

**CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
THE CASE OF REGGIO EMILIA APPROACH IN DUBAI**

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Abstract

Although the term “culture” is a controversial term and there is no unified meaning that is accepted by all, societies deal with culture in every aspect of day-to-day life and interactions. The dilemma of how to introduce or accept a culture or cultural norm in a society, especially a society that is regarded as multicultural, is felt more intensely. Within international schools and specifically, in the multicultural society of countries such as the United Arab Emirates, this cultural diversity is clearly visible. On the other hand, the world-known and famous Reggio Emilia approach which has been successful in numerous Western countries has found its way to pre-primary education in the UAE. This paper will look into the implementation of the Reggio Emilia approach in the culturally diverse society of the UAE compared to Italy and other Western countries. The aim is to see if the important aspects of the Reggio Emilia approach such as teachers as researchers, children as citizens with rights, the role of the environment, curricula as long-term projects and finally, parents as partners in education enterprise, are indeed implemented in the Reggio Emilia nurseries in the UAE. Or could it be the case that due to the cultural diversity of the UAE this implementation in its full and exact sense is not possible and nurseries in the UAE are only inspired by the approach?

Keywords: culture, cultural diversity, early childhood education, Dubai, Reggio Emilia approach

Discipline: pedagogy

Absztrakt**KULTURÁLIS SOKSZÍNŰSÉG ÉS KISGYERMEKKORI NEVELÉS DUBAJBAN A REGGIO EMILIA MEGKÖZELÍTÉSÉBEN**

A „kultúra” kifejezés ugyan vitatott megnevezés és nincs egy mindenki által elfogadott jelentése, a társadalom minden aspektusban foglalkozik a kultúrával, legyen az mindennapi élet és a hozzá tartozó interakciók. Dilemmát jelent a kultúra és a társadalmi kulturális normák elfogadása és bemutatása legfőképpen olyan szociális környezetben, ahol multikulturalizmus van jelen, és, ahol ennek a hatása jobban is érezhető. Nemzetközi iskolákban, és főleg, olyan multikulturális társadalmi körökben mint az Egyesült Arab Emírátságok, ezek a kulturális változatosságok tisztán észrevehetőek. A világhírű és közzismert Reggio Emilia szemlélet, ami sikert aratott számos nyugati országban, utat talált az Egyesült Arab Emírátságok kora gyermekkori intézményeiben is. Ez a tanulmány betekintést nyújt a Reggio Emilia megközelítés megvalósításába a multikulturális Egyesült Arab Emírátságokban, és egyidejűleg összehasonlítja azt Olaszországgal és más nyugati országgal. A cél az, hogy betekintést nyerjünk a Reggio Emilia szemlélet olyan fontos aspektusaira, mint például a tanárok mint kutatók, a gyerekek mint jogokkal rendelkező állampolgárok, a környezet jelentősége, a tananyag mint hosszútávú projekt, és végül a szülők mint partnerek az oktatásban. Továbbá, valóban jelen vannak-e a felsorolt jellemzők a Reggio Emilia óvodákban az Egyesült Arab Emírátságokban? Vagy azt kell feltételezzük, hogy a teljes és pontos implementációja nem lehetséges a Reggio képviselte szemléletnek az Egyesült Arab Emírátságok kulturális sokfélesége miatt, és az Egyesült Arab Emírátságok óvodáit csak inspirálta ez a megközelítés?

Kulcsszavak: kultúra, kulturális sokszínűség, kisgyermekkori nevelés, Dubaj, Reggio Emilia megközelítés

Diszciplína: neveléstudomány

Introduction

The word “culture” is a controversial term where no one can provide a meaning that is unified and accepted by all. However, we are confronted with it in every aspect of our lives, in our day-to-day interactions with people, as well as, in our educational systems and how our curriculum works. The presence of culture and the controversy over its definition take the form of a dilemma when, and if, we are confronted with a society where there is a multicultural population. In addition, it gets even more demanding when education is involved. In this regard, the educational and administration staff of an international school really need to think twice before introducing a teaching method, an approach or a teaching philosophy. As the name suggests, international schools are normally known for their

international population of staff (teaching or otherwise) and students. The social status of the members in these schools also varies, as at first, they were established for the purpose of providing a national educational system for expatriates sent by their governments to different countries with the aim of doing business or government projects, for instance. As time passed elite locals too desired to send their children to these international schools in the hope of a brighter and more secure future for their children. These international schools with their varied curricula are home to many different students from the pre-primary stage to grade twelve.

