INCLUDING ELEMENTS OF REGGIO EMILIA CONCEPT IN SLOVENE CURRICULUM FOR PRESCHOOL EDUCATION

Abstract
When monitoring the achievements in preschool education around the world, it is impossible to overlook a contemporary concept, whose institution extends well in the year of 1963 and is today practiced in 22 kindergartens in Reggio Emilia (northern Italy). The concept became interesting after the year of 1983, when children from Reggio Emilia kindergartens introduced their products (pictures, drawings, statuettes, models, photographs, projects shown on panels…) on exhibition in Stockholm. They challenged the attention of professional, cultural and lay public because of exceptional display of children’s creativity and achievements. Concept Reggio Emilia derives from many different theories and leans mostly on involvement in cultural environment, diversity of children, development and use of all senses in cognitive development and quality interaction and communication. In this paper authors are focusing on three specific elements of Reggio Emilia concept (participation, cooperation with local community and project work) and their implementation in Slovene curriculum for preschool education.

Key words
Reggio Emilia, curriculum, participation, project work, local community
INTRODUCTION

When we talk about preschool education in Europe, we can talk about three main models. The first and most important model, which applies to the majority and which puts the child at the center of attention is the *professionally and institutionally organized preschool education*. It provides the institutional (center-based) protection in accordance with the tradition of child care provided for pre-school intervention programs, and generally prepare for the school in public preschool institutions, kindergartens or reception classes in primary schools. The actual supply and the programs vary in when they start, the intensity and duration (the dose of intervention), pedagogical approaches and curriculum, education of preschool teachers and the ratio between the number of children and educators. The institutional model could be extended in collaboration with parents, families and different communities - in order to strengthen and to assist them – which leads to the *combined model*. The other main model is directed at the child care at home with training programs, which are usually kept relatively unschooled individuals, such as parents or paraprofessionals. The third model is a set of *parental or family-oriented assistance programs*. Systems and programs to help families tend to offer different services and activities tailored to the needs of many families. In Slovenia we have institutionalized preschool education (Fidel 2009).

In addition to these three models we must also mention special educational principles, which began to emerge at the turn of 19th and 20th century with reform pedagogy. We speak of course about educational principles like M. Montessori educational concept, Rudolf Steiner’s Waldorf pedagogy, A.S. Neil’s Summerhill, L. Malaguzzi’s Reggio Emilia approach, Head start programs and High/scope curriculum, C. Stendler Lavatelli program and others. Many of them still exist today - more or less in the same form. Although these programs, because of their specific orientation, are not meant for all children, they still contribute to overall diversity of public preschool education.

In the last century scientific research on children had a growing impact on pedagogy and curriculum for preschool care and education. However, development and science education did not contribute single, unambiguous guidelines. The rise of biological science in some systems and programs of pre-school education has introduced a strong position on the maturity and thus on the one hand, strengthen the curriculum focus on the child and point out the important role of physical and social play and on the other hand separated pre-school education from school (academic) education. As a contrast to this, the rise of behaviorism
increased the role of teaching and learning through the use of stimuli for the creation of language and cognitive and social behavior of young children. In the current debate on the pre-school curriculum nor "clean" curing nor constructive theory nor theories of learning are in the forefront. Consent of experts and many preschool teachers, which can be described as social constructivism, emphasizes that the child's home motivated activity and self initiative are the drives of development, but also recognizes that development doesn’t takes place in a cultural vacuum, but must be directed to the cultural colored areas of knowledge and skills as presented by Dewey and Fröbel. In addition, it is possible to detect a move towards social-emotional approach, which originates from the theory of attachment (Hoffman). Today emotionally secure and stable social relations in pre-primary education are considered to be an essential condition for healthy development and effective learning (Pianta et al., 1997, Hamre and Pianta, 2001; Rimma-Kaufman et al., 2002).

In the last few years, because of the shrinking budgetary resources, globalization, demographic change in Europe and especially regarding current financial and economic crisis, the debate is going on about an effective investment in care and education. Early education is the foundation for education and ample evidence testify that preschool education has strong social and economic effects. Therefore, the Commission of EU decided: "For the adaptation of children in society, pre-primary education is the most profitable. Member States should devote more resources to it, since it is an effective foundation for subsequent education, preventing school drop-out, the more equal final success and a higher level of knowledge and skills in general." The Commission has set pre-school education as a priority theme of cooperation between European Union Member States in years 2009 -10 (Fidel 2009).

