DEVELOPING LANGUAGE

SAN FELICE NURSERY AND PRESCHOOL, REGGIO EMILIA, ITALY

Across Europe and the USA there is an ongoing exploration for many educational systems and the environments which support them. The San Felice Nursery and Preschool exemplifies a situation in which it was a goal for the architecture to follow these experiments in education rather than the other way around, education conforming to the architecture. Specifically, this architecture speaks to curriculum goals of civic identity, body awareness and group learning.

The social and civic initiative begins with the kindergartens, which extend their activities into the community to become a focus of that community. Parents are given some responsibility and encouraged to organize events within the kindergarten building on the weekends, even engaging those who do not have young children themselves. For instance, parent classes and pre-natal groups meet in the kindergarten.

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14 Dudek, Mark. *Schools and Kindergartens*, p 64.
The environments themselves also reveal messages about the Reggio Approach and the way a child is educated. With the examination of this case study, several spatial lessons were apparent.
This Reggio project is an experiment in creating a children’s space which incorporates the pedagogic system as a reflection of harmonious interior architecture. This is achieved within the context of a clear form treating the architecture as background to the children and their activities. It is spacious, elegant, and decorated in a restrained manner so that the architectural simplicity is never overwhelmed by the artwork or activities that take place within.\textsuperscript{18} It is a fascinating environment for children providing a balance between social and private spaces. The architecture is a teacher.

\textsuperscript{18} Dudek, Mark. Schools and Kindergartens, p 67.
Another distinctive feature of the Reggio schools are the ‘homebase’ areas. These inner activity areas are discrete, but always visible from the communal areas. There is a sense of freedom of movement between the different areas of the building, yet at the same time the same children have a sense of territory, the feeling of a family apartment.

Within each homebase room, there is clear articulation of several areas meant for small group interaction. Each space contains an activity corner, physical climbing area, soft corner, art area and a general play and activity zone. Also included is a bright and spacious children’s toilet. The double story spaces each have an internal staircase leading up to the mezzanine sleeping area. This provides the feeling of an area small enough to feel cozy and safe for even the youngest children. Each homebase area also contains a small kitchenette for the preparation of mid-day snacks. Each day, some of the children are encouraged to participate in the preparation process. 17

Each of the ‘homebase’ areas are directly connected to a small exterior courtyard space. This provides an interior/exterior learning environment, as well as direct daylight into each of the spaces.

17 Dudek, Mark. Schools and Kindergartens, p.66.
The plans of this building are arranged to resemble relationships and spaces found within Italian Villages. Immediately, a connection is made between the rhythms of life inside and outside the school.

A central square, piazza, is placed at the heart of each childcare center, a deliberate reminder of the urban spaces whose primary purpose is to encourage social interaction. As such, the central core encourages teachers, parents, and children to make contact with each other, thus fulfilling one of the primary functions of kindergarten life.

In addition, there is a central dining area with an attached kitchen where food is prepared fresh each day. This process is exposed to young children through windows from the square. The important role eating has within Italian society is continually underlined when children join their older and younger friends around the dining tables.16

Similarly, there are larger music and art rooms, suitable for the children, but open to visitors and the community. This instills the notion that art and creativity are the center of school life.