This paper will look into the concept of cultural diversity within international schools and the implementation of Reggio Emilia at pre-primary level

education in the United Arab Emirates and most specifically its city of Dubai. The Reggio Emilia approach, which has gained popularity around the world, has also been introduced to the pre-primary educational system of the UAE; however, how effectively and how suitably Reggio Emilia can perform is in dire need of research. The first section of this paper will look into the concept of culture and cultural diversity. The second part of the paper will look into the culture or norms of life in the UAE, as an Arab and a Muslim country, and how different nationalities can live in the same society regardless of their social/cultural background. The third section will introduce the five most important characteristics of the Reggio Emilia approach and compare them with the cultures and norms of the society and educational system in Dubai. The aim is to see if it is really the case that the Western and liberal approach of the Reggio Emilia is and can be as effective as it is in its native land of Reggio Emilia, Italy and in a broader sense in the Western community. Finally, the paper will try to find answers to questions such as: how the Reggio Emilia approach is implemented in at least 22 nurseries in Dubai and how much of the Reggio approach is really implemented and followed in those nurseries. Do these nurseries really follow the Reggio Emilia approach, or they are simply inspired by it?

Literature Review

The term culture amongst anthropologists is a notoriously difficult term to properly define. In 1952, two American anthropologists Kroeber and Kluckhohn reviewed the concept of culture and “compiled a list of 164 different definitions” (cited from Spencer-Oatey, 2012, p. 1). According to Tyler, culture is “the complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (ibid). This confusion and multiplicity of definitions

associated with culture is due to the different usages and different understandings that are associated with it. In other words, this term can be defined from different perspectives and for different purposes such as political or ideological needs in different societies. But what is certain about culture is that it is an aspect of human society that is learned via one’s social environment and not inherited from parents. This social learning of culture extends to our behaviour while we interact with other members of the society we live in and therefore share the same culture. According to Spencer-Oatey (2012, 7.), even „our biological needs such as eating habits are influenced by our culture” as we culturally consume food that is typical of our society and culture. For instance, the consumptions of pork products are religiously and culturally rejected in Muslim societies regardless of the degree of religious adherence in those societies, and at times it seems more a cultural choice than a religious prohibition. In this light, it is safe to say that members of societies carry different layers of attitudes and behaviours that correspond to their cultural behaviour. The most significant and different definition of culture was provided by Hofstede, as he recognised layered functionality of culture within certain societies.

1. A national level according to one’s country (or countries for people who have migrated during their lifetime);
2. A regional, ethnic, religious or language groups;
3. A gender level, according to whether a person was born as a girl or as a boy;
4. A role category, e.g. parent, son/daughter, teacher, student, etc;
5. A social class level, associated with educational opportunities and with a person’s occupation or profession;
6. For those who are employed, at an organizational or corporate level according to the way employees have been socialized by their

work organization. (cited from Spencer-Oatey, 2012, 8.).

If these specifications are considered, one can easily detect that each person can be a member of different levels and cultural groups. This is the reason that sometimes people confuse culture with kinship in families or clans for instance, or they are put into a cultural category by the language they speak, their race and ethnicity, socio-economic characteristics and even their political attachments and beliefs. However, this diversity within culture is a two-ended road, as no matter what the culture of a society is the cultural norms and the degrees people follow these norms is different for everyone. This means that a norm being very important to a family could be less important or not at all important to another one, therefore culture is not uniformly distributed within the same group of people or society. In other words, it is not possible to find two individuals who actually do share the same social class, religion, regional or ethnic backgrounds, language and race, hence sharing all cultural content to its perfection. The most important factor about culture is the fact that culture is always subject to gradual change within societies as it is not a static phenomenon. This gradual change can and is always happening with the growth and advancement of societies or in other words in education.