In this context the emerging trends in Slovenia are to update upstanding Curricula for preschool education (1999). Since its adoption ten years ago, there have been numerous new findings in the area of preschool education and in the area of curricula implementation. For the continuation of this paper, two of the mentioned approaches/models are relevant – Slovene curriculum for preschool education and Reggio Emilia educational approach. As we are sure, that most of educators have already heard about Reggio Emilia approach, we will focus first on describing Slovene preschool education and curriculum in more detail and than we will outline three of the Reggio Emilia characteristics (participation, cooperation with local community and project work), which we believe could be to some extend included in our curriculum.
THEORETICAL STARTING POINT

PRESCHOOL EDUCATION IN SLOVENIA

Slovenia has established an integrated approach to pre-school education, combining education, play and care in pre-school institutions. Pre-school education is not compulsory; it admits children from 1 to 6 years of age or to the age when they enter primary schooling. Pre-school education is performed by public and private pre-school institutions - kindergartens.

Parents have the right to choose pre-school education programmes for their children in a public or private pre-school institution. The aim of pre-school institutions is to support the parents in bringing up the child, to improve the quality of family life and to create good conditions for the development of the child’s physical and intellectual abilities (Pre-school institution act 1996).

Programmes of pre-school education are part of the system of education and schooling. The principles of pre-school education, i.e. those of democracy, pluralism, autonomy, professional competence and responsibility of the employees, equal opportunities for children and parents, regard to diversity of children, the right of option and distinctiveness and the principles of maintenance of balance of various aspects of the child’s physical and intellectual development, are set out in the Pre-school institution Act (1996, last revision in 2008).

Among the objectives of pre-school education, the following are especially emphasized: development of comprehension skills and skills of acceptance of others and oneself, regard to distinctiveness and cooperation in groups, development of skills of recognition of emotions, stimulation of emotional perception and expression, stimulation of curiosity, exploratory spirit, imagination and of intuition, development of independent thinking, stimulation of communication skills for an effective and creative use of language, at later stages also stimulation of reading and writing, stimulation of perception of artistic works and artistic expression, transmission of knowledge from various fields of science and everyday life, stimulation of physical and locomotive development, and development of self-dependence at hygienic habits and health care.

In the last decade important changes in the concept of education have been made. While the former concept was based on group routine, activities are nowadays organised in smaller groups which stimulate the child’s individuality and respect the child’s right to privacy. In the former educational programme individuality was generally not much desired, it was based on routine activities; new programmes, however, strongly emphasize the right to choose, which is related to the right to play and the right to creative expression. Much attention is paid to the
equal progress opportunities, which apply to all: children with special needs, Roma children, and children from socially deprived families. The national curriculum for pre-school institutions (1999) is based upon appreciation of individual differences in development and learning, as well as on appreciation of the child’s integrative and balanced development. The curriculum is open and enables implementation of various programmes (day, half-day, short). The objectives, contents, and activities are designed separately for the first and the second age group of children. For the sake of better transparency they are divided into various fields; however, the suggested curriculum themes extend over the stringent limits of a single field and are placed into the context of the children’s every-day life in a pre-school institution. The following subject fields are included in pre-school institution activities: physical exercise, language, art, society, nature, study, and mathematics. Interdisciplinary activities like ethics, health care, safety, and traffic education are incorporated into all those fields. Implementation of different subject fields goes hand in hand with the daily routine. Educational work is important for the child’s personality (not only as a preparation for the next educational level), which is why it is based on the ability of children and their activities. Children’s play enables the most natural way towards their development and learning. The curriculum contains the objectives and principles of pre-school education, which importantly affect every-day activities, communication, and classroom arrangement. In planning routine activities (eating, resting, sleeping, tidying up), the differences between children must be taken into account (gender, social and cultural origin, philosophy of life...) and such conditions must be created that those differences can be expressed. Children’s particularities, the right to choose, and their distinctiveness must also be regarded.

