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**The Educator's Perspective: Implementing the Reggio Emilia Approach in the
American Classroom**

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The Educator's Perspective: Implementing the Reggio Emilia Approach in the American Classroom

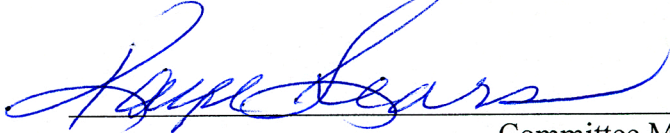
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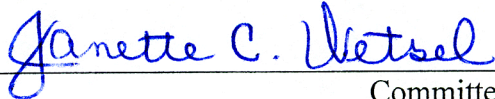
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Dedication

I dedicate this project to my mom, Rosa Penner Harp, who taught me the value of hard work and perseverance and to my dad, the late Jack Lewis Harp, who always said whether you are starting a business, writing a novel or having a child, whenever you do something to be proud of, always put your name on it.

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Abstract

This study explored the possible challenges teachers face in the implementation of the Reggio Emilia Approach in American classrooms. The Reggio Emilia Approach is highly-respected, internationally as an exemplary early childhood education program, yet in the United States many have never heard of it. The researcher investigated the challenges faced by the teachers, the parent's reaction and the level of support received from the administration when implementing the Reggio Emilia Approach. Using survey questionnaires completed by educators, observation, field notes and direct information received from lectures held by specialists in the Reggio Emilia Approach, the researcher was able to determine that training is often times quite expensive and difficult to find. Therefore, parents, educators and administrators do not fully understand the approach. Other factors challenging the implementation of the approach were money, educators not embracing the non-traditional concepts and educators feeling that they do not have enough time in their days to fully implement the Reggio Emilia Approach in facilities that are Reggio-inspired.

Table of Contents

	Page
Dedication.....	i
Acknowledgements.....	ii
Abstract.....	5
I. INTRODUCTION	7
Background of the Problem	13
Definition of the terms	18
Limitations	19
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE	20
III. METHODS	30
Research Methods.....	30
Sample.....	31
Procedure	32
Measures	32
IV. RESULTS	34
V. CONCLUSION.....	42
References	55
Appendix	57

Chapter 1

Introduction

The Reggio Emilia Approach is recognized and acclaimed as being the best childhood educational system in the world according to an article written in Newsweek dated December 2, 1991 (Edwards, Gandini & Foreman, 1993). It has received this high regard because of its holistic approach to learning which puts children at the center of their learning experience as the investigator. It is also referred to by many as a philosophy, a system or Reggio-inspired teaching. The Reggio Emilia Approach, as termed in this study, regards education as a community activity, a sharing of culture through joint exploration between children and adults who together open topics to speculation and discussion (Edwards et al.). Teachers listen to the children, allow them to take the initiative and then guide them in productive ways (Edwards et al.). This is done through group project work and emergent curriculum, which is child-centered and child-driven.

The Reggio Emilia Approach is a paradigm shift from traditional teaching methods. Assessment-driven teaching becomes a joint venture, where both the child and the teacher are enjoying the process of learning together. Teachers continuously question, “What is my image of a child? Do I believe that a child is capable of constructing his own knowledge, of directing his own learning? What do we think about the potentials of children to start so early to make a hypothesis?” (Gandini, 2011). For the teachers working in Reggio inspired schools, the parents and children they serve, it is a way of life. It is a true example of the phrase: *It takes a village to raise a child.*

The international appeal of the Reggio Emilia Approach and the opinions of so many that regard it as the best approach, opens this subject up for much debate. Why is it considered the best? What is all the fuss about? If it is the best, then why haven't more early childhood professionals implemented it in their classrooms? There are many factors to consider. This study will look at the implementation of the Reggio Emilia Approach and its continued use in Oklahoma classrooms through the eyes of the teacher/educators and administrators that work in new and already established Reggio Emilia-inspired programs.

The central tenets of the Reggio approach address four areas: 1. The image of the child; 2. Negotiated learning; 3. Documentation; 4. Social relationships (Edwards et al., 1998; Gandini 2005; Hendrick 1997). In her book, *Bringing Reggio Emilia Home: An Innovative Approach to Early Childhood Education*, Louise Boyd Cadwell (1997) explains these basic fundamentals of the Reggio Emilia Approach.

- The child as protagonist. Children are strong, rich and capable. All children have preparedness, potential, curiosity, and interest in constructing their learning, negotiating with everything their environment has for them.
- The child as collaborator. Education has to focus on each child in relation to other children, the family, the teacher and the community rather than on each child in isolation (Gandini, 1993).
- The child as communicator. The approach focuses on symbolic representation including words, movement, drawing, etc. in order to discover and communicate. Their thinking is made visible through their many natural *languages*.