Education and culture can be regarded as two sides of the same coin, as with proper education cultures evolve and flourish, and with good education, cultures change and improve for the better. However, education in a culturally diverse classroom is not and should not be considered an easy task. According to Gay (2013, 49.) „the education of racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse students should promote educational equity and excellence, create community among individuals from different cultural, social and ethnic backgrounds and develop student agency, efficacy and empowerment”. Therefore, it is obvious that a

culturally responsive teaching method will always consider making learning relevant to African American students or Asian Americans for instance. This is due to the fact that these teaching methods and ideas should indeed differ for each group according to their culture, in order to provide the future adults with the necessary tools to function properly in society. Gay continues to elaborate on the idea presented by stating that for instance in America „since all Americans do not have the same set of beliefs, attitudes, customs, values, and norms, a single system of education seems impossible to serve everyone” (2013, 50.). Therefore, and with the globalized world that we are living in, it is important for educators and education policy-makers to understand and accept the existence of cultural pluralism in the world now in the 21st century. Along with this cultural pluralism, it is also important to accept and respect the differences existing amongst students in any one classroom, discrimination and nationality preferences should be eliminated and a more tolerant atmosphere is needed in classrooms, especially in international schools. The acceptance of this cultural diversity in educational systems and classrooms is an indication of behavioural expressions of knowledge transfer, respecting beliefs and religions, understanding values and recognising the importance of this diversity in learning.

UAE and Its Unique Culture

The United Arab Emirates, or the UAE, is situated in the northeast of the Arabian Peninsula and has borders with Oman and Saudi Arabia as well as Qatar. The country was formed in 1971 by the joining of the six emirates of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al-Quwain, Fujairah, and in 1972, Ras al-Khaimah. The capital city is Abu Dhabi which is the largest and the wealthiest of the seven emirates, however, Dubai is most famous for its tourism and nightlife. The country’s population is mostly non-UAE nationals, „with

expats making up 89% of the population” (Alhosani, 2022, 285). The educational system operates on two different sections of national /government schools providing free education to UAE nationals only, and the private schools, which are fee paying and both expats and nationals can enrol. According to the 2021 vision and national agenda, the development of a first-rate educational system for the UAE is emphasized. This can only be done via a „complete transformation of the current education system and teaching method” (cited from Alhosani, 2022, 285.). In that same agenda, a high level of stress and importance has been put on the necessity of preserving the Khaliji or the UAE’s unique culture and religion. However, this emphasis does not mean the exclusion of expats in the UAE’s society as Alhosani notes “one of the government’s goals in this vision is to promote an inclusive environment that integrates all segment of the society” (ibid). In other words, “the UAE continues to be a tolerant, open, caring society that cherishes its traditional roots (Ministry of Information and Culture, 2006, cited from Al-Darmaki & Sayed, 2009, 466.). The founding father of the UAE, the late Shaikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al-Nahyan stressed upon the fact that education is one of the pillars for the proper development of a country as young and prosperous as the UAE.

The Arabic culture is a unique and very complex culture, in which the Islamic religion plays an important part. Islam is the major source of beliefs, practices and values in Islamic countries. These Islamic beliefs are evident in every aspect of Arabic culture as it is the core trait of the values, concepts, ethics and attitudes both personal and in society as the religion is not only regarded as the practice of faith but it is considered as a way of life. In other words, this culture can be regarded as a hidden educational system where every aspect of life, including education, is affected by it. However, due to the diversity of the UAE’s population where different nationalities with different religions and

spoken languages live, a society is formed where one can claim that it is a multicultural environment. It could be due to this multicultural nature of the society that the UAE’s government has put insistence on attempting to preserve the unique Arabic culture in the midst of the country. In that attempt, „the UAE’s culture, customs, and traditions, e.g., Emirati music, art, dance, poetry, camel racing, clothing and food, continue to make up the UAE’s identity” (Al-Darmaki & Sayed, 2009, 466.). The Emirates society is structured on the importance of the family which can be both nuclear and extended, where individuals receive support both emotionally and financially, protection and guidance from their eldest members of the family, as another trait of Islamic culture and educated values. Another specification of the UAE’s culture is the encouragement of individuals „to obey authority figures such as parents and those who are in powerful positions such as teachers and doctors” (Al-Darmaki & Sayed, 2009, 467.). From the perspective of the languages spoken in the country although the native language of the Emirates is Arabic, other languages such as English, Persian and Urdu, amongst others, are widely spoken.