Ten years after the implementation of the Curriculum for preschool education there have been tendencies to upgrade the existing curriculum with some of the new findings, which also come from the area of alternative educational approaches like Reggio Emilia educational concept, M. Montessori’s concept, Waldorf pedagogy and others. Out of all the existing alternative educational approaches, we believe, that the one that has the most to contribute to our preschool education is Reggio Emilia concept.
REGGIO EMILIA EDUCATIONAL CONCEPT

Over more than the past 40 years, the Reggio Emilia approach has evolved its own distinctive and innovative set of philosophical and pedagogical assumptions, methods of school organization and principles of environmental design. Young children are encouraged to explore their environment and express themselves through all of their available “expressive, communicative and cognitive languages”, whether they be words, movement, drawing, painting, building etc. (Edwards (ed.) 1997, p. 7).

To use Malaguzzi’s (1998) words, Reggio Emilia approach is a postmodern concept of preschool education, which educates children to be critical thinkers and guardians of the democracy. The approach eclectically integrates not only different theories and knowledge, but also the knowledge of its own historical and cultural environment. The advantage of Reggio concept is so called “emerging” curriculum, which constantly meets and constructs itself. This means, that educational process is not preplanned, because they believe that is better if the curriculum is a result of collusion between children and teachers and children among themselves. Malaguzzi (1993) further believes that the role of the theory is mainly to help the teachers to better understand the nature of their practical problems. As a result, the foundation of the Reggio approach could be, in his opinion, summed by these elements: kindergarten involvement in the cultural environment, diversity of children, development and use of all senses in cognitive process, encouraging and enabling different forms of expression, advantage of learning from teaching, quality interaction and communication, the role of the teacher and the position of the children (Devjak et al. 2008, p. 102).

In L. Katz (1993) opinion, the model of Reggio kindergartens is similar to the extended family, because the atmosphere is warm, comfortable, pleasant and cheerful. Children can play without any unneeded pressure and have also certain commitments (like participation in preparing meals, room decoration…), which strengthen the link and joint responsibility at the same time. Extended families can also be characterized by shared responsibility, intimacy, informality and participation which seem to provide a very appropriate model for designing early childhood programs. However Reggio Emilia education can also be seen as a communal activity and sharing of culture through joint exploration among children and adults. The fact that Reggio children assume responsibility for some of the chores involved in group life throughout the day, such as setting the tables for meals, working with the cooking staff, sharing responsibility for keeping the art materials in good order, strengthens the atmosphere
of communal life. The communal feeling is also enhanced by the participation of the entire staff in all aspects of the program and long meetings of all concerned, including parents. Using these two models, the approach provides us with new ways to think about the nature of the child as a learner, the role of the teacher, school organization and management, the design and use of physical environment and different curriculum planning (Katz 1997, p.40).

When including individual elements of certain educational concepts in another (in our case elements of Reggio Emilia approach in Slovene curriculum for preschool education) it is important, that we deliberately include only those elements that are consistent with the main philosophy of the basic concept. The main similarity between the two concepts are, that they are both based on human and children's rights, democratic values and the rule of law, and that they both advocate pluralistic knowledge and conceptual integration of different sciences (Devjak et al. 2009, p. 8). As we announced in the introduction we will hereafter devote our attention only to three elements of Reggio Emilia approach, which in our opinion, may under certain conditions be implemented in our preschool curriculum. The three elements are: participation, cooperation with local community and project work.
PARTICIPATION

The basic principles regarding children's participation, followed by the Reggio approach are: (1) the child is a protagonist, collaborator and communicator in the educational work, (2) the teacher is the one that leads the child and (3) the environment is the “third” educator (Edwards 1998). As C. Rinaldi (1997, p. 115) points out, teachers in Reggio Emilia approach believe, that all knowledge emerges in the process of self and social reconstruction. Teachers must therefore establish personal relationships with each child and ground this relationship in the social system of the school. Children do not passively endure the experience, but they become an active agent in their own socialization. In Reggio Emilia approach children, parents and local community participation in the life and work of kindergarten is essential (Malaguzzi 1998, p. 66). Participation develops the sense of belonging to the kindergarten and local community in which kindergarten is located (Rinaldi 2006, p.175) If we look at the Reggio Emilia approach closely, we see that children's participation in kindergartens life and work is mainly illustrated by their participation in the project work.