- The environment as third teacher. The children's space should encourage encounters, communication and relationships.
- The teacher as partner, nurturer, and guide (Edwards, 1993). Teachers facilitate exploration, guide children in short and long term projects. Teachers ask questions, hypotheses, and provide occasions for learning (Gandini, 1993).
- The teacher as researcher. Teachers work in pairs and maintain strong relationships with other teachers, engaging in continuous discussion.
- The documentation as communication. This allows parents to know what the children are experiencing, teachers to better understand the children, children to see their own learning process.
- The parent as partner. Families are an intrinsic element in the learning of their children. Families add ideas and skills that enrich the children's learning experience (Cadwell, 1997).

The Image of the Child

In Reggio Emilia, the child is considered powerful, competent, creative, curious, and full of potential and ambitious desires (Malaguzzi, 1998). Teachers in early childhood programs should ask themselves what their own image of the child may be. The answer would probably be quite different in a traditional classroom compared to a Reggio inspired classroom.

The following is an observation made in a pre-school classroom: The teacher-led theme of the week was the letter *L*. The children were busily gluing pre-cut squares of tissue paper around the edge of a paper plate to re-create a lion like the example done by the teacher. This type of teaching method limits children to pre-conceived ideas of what

the teacher believes the child is capable of learning. The finished product, in this case the lion head on the paper plate, is not a true representation of what the child can and has learned.

In a Reggio inspired classroom, the teacher will set up a *provocation* which is intended to stimulate the child's creativity and curiosity. Had this classroom been Reggio-inspired, the sheets of colored tissue paper and paper plates would have been added to the atelier and books about lions would have been added to the reading area only after dialogue between the children had allowed the teachers to see that this was the direction of interest among the children.

Emergent Curriculum

Emergent curriculum is a model in which teachers formulate a hypothesis of what could happen based on their knowledge of the children and of previous experience (Edwards et al., 1993). Teachers listen carefully and observe the children's conversations as they engage in their surroundings (Strong-Wilson & Ellis, 2008), and document the children's learning processes to understand what they are gaining from their experiences. They reflect and talk to other teachers or with the children about planning the next activity.

Before working with new materials the teachers may ask the children to explore the properties of the new materials. One group of teachers had the children explore and describe the properties of glue: How does it feel? What can you do with glue and a paintbrush or cotton swab? Once the children were finishing with the exploratory phase, teachers set out bowls of sequins and beads for gluing and noticed that the children were

much more thoughtful rather than randomly gluing objects onto the paper (Kantor & Whaley, 1998).

Documentation

Understanding the tenets of the Reggio approach allows educators to know the importance of collaboration and documentation. In a Foreword written by Seidel for the book, *Insights and Inspirations from Reggio Emilia*, he states, "Reggio educators accept responsibility for their decision and choices, for providing an account of what they are doing, and why, and what then happens in the school" (2008, p. 14). Documentation shows the children's thoughts, ideas, and experiences revealing how the children and the teachers relate to each other through the learning processes as they work in groups or independently. Documentation makes the pedagogical work concrete and visible (Kim & Darling, 2009) and promotes communication and collaboration among children, teachers and families, creating inviting and meaningful dialogue (Rinaldi, 2003).

Environment as the Third Teacher

The child's environment can either encourage learning or discourage learning for many reasons. Room arrangement and materials are two things that influence learning. Reggio-inspired programs identify eight principles as key to the environment as the third teacher: aesthetics, transparency, active learning, flexibility, collaboration, reciprocity, bringing the outdoors in and relationships (Fraser, 2006). Reggio-inspired programs feel that the environment should be flexible, fluid and ever-changing in order for the child as protagonist to better construct their knowledge. Children should feel at home in an environment organized for them (Turner, 2010). Space should be set up to encourage relationships between the teacher and children and between the children themselves.

“A space that is responsive and transformable, that enables different ways of inhabitation and use during the course of the day and with the passing of time” (Ceppi & Zini, 1998 p. 17). This is what Reggio Emilia educators mean when they say the environment is the third teacher. The approach advocates that teachers pay close attention to the myriad of ways that space can be made to *speak* and invite interaction (Cadwell, 2003; Fraser, 2006).