The social ranking of the Emirates as Burton puts „it is divided into three main classes of labour, brains and bank” (cited from Hopkyns, 2020, 31.). According to Davidson’s pyramid illustration, „the Emiratis are the bank at the top, the westerners/western educated are the brains in the middle and the bottom two layers are the labour” (ibid). As it is expected, the result of this social ranking is visible and does lead to cultural detachment among members of the society. This distinction is so vivid in the society as with one cursory look one can notice the difference between Emiratis and other nationalities with their different clothing and style, where men wear the traditional Arabic cloak in white and women with black full-length cloaks and head scarves. This distinction extends to the language spoken by Arab locals by their different

lifestyles, dialect spoken by them, their wealth and social status. In order to effectively run the country in an orderly manner the authorities have set strict rules and codes of conduct in both unwritten and official forms to make sure the clash of cultures is minimised. On the other hand, this sense of otherness is felt and experienced at all social levels where „different nationalities have their own social networks” (Hopkyns, 2020, 32.).

UAE and Early Education

According to the UAE laws, the preschools in the country „have 100% woman workforce” (Gandhi, 2012, 22.) and although compulsory education for children starts at the age of five or six when children are sent to schools for grade one, most parents, Arab locals and expatriates alike, send their children to kindergartens or even nurseries starting from the age of 4 months. Parallel to this choice of schooling there comes the option of hiring foreign live-in maids who act as nannies, babysitters, foster mothers, cooks, and even teachers at home. This is due to the fact that in order to live comfortably in Dubai both parents are required to have full-time jobs, on the other hand hiring full-time nannies is an easy process and even more economical than sending the toddlers to nurseries, hence it has become a trend in UAE’s society. Consequently, children spend a considerable amount of time with these in-home nannies, and according to Gandhi (2012, 17.), most children, „about 58% of them, under the age of three spend around 30-70 hours per week” with these nannies. Gandhi also stresses the fact that „this length of time is far greater than most institutional childcare hours in the US or Europe, which are increasingly criticised for being too long” (ibid). The issue with hiring these nannies is that they are mostly from impoverished backgrounds, have little education and mostly have very poor language skills. These in-home nannies/maids come from different countries such as the

Philippines, India, Sri Lanka and Indonesia, and they have formed a child-at-home model of living in the UAE (Baker, 2015, 983.). For these nannies, English or Arabic for that matter is not their first language and their proficiency in both languages is almost none existent. Furthermore, they usually do not have any qualification in childcare, except from their own experience in case they have children of their own.

According to Lootah (2011), the first private school established in the UAE was in 1960 (cited from Hopkyns, 2020, 38.), the growing number of expatriates coming to the UAE the need of private/international schools increased as well. Among different international schools available in the UAE, the British curriculum is preferred due to „their high academic and general performance” (Hopkyns 2020, 41.), and the language of instruction for these nurseries is English. Although early childhood education also covers the preschool stage and provides care from birth up to age 6 (cited from Alhosani, 2022, 287.) the curriculum of kindergartens in the UAE educating children aged four to six years of age requires to learn nine subject areas such as Arabic literacy, English literacy, Islamic studies for Muslim children, Social studies, mathematics, visual arts, computer sciences, and health and physical education (MOE, 2019, cited from Alhosani 2022, 291.). According to Alhosani (2022, 292) „among the priorities of the kindergarten curriculum is laying the foundation of the cultural, Islamic, and national identity of children”.

Reggio Emilia Approach or Reggio Emilia Inspired

A lot has been said and done with regards to the Reggio Emilia approach. Different researchers have spent their time studying different angles of this North Italian approach and the reason it has become so famous worldwide. According to New (2007, 5.), there are five specific features that

distinguish the early childhood education approach of Reggio Emilia from others:

1. An interpretation of teachers as researchers,
2. Curriculum as long-term projects,
3. The role of symbolic languages in child development and advocacy,
4. The role of environment
5. An interpretation of parents as partners in the education enterprise.

It is also believed that „Reggio Emilia demonstrates the power of creative and critical thinking especially when helped along by courage, charisma, and good timing” (ibid). Another characteristic of the Reggio approach is the fact that it is a European approach with a distinguishable Italian cultural factor embedded in it, which also depicts „the town’s long history of resistance to social injustice and its alliance with Italy’s socialist and communist parties” (New, 2007, 6.). All of these and more makes one think twice before accepting the Reggio established nurseries in the UAE and more specifically in the city of Dubai, as a not entirely Reggio approach but, in the best-case scenario, Reggio approach inspired. Having the five important features of Reggio Emilia’s approach represented above in mind, this paper argues that based on the cultural, linguistic, religious and societal norms and differences between the two countries, the Reggio Emilia approach implemented in the UAE’s nurseries are not Reggio Emilia but they are only inspired by it.