As we already mentioned, the importance of participation is especially highlighted in planning and implementing projects (we will talk about that in the chapter about project work), but they also emphasize children's participation in kindergartens everyday life and work and in kindergartens daily tasks (helping in the kitchen, setting the tables…) (Katz 1998, pp.41). Children in Reggio Emilia kindergartens have the right to participate in decision making, which involves their lives, which means, that they can influence the process of learning and the whole kindergarten life experience. This right is an important criterion in the quality of institutionalized education and the opportunity to influence one’s own situation is also an element of kindergartens and educational democratization. But, as A. Hočevar (et al 2009, pp.27) exposes, even participatory democracy has its limits. Facilitating the active participation of children in the life and work of kindergarten requires accurate reflection of what all children in kindergarten actually (are) to decide. As authors emphasize, the kindergarten is an educational institution, which, in important elements, operates under the rules set from “outside”. If we then believe, that children can participate in every decision made in kindergarten, but the reality is that they are (co)deciding only on the appearance, the real effects are mostly just the opposite of the desired ones. M. Kovač Šebart and J. Krek (2007) underline, that the notion of the participation, if associated with the concept of democracy, implicates freedom of decision making, freedom of debate and respect for different duties. In this context it so becomes clear, that participation has its own objective
limits. Because of that, Slovene curriculum includes a thesis, that it is necessary first to present the children with the “outside” set of principles, social norms and rules and then place them into the position of reflection on why some of the principles and rules are needed or unneeded. However, as the authors continue, a bet on the children's participation requires a clear articulation of actual borders. Education in the spirit of democratic culture, on which Slovene national curriculum for preschool education is built, includes clearly articulated child's subordinate position and secured place for participation everywhere, where that is realistically possible. Preschool teachers both respect and reflect pre-set rules and they exercise democratic culture mainly with their own behavior. The same applies also for the kindergarten's life in full.

However the question about Reggio children's participation in establishing formal kindergarten rules remains. C. Rinaldi (2006) namely stresses, that child’s education demands the establishment of what is right and what is wrong, and that the compliance with the rules is difficult for the children and for the adults, but we still don’t know if (and how) the children really participate in the formation and acceptance of kindergarten rules. Regarding the important role of participation in Reggio Emilia approach, we must assume that the dialogue and search for consensus are taken into account with kindergarten formal rules as well. However, objectively speaking, consensus cannot be achieved in all situations or even by working towards achieving consensus we can achieve the opposite effect then desired. Therefore we must conclude, that freedom and participation as a way of practicing democracy in kindergarten context can be understood only specifically and adjusted to kindergarten framework and its objective restrictions. In other words, preschool teachers promote democratic culture with their behavior. For example children must feel free to ask questions, give suggestions and formulate own ideas and also they should not have reservations when warning their preschool teacher, just as she warns them, about deviation from agreed rules. Teachers in kindergartens must promote dialogue and active listening, because an important part of the democratic culture is also stating participants that their ideas or disagreements cannot always be satisfied. This of course does not mean that kindergarten is not democratic (Kovač Šebart 2009).

To conclude, children's participation in the life and work of kindergarten is very important in Reggio Emilia approach as well as in Slovene curriculum for preschool education, but we must emphasize that the main importance goes to the areas of participation. Although there are some limits to children's participation in formulating and implementing formal rules and
regulations of conduct, there are still some areas in which children can have the same say as adults or at least have the feeling of responsibility. In our opinion children in Slovene kindergartens should participate more in kindergartens everyday life and work and in kindergartens daily tasks (helping in the kitchen, setting the tables…), which would develop their sense of responsibility. As L.Katz (1997) points out, the fact that Reggio children assume responsibility for some of the real chores involved in group life throughout the day (like tidying after meals, frequently working with cooking staff) and share responsibility for others (like keeping materials in good order) strengthens the atmosphere of communal life.

