



Reading summary

Rigney, L. I., Sisson, J., Hattam, R., & Morrison, A. (2020). *Bringing culturally responsive pedagogies and Reggio Emilia education principles into dialogue: Children learning to live together in diverse communities. Final report.* University of South Australia.

This report is based on a research project which grew out the policy priorities of South Australia's Department for Education regarding early learning and the inequitable outcomes of education for Aboriginal learners. There is a consensus in the literature that early childhood education has significant cognitive, social and emotional benefits, and that it increases the likelihood of successful transition to school and ongoing engagement in schooling. This needs to be considered in conjunction with two significant issues for Australian early childhood education: the Australian early childhood cohort is increasingly diverse, and there is a large gap in educational achievement between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learners.

This project rejected deficit views of learners and instead saw the problem as a lack of sensitivity to the cultural differences in educational sites and a lack of recognition or appreciation of the knowledges and everyday experiences of some children. The project drew on the principles of Reggio Emilia education and on culturally responsive pedagogy, both of which propose an assets-based approach to curriculum and pedagogy. This project was a response to the urgent need to provide early childhood educators with professional learning that enables them to redesign curriculum and pedagogy to respond positively to the funds of knowledge of culturally and linguistically diverse learners, including Aboriginal children.

The study used an action research approach at six early learning sites, both urban and regional. Educator participants engaged in reading and workshops about Reggio Emilia education and culturally responsive pedagogies, then trialled these approaches. The study

found that the Reggio Emilia education principles can help educators to redesign their practices, but they must be translated for local contexts. In particular, the principles must be adapted to acknowledge the significance of culture and to engage with diverse cultures to enhance children's active engagement in learning. The study found that engaging in a culturally responsive Reggio Emilia–inspired approach improved children's attendance, participation, confidence and literacy. It also improved families' connection with and support for the education site, and increased interactions between families and educators. The study also found that coherent and consistent early childhood education policy is needed to advance such an approach.

Take-home messages

Adapting Reggio Emilia principles: The Reggio Emilia education principles need to be translated for local contexts, in particular for culturally diverse education sites.

Improved outcomes for children: Culturally responsive education based on Reggio Emilia principles can improve children's engagement, confidence and educational outcomes.

Improved outcomes for families and educators: Culturally responsive education based on Reggio Emilia principles can improve families' support for and connection with their children's education and educators.

Departmental support for educators: The Department for Education should provide consistent policy for early childhood education and support professional learning through action research.