An Interpretation of Teachers as Researchers

The teachers as researchers aspect of Reggio is the most important aspect of this approach where there is no hierarchy of status amongst teachers in Reggio Emilia schools in Italy and the teachers learn and evolve along with the children. (Vargáné, 2018) However, implementing this line of thinking into the nursery organisation system of early education in the UAE is almost impossible. The hierarchy starts with the 51-49% ratio of

sponsorship of the institution before it is even established, where the Arab locals must have 51% of the sponsorship and the rest can be divided among a number of sponsors of different nationalities. At a classroom level, this hierarchy is also visible where there is a teacher and an assistant helping the teacher. These assistants are most of the time from low-income countries, mainly India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and the Philippines, and the only difference between them and the housemaids is they have some kind of official training in early childhood education. Another important factor with regards to status hierarchy within educational institutions as well as society-wide could be as Matsumoto (2019, 6.) puts it that „in the UAE people generally accept a clearly defined hierarchy of power, inherent inequalities and subordination” as they are cultural traits of the country and very common. Therefore, the fact that a teacher and the assistant in the classroom can act and function as researchers and freely decide on how and what will be the topic of the study on any particular day seems almost unfunctional.

Curriculum as Long-term Projects

This aspect of the Reggio Emilia approach is in clash with the UAE’s government’s vision for 2021 and education reform attempts. As mentioned earlier according to UAE vision 2021, the kindergarten curriculum for children aged four to six should encompass nine subject areas such as Arabic literacy, English literacy, Islamic studies, social studies, math, science, visual arts, computer sciences, and health and physical education. In this regard, the aspect of long-term projects as a curriculum simply does not have any place in the UAE’s educational system. Each nursery and kindergarten in the UAE follows a British and/or American curriculum where they strictly follow the instructions used and provided to them by the higher decision-maker section of the system. Also, the fact that Islamic studies and Arabic literacy are

stressed both by the government and the lifestyle choice of the Muslim population living in the UAE makes it impossible to follow Reggio's long-term project curriculum model in the UAE's nurseries and kindergartens.

The Role of Symbolic Languages in Child Development and Advocacy

The symbolic languages of children are the main ideology of the Reggio Emilia approach where the famous „100 languages of children” has become a trademark of the teaching approach; however, implementing this unique and symbolic language associated with children in the UAE seems almost impossible. The population of nursery attendees in the UAE based on Alkaabi's research (2022, 26.) is up to 90% foreign nationals as the UAE “is home to over 200 nationalities” (Gandhi, 2012, 3.). The wide variety of expatriates residing in the county results in over 200 cultures living side by side. This also means that the linguistics, religious, and cultural beliefs and attitudes of each child are different from the other. As culture is an important factor in the twenty-first century's social structure, it is very unlikely to consider that each child in a Reggio nursery in the UAE can actually have his/her own symbolic language and since this diversity of cultures/nationalities also include the teaching staff, the teachers too are not familiar or even educated with the language of each child. For instance, imagine a situation where an Irish national teacher is trying to understand a Muslim Persian child, and sitting beside this child is an Indian child who is Hindu and speaks different languages at home, with an entirely different culture that includes not only the students but also the teacher. In this sense, the symbolic language aspect of the Reggio approach seems to be unattainable.

The Role of the Environment

This aspect of the Reggio Emilia approach is also of extreme importance based on the classroom

structure of the Reggio institutions children spend a significant amount of time in nature, and the classrooms have bright colours, with nature and greenery elements at every corner available to children to get familiar with their surrounding environment. According to the climate change knowledge portal the UAE „has an arid desert climate with only two main seasons, winter and summer separated by two transitional periods, respectively. The winter season (December to March) has a mean temperature ranging from 16.4 degrees to 24 degrees. The summer season (June to September) is characterized by extremely high temperatures which can be expected to climb up to 50 degrees” (1.1). Having this climate specification of the UAE in mind, and the fact that nurseries in the UAE run 12 months of the year, it is almost impossible for the management of the nurseries and the UAE education policymakers to include the environment aspect of the Reggio approach within the institutions' attempts to follow Reggio. As the temperatures start rising by the end of March and continue to rise up to almost the end of November, this takes up to nine months of the year, when children cannot have access to the natural environment as they do in the Northern city of Reggio Emilia in Italy.