**COOPERATION WITH THE LOCAL COMMUNITY**

S. Spaggiari (1997, p.99), director of education in Reggio Emilia explains, that from the 1970s on, the idea of community participation in education has been official blackening. It has been viewed as a means of fostering innovation, protecting educational institution against the dangers of excessive bureaucracy and stimulating cooperation between educators and parents. This participation has evolved in two different forms: first, through the system of community-based management in infant-toddlers and pre-primary schools run by the city and second, through committees in the public schools. We will only stress out the first one. Community based participation goes back a long way. In 1971 the idea of participation was formalized with the passage of national laws governing infant-toddler centers. This concept gradually evolved during the years and finally led to legal formalization of community-based management. The demand was for the national government to provide public funding, the regional governments to take care of overall planning and the municipal governments to be responsible for community-based management. Such community based management now encompasses all the process of participation, democracy, collective responsibility, problem solving and decision making processes all integral to an educational institution. Community-based management embodies the theoretical and practical synthesis of the interrelationships forged among children, families, service providers and society at large. Community-based management seeks to promote strong interaction and communication among educators, children, parents and the community. The participation of the families is just as essential as is the participation of children and educators. Obviously such “three-party” system is part of the community at large, which in turn becomes the fourth component, having its own particular influence and worth. In short community-based management is a philosophical ideal permeating all aspects of the entire educational experience.
As a consequence of the drop in the birth rate in Italy (this has happen over the years in Slovenia as well), today’s child is perceived a rare and precious object. For these reasons, education of preschool children presents the most difficult and complex task, for which responsibility cannot singlehandedly accepted neither by the family or the school. Today there is strong awareness, that the job of educating a child involves above all different competencies. Types of group support that come from participation and community-based management provide a response to the psychological need of such families. They facilitate a dialogue between the parent and the child, between educators and parents, between groups of educators and different families and eventually extending to involve the whole community (ibid.).

L. Malaguzzi (1997, p. 66) explains, that on the practical level, kindergartens must continuously maintain and reinvest in their network of communication and encounters. They have regular meetings with families to discuss curriculum, they ask for their cooperation in organizing activities, they distribute to each child the telephone numbers and addresses of all the other children and their teachers and they encourage visits among the children in their homes and visits to parents’ workplaces. This type of approach with children reveals much about their philosophy basic rules. These include the interactive and constructivist aspects, the intensity of relationships, the spirit of cooperation and individual and collective effort in doing research. In addition, as S. Spaggiari (1997) points out, by widening the field of participation, the educators who participate in the community-based management include all types of adults working in the schools - teachers, cooks, aides – all of whom must share the responsibility that stems from the being a part of community of educators. The ideas and skills that families bring to the school and the exchange of the ideas between parents and teachers, favors the development of a new way of educating and helps teachers to view the participation of families not as a threat but as an intrinsic element of collegiality and as the integration of different wisdoms. Participation with families in Reggio Emilia kindergartens involve: meetings at the individual classroom level, small group meetings, individual parent-teacher conferences, meetings around a theme, encounters with an expert, work sessions, labs, holidays and celebrations and other meeting possibilities (trips into town, picnics, excursions, short holidays, a day at school…).

It can be summarized that Reggio kindergartens can be described as open spaces for meeting and discussions with families and other citizens about the local teaching experience and educational experience in general (The municipal ... 2009). L. Malaguzzi (1993) considers
kindergarten to be a space which reflects and creates culture. It is a living organism the structure of movement, which is constantly adjusting and is open to the environment and in the environment. From kindergartens life is expanding to families and from there to the local community, which is to accept children as promoters and users of special rights. Preschool institutions are in his view never neutral, they are impregnated with culture, and they are laboratories of culture. It’s a system, that connects all the elements and it’s an area of communication for three basic entities: children, teachers and parents. C. Rinaldi (after Edwards et al 1993, p. 101) defines kindergarten as a system of relations and communications, embedded in the broader social system.

