be used to create furniture/role-play areas.
- Ice may be readily available in winter, or could be made and introduced in summer.
- Tyres can be filled with sand as a cheaper alternative to a sand pit/tray.
- Tyres or cable reels could be used to make small-world setups.
- An investigation station can easily be created with magnifying glasses, binoculars, clipboards and writing materials, tweezers, bug viewers, trowels, non-fiction books or laminated sheets about flowers/minibeasts/clouds/leaves/trees/birds/wildlife.

Pressure to prioritise phonics and numeracy

Settings often face pressure to prioritise phonics and numeracy over other areas of learning. The outdoors can provide opportunities to promote early numeracy, reading and writing, as well as being a fantastic place to explore and learn about the world (Jarvis, 2009).

Pascal et al. (2020) state that maths and literacy should be taught in real-world contexts to make learning meaningful. Looking for naturally occurring patterns in nature, weighing material for a project, comparing the height of trees, a tree house becoming a shop with money, are all examples of potential outdoor maths activities.

Risk aversion

According to Gill (2007), 'childhood is becoming undermined by risk aversion'. In many settings, practitioners are not providing opportunities for risky play because of concerns about children being injured. Waite (2011) argues that children need to take risks in order for them to learn how to recognise and manage risks themselves. The outdoor provision can provide many potential opportunities for risky play.

Practitioner skills and knowledge

Making the most of the outdoor provision is very much dependent on practitioners having the desire, skills and knowledge. Practitioner Continuous Professional Development is increasingly important. Bilton (2017) highlighted the different ways in which practitioners could use the outdoor provision and highlighted key differences between Welsh and English provisions. The OECD (2018) highlights the need for teachers to continually change their practice in order to stay relevant.

Conclusion

Outdoor learning is a statutory part of the curriculum, that practitioners should embrace for the very many benefits. Ofsted (2025) states that a play based curriculum that supports movement and exploration is preferable. With the right training and a little investment, practitioners can ensure that the outdoor provision is a great place to be, where children are supported to learn.

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