The cultural differences of the students and the parents also play a significant part in this aspect as well. Since most parents prefer to keep their children inside the classrooms where they are not exposed to the extreme heat for instance by going to the park next door, the children remain and spend all day inside the classrooms or in the covered and air-conditioned yards where the heat of the sun and the hot weather does not endanger their health.

An Interpretation of Parents as Partners in Education Enterprise

The most important principle of the Reggio approach is the insistence of the Reggio teachers

on the fact that „they are not substitutes for parents, but rather, share with parents the challenge and responsibility of educating their children” (New, 2007, 8.). The approach’s aim is also to expand „on principles of attachment theory so that the child’s relationships with non-familial adults are mediated by those with whom she has an initial attachment” (Bove, 1999, cited from New, 2007, 8.). This is in contrast with the culture and lifestyle of most people, local Arabs and expatriates alike, to choose between the two options of housemaid care, or international nursery option where the child spends most hours of the day at the nursery. In addition to this, gender roles in Islamic countries such as the UAE are highly influenced by Islamic laws. In these countries gender roles are strictly differentiated, as men are the breadwinners, focusing on achievement in professional careers, while women are housebound, focusing on family and quality of life. In Arab/Muslim countries women are regarded as mothers, wives and caregivers most of the time, while the society is accepted as being patriarchal and gender role stereotypes are the norm in countries like the UAE. However, with globalisation the discovery of oil in the UAE, and the advancement of technology and education, this hierarchical status and women's role in society is moving towards a more liberal treatment of women, but there is still a long way to go. In this regard, the last principle of the Reggio approach which is the partnership of the parents in their children’s education seems to be an impossible task at hand, as fathers are always busy with work and mothers, if not employees of any kind, have limited time or knowledge to be immensely involved in their children’s education.

Conclusion

This paper looked into cultural diversity and its impact in multicultural societies such as the UAE. Although culture has been associated with identity, race, ethnicity, nation, language and religion, one

can consider all of these to be determinants of a specific culture. Within education and most specifically early childhood education, different approaches have been successfully functioning in the UAE. With the government’s 2021 vision the reform policy of the educational system in the country, and the fact Reggio Emilia approach has gained worldwide recognition, a number of nurseries in the UAE are claiming to be Reggio nurseries.

Based on the five most important factors of the Reggio approach, such as the interpretation of teachers as researchers, the curriculum as a long-term project, the role of symbolic languages in child development and advocacy, the role of environment and finally the interpretation of parents as partners in education, it is clear that due to the unique culture of the UAE and the multicultural essence of the society in the country implementing the Reggio Emilia approach is not possible. The claim is that due to cultural, governmental regulations, and religious laws these five principles are simply ineffective and unresponsive in societies as diverse as the UAE. The fact that the Reggio Emilia approach is applicable in Italian culture and with some slight modification in Western countries can be traced back to the similarities between the cultures shared in the West. Therefore, it is obvious the Reggio approach cannot be replicated in full and in its entirety in a Muslim and Arabic country, where a rich and dominant Arabic culture is practised every single day. The environment which is one of the most important principles of the Reggio approach is simply unavailable to those establishments in the UAE due to the harsh, desert climate it is located in. On the other hand, the 100 languages of the children which has become the slogan of the approach and is famous around the world cannot be implemented, paid attention to or simply applicable due to the multi-national society of each classroom, especially when the classroom attendees are children under the age of six. These

international schools/nurseries who claim to follow the Reggio approach, although doing an amazing job putting an effort into improving early childhood education in the UAE, are merely inspired by the approach and not the Reggio Emilia approach as it is practised in its motherland. However, with the wealth, the endless opportunities available to investors and educators, the UAE can be a fertile ground for improvement and implementing an Islamic/Arabic version of the Reggio Emilia approach where children of all nationalities can experience a world-class education and build a proper foundation for a bright future. Until then there is a long way to go and a lot of questions that are in dire need of answers. Questions like, how religion can play such an important role in early childhood education? How to minimise the gap between the gender roles in Islamic societies where both men and women are involved in their children's education. How can children of all races, ethnicities and religions share their 100 languages and be understood by their classmates and educators alike? In short is it possible that the East meets the West without the cultural clashes the world as we know it today is in real need of such understanding and advancement starting with our young generations to come.

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