Even though the world is in awe with Reggio success in involving parents and local community in kindergarten work, we must emphasize, that all the forms of cooperation are also known in Slovene kindergartens – parental group meetings, individual contacts, expert lectures, curricula discussions, working meetings, picnics, holidays… Public pre-school institutions in Slovenia are founded and financed by local communities, their budget provides funds for personnel wages, for material costs in accordance with norms and standards, for extraordinary maintenance and for investments in real estate and equipment for public preschool institutions or pre-school institutions with concessions. The local community is also obliged to initiate the procedure of setting up a pre-school institution if there is sufficient interest of the parents. As we already mentioned, in the management of the Reggio kindergartens there are also Community-Early Childhood Councils involved. Every three years, parents, kindergarten staff and representatives of local community elect representatives to the Community Council for each kindergarten. The main role is to decide on the admission of new children, to present kindergarten to the wider community, to promote the meetings, which reinforce children and parents affiliation to the kindergarten and community, to promote the participation of families in kindergarten and to help to maintain the quality of kindergarten (ibid). In Slovenia there are also bodies (Parents Council and Kindergartens Council) established, which participates in the operation of kindergarten. So, in comparative terms we can say that the parents in Slovenian kindergartens have more power and that the local community is incorporated in the life and work of kindergarten in both concepts. However, we believe, that the essence of Reggio Emilia approach success lies with their view of cooperation as an element of collegiality and integration of different wisdoms, instead of viewing participation as a threat. We believe that in Slovenia many teachers fear such in-depth cooperation and feel that involving parents, as well as community, in educational work
reduces and limits their professional autonomy. If nothing else, as L. Katz (1997, p.44) points out, Reggio approach shows us, what can be accomplished when community makes a real commitment to its young children. And that is something that could be integrated in public preschool education as well.

\textit{PROJECT WORK}

One of the most impressive features of the Reggio Emilia approach is the way their young children are involved in extended in-depth explorations and investigations. Katz (1997) however exposes that involving young children in project work, namely in extended studies, is not unique to Reggio Emilia. It was already introduced in United States (Progressive movement – J. Dewey) in early 20th century and it was also done exquisitely in Britain during so called Plowden years (1960s and 1970s). But, she also writes, that as far as she knows, Reggio schools have taken this pedagogical practice further than anyone else. Projects in Reggio Emilia approach provide an important part of the curriculum in which children are encouraged to make their own choices and decisions, which we can assume, increase children’s confidence in their intellectual powers and strengthen their dispositions to continue learning. Projects in Reggio kindergartens are organized in such manner, that they enable the children’s in-depth learning about an event or phenomena, which concerns their lives. During the project children can decide and choose by themselves, because the project work is based on assumption, that such engagement improves child's confidence in their own intellectual abilities and develop the dispositions for further life (Katz and Chard 1989). According to Malaguzzi (1997, p. 90) good project has a few essential elements. First it must produce or trigger an initial motivation, to warm up the children, then it has a prologue phase in which information and ideas are offered and shared within the group. These will be used later to help the children to expand their intentions along with the adult’s intentions, suggesting a final objective. The discussion at the beginning is very important, because it helps adults to make predictions and hypothesis about what could happen next. Some of these expectations will of course not come to pass, but others will come alive during the journey taken with the children in the course of the project. However it is not only the adults that form expectations, those of children – who can use their capacities to make assumptions – are also needed to organize the work. The strong motivation with which the children embark will help them to feel comfortable as they go down many different paths, abandoning some and trying others. They bring different kinds of intelligence and attitudes to this task and that produces an extraordinary blooming of ideas and also (through their negotiation) a convergence in which
ideas become sharper and more selected. Children are not afraid to make mistakes or demolish their own ideas. The projects objective serves as a permanent beacon that is always present and it gives children energy, because they know where they must arrive.

Kindergartens teams are meeting every week to discuss the projects in various groups. Projects, which take place in a large group of children, help them to deepen and refine the sense of events and phenomena in their environment. The project work constitutes a part of kindergartens life and in this way, the children can acquire their own experience (Padovan 1995). Project theme is never accepted without children’s participation and without taking their ideas and interests into account. Teachers choose mainly themes, which allow children to gain direct experience and connect them with the existing ones. When deciding on a project, teachers follow children's communication; they discuss various problems and seek contents of interest to the children. Upon discussion with other professionals the final decision is taken about central project theme for a group of children who wish to participate. On this basis the project objectives are also established. Even the process of project realization is open for discussion and it is not leaning on the curricula, because current communication with the children alters the objectives even when the project is already on the way (Špoljar 1993, p. 32). Malaguzzi (1997, p. 91) emphasizes that all through the project, adults should intervene as little as possible. Instead they should set up situations and make up many choices that facilitate the work of children.

