

Cultivating Identity: How Culture Shapes Early Childhood at Lil & RAKS Pallikkoodam

Close your eyes for a few seconds and take your mind to your childhood. What was your favorite meal, that one that skipped a beat when you smelled it wafting through the air? Do you remember the language your grandparents used, the expressions your caregivers used, which brought comfort, or the festivals you were waiting for each year? These memories form the very basis of who we are, almost carving what social, emotional, and cognitive developments we acquire right from the earliest times.

At Lil & RAKS Pallikkoodam, we believe that a child's cultural and traditional background is essential to their identity and growth. It is in shared experiences and spaces that children come to feel a sense of belonging and therefore thrive. Through the lens of the Reggio Emilia philosophy, we see our environments as much more than mere classrooms—they are vibrant reflections of the ideas, values, traditions, and cultures of the children who fill them.

Culture and Environment: The Growth Foundation

“The space has to be a kind of aquarium which reflects the ideas, values, attitudes, traditions and cultures that live inside it,” says Loris Malaguzzi, the founder of the Reggio Emilia Approach. This directly speaks to the heart of our philosophy at RAKS and Li'l Pallikkoodam. For children to thrive, their learning environment must reflect the world they come from— one that values and appreciates diversity, tradition, and inclusion.

When a child's social and physical environment conflicts with their cultural identity, learning and the ability to express themselves become difficult. They need to know that their background, their language, and their traditions are not just recognised but celebrated. When this aspect is woven into the fabric of the learning environment, children feel safe, which gives them confidence in themselves and love for learning.

Thrive with Purpose: The Philosophy of Lil & RAKS Pallikkoodam

“Our school philosophy, “Thrive with Purpose,” is much more than just a motto—it's a way of life that seeps into every crevice of our approach to education. We believe that purpose is deeply connected to a child's sense of self, which is shaped by the culture, traditions, and values they grow up with.” Identity is shaped in early childhood, and embedding cultural experiences within the school environment fosters a strong sense of self in connection to others.

So, in Lil & RAKS Pallikkoodam, we do not just teach to children; we engage with children through spaces that have embodied who they are and where they come from. Mentors, as caregivers, incorporate culture by actively engaging with the parent community to create a familiar, comforting space. This collaborative approach ensures an environment where children feel safe, supported, and included.

This is why "Thrive with Purpose" resonates so strongly. We strive to ensure that every child gets a chance to grow, both intellectually and as compassionate, culturally aware individuals. This way, we prepare them for the world-with open hearts and open minds.

Navarathri Golu: Celebrating a Tradition of Inclusion

Our Navarathri Gollu celebration is one of the beautiful examples of how we build culture into our school environment. Navarathri is a festival believed to hold deep significance in Indian culture, and at Lil & RAKS Pallikkoodam, it's become this treasured tradition that brings our community together. Every year, each child is encouraged to bring in his favourite doll for the Gollu display, thereby creating a sense of belonging and pride in their heritage.

This year was no exception. As we had the Golu dolls in their bright colours adorning our school premises, it filled the air with unfettered energy and exuberance. Parents and grandparents eagerly joined in, sitting with the children at various spots to share stories about Navarathri and explain the significance of each doll on display. It was heartwarming to see how knowledge, tradition, and values are imparted to children in such meaningful and educational ways. And no Navarathri can be said to have been celebrated in full if the special Prasadh they have at school is missed out as it tries to bring a dose of tradition into the day's celebrations.

The Role of Familiarity in Early Learning Environments

Creating familiarity in the school setting is core to our philosophy. Children deserve to see their world reflected in their learning environment. Whether it's in the dolls of Navarathri or the language spoken in discussions, these pieces of culture create the bridge that gives the child the sense of being understood.

When children are placed in an environment that is profoundly relevant to them, a sense of security sets in which is effective for learning. In early years particularly, when they are socializing and learning about themselves, and forming themselves into beings is crucial. Creating spaces that reflect their cultures essentially puts the framework together which will provide tools for growth into confident, resilient persons.

Collaboration with the Parent Community: A Key to Success

Knowing well that the very first teachers of children are the parents, Lil & RAKS Pallikkoodam places immense emphasis on collaboration with the parent community in everything we do-to plan and execute cultural celebrations and to design learning spaces representing the diverse backgrounds of our learners.

Our role models team up with parents to ensure the school environment acts as a seamless continuation of the home, reinforcing values and traditions, which children experience every day. This collaboration is an important part of a cohesive learning experience for every child.

A Bright Future: Preparing Children for a Diverse World

In the increasingly globalised world, learning and appreciating the diversity of cultures is significantly important. So, Lil & RAKS Pallikkoodam has been established to educate the young minds of today for their challenges in a diversified world, so we emphasize the external influences right from the beginning of the encounters in the home.

Through festival celebrations like Navarathri Gollu, we teach our children not only about their cultural heritage but also the importance of valuing diversity, respecting differences, and connecting with the world around them.

A Culture of Belonging

The infusion of traditions and cultures in early childhood education is not only beneficial but essential, especially when an environment such as Lil & RAKS Pallikkoodam offers children a world in which they can see their identities, providing them with that sense of belonging and security that children need to be developed.

As our visionary Founder, Ms. Swetha Krishnamurthy so poignantly says, "Your environment, your home, your community says a lot about who you are, who you identify with, and how you develop a sense of self and an understanding and appreciation for culture and differences." This philosophy comes alive each day in Lil & RAKS Pallikkoodam, where all our children truly 'thrive with purpose.'.