In the course of the project, for example, on a topic such as “What happens at the supermarket?” or “How houses are built?” children explore the phenomena first hand in detail over an extended period of time. The activities of the children include direct observation, asking questions of relevant participants and experts, collecting artifacts and representing observations, ideas, memories, feelings and new understanding in wide variety of ways including dramatic play. However, as most preschoolers are not yet easily able to represent their observations and new knowledge in writing, they may dictate their observations and thoughts to others, who can write for them. So the first major lesson from Reggio Emilia approach is the way children are encouraged to use what they call graphic languages (Rinaldi 1991) and other media to record and represent their memories, ideas, predictions, feelings, observations… Observation of the children at work in Reggio Emilia reveals how a wide variety of visual media are used to explore understandings and their work can really suggests to us, that many people seriously underestimate children’s graphical representational abilities and the quality of intellectual effort and growth it can engender (Katz 1997). Of course one
could ask why bother to undertake a project on such mundane topic as a local supermarket – something children experience frequently and directly. When a topic of the project is very familiar to the children, they can contribute their own knowledge and the children themselves can take leadership and planning as they suggest questions and lines of investigations to pursue. Such projects that involve young children in investigating real phenomena offer them an opportunity to be the natural scientists they seem born to be. Another value of project work is that extended studies of particular phenomena give young children early experience of knowing and understanding a topic in-depth. As Inagaki (1992) points out, having the experience of knowing a topic in depth can be highly rewarding for young children. Such early experiences of feeling of mystery can also cultivate and strengthen a disposition to seek in-depth understandings of topics – a disposition that can serve children well throughout their development and education. It should also be noted, that sometimes the teachers in Reggio Emilia choose a project on a topic that is unpredictable. Willingness to explore a topic that might not work very well is a part of their commitment to experimentation and to exploring together with children what kinds of ideas might emerge from an experiment.

Slovenian kindergartens also know some types of project work like learning projects with research and problem solving process, which have characteristics that appear to be similar or at least complementary with the projects in Reggio Emilia kindergartens. Projects we have in mind are mostly those, where children transform to real scientists and researchers in the field and when they are able not only to gather information but also to use it in problem solving issues (Turnšek, 2009, p. 228). The main difference between projects in Reggio and Slovene kindergartens is that the documentation in the Reggio projects is largely in the hands of educators, but in our case it is in the hands of children (children with cameras, dictating machines, collect materials ...). Also we must emphasize, that children in Reggio kindergartens really participate in all the steps of the project, when in Slovene kindergarten they have an active role, but the educators are still the ones, that make all the important choices. However, Slovene preschool teachers are very favorable to the participation of the children which in our kindergartens increasingly invokes projects, where the children are "major" players – they suggest things, decide what to do and how to do it, for example, they decide how to arrange their playground or certain events and then with the help of adult they derive their concepts and ideas.

The main thing we can learn from Reggio project work and integrate in our kindergarten is their so called weakness – graphic representation. Putting ideas into graphic representations
allows children to understand that their actions can communicate. As L. Malaguzzi (1997, p. 92) emphasizes, this is an extraordinary discovery, because it helps them realize, that in order to communicate, their graphic must be understandable to others. In their view, graphic representation is a tool of communication much simpler and clearer than words. Documentation involving project work is also something that our preschool teachers should put more thought into. Documentation contributes to the extensiveness and depth of the learning gained by the children from their projects and other work. L. Malaguzzi (ibid., p. 39) points out, that through documentation children “become even more curious, interested and confident as they contemplate the meaning of what they have achieved”. Experience and observation of the children in Reggio Emilia also indicates that children learn from and are stimulated by each other’s work that is made visible through documentation.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, we believe that Slovene preschool education is well organized and that implementation of the Curricula for preschool education ten years ago was a big step in the direction of assuring quality preschool education for all children. However changes in the time require different vision of cooperation among parents, local community and kindergarten as an institution and this is where described elements of Reggio Emilia can be put to use. However, as Kroflič (2002, p.210) points out, elements of Reggio Emilia approach should not be indiscriminately transfered in our preschool education practice, thinking that this is the only way to achieve the desired educational effects and increase quality educational process. These elements may be otherwise productive and perhaps provocative professional challenge, which allows further reflection of activity of public kindergarten, but they also need a good theoretical basis. Despite the fact that the literature most often observes that the main advantage of Reggio curriculum is their emergent curriculum and constant adjustment and acceptance of different scientific theories and knowledge, it is probably true that L.Malaguzzi and his colleagues succeeded to connect in a unique way the research and theoretical findings from the different knowledge of their own cultural traditions and the practical experience of nursery school in Italy and worldwide.
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