Educators at the Boulder Journey School in Boulder, Colorado have reflected on questions such as: Can we design a more eco-friendly classroom? Can we better connect indoor and outdoor spaces? How does the environment relate to the biggest challenges teachers have throughout the day? Doing so has helped them see what they have been doing out of habit and what they have done because it was intentionally well thought out and planned. Reggio Emilia educators continually observe and document as the children work so they can make changes as needed to better support them (Turner, 2010).

Educators of the Reggio Emilia Approach are aware of how *visual busyness* affects concentration. They feel that the use of commercial images, cartoon characters on the walls and brightly-colored toys actually silence the experiences of those who are learning together (Tarr, 2004). The Riverfield School in Tulsa, Oklahoma is a Reggio-inspired school that seeks to bring nature indoors with the use of tree stumps for chairs and branches for displaying art. The classrooms have soft ambient light from lamps placed throughout the room rather than harsh over-head lighting. Art easels are placed near large windows to allow natural light. Objects such as markers, buttons, fabric scraps, sea shells, pine cones are stored in transparent containers on low shelves for children to investigate, and sort by color or texture. All of these items make the room come alive.

Children come to care about their environment which is also part of their planned approach to curriculum.

Background of the Problem

Many aspects of the Reggio Emilia philosophy are strived for in early childhood programs throughout our country. Yet, many who work in the field of early childhood and many parents of young children have never heard of the Reggio Emilia Approach. In fact, Oklahoma has only one school registered with the North American Reggio Emilia Alliance as an early childhood program whose work is inspired by the experiences and philosophies of Reggio Emilia (www.reggioalliance.org, 2008). One would then have to ask why more programs have not adopted these philosophies. Is it difficult to implement the Reggio Emilia Approach in American classrooms and if so, then why is this true?

The Expense

One barrier to the implementation of the Reggio Emilia Approach is the expense of operating the program. The Reggio Emilia Approach dictates that children have a right to the very best materials and equipment authentic to learning in the real world. A child would find only the highest quality art materials for drawing, painting, working with clay and wire and each classroom will have a *mini-studio* or *mini-atelier*. Each pre-school will have a full *atelier* and an *atelierista* which is a person with a background in the arts who helps teachers and children work with the materials and is also integrally involved in the process of documentation (Wurm, 2008).

Graham Bowley (2007) suggested that the cost of sending educators abroad to be trained in the program makes the approach too expensive for any but the wealthiest private schools. Another reason Reggio Emilia inspired programs may not be more

prevalent may be the additional staff and teachers needed to meet the commitments of the philosophy. Reggio Emilia programs typically have two teachers in each classroom. The teachers collaborate and document the daily activities and conversations of the children. Along with a higher teacher to child ratio and the addition of the *atelierist*, the Reggio-inspired program will have a pedagogical team of eight people with degrees in education or psychology. The *pedagogista*, as they are called in Reggio Emilia, are there to act as liaisons between the schools and the administration (Wurm 2005).

In her article entitled *Education in Blue* dated January 17, 2009 which appeared in the July 28, 2011 edition of *American Thinker*, Candace de Russy describes the Blue School in New York's East Village. Started by the Blue Man Group because of their desire to give children in this fast-paced world a chance to think divergently, this school views common objects in different, creative ways. This Reggio-inspired school is a private kindergarten costing families \$27,000 a year (de Russy, 2009) again making it out of reach for all but a few upper class families who can afford to spend large amounts of money on private education.

Parent Involvement

Another barrier to the implementation of Reggio Emilia Approach is parent involvement. Parents are an essential component of the program. In Italy, the children stay with the same educator for three years so it is important to develop a strong relationship between the families and the educators (Gambetti, 2011). Family participation is seen as essential to both the families and to the school (Wurm, 2005). Each new school year begins with a meeting with parents to study the menu and recipes (Gambetti, 2011). Parents in Reggio-inspired programs are expected to be involved far

beyond what is expected in most U.S. programs making this somewhat of a cultural challenge. Work nights, parent meetings, home visits, and planning materials are just a few ways that parents contribute to the program. Educators advocate for active and extended participation and expect the relationship to be complicated as they share in the care and education of the children (Edwards, et al., 1993). It may be a lack of support, time commitment and understanding from the parents that makes the Reggio Emilia Approach more difficult to implement.

In this increasingly fragmented and hurried society that we live in, building sustained relationships between teachers and parents can be challenging. American teachers/educators often times bemoan the overly curious parent, or the one who has too many good ideas, or most especially the one who questions the appropriateness of classroom practice (Edwards, et al., 1993). Perhaps, the American teacher prefers less intervention from parents and more control over the happenings in her own classroom sating that additional parent involvement only adds to her work.

Documentation/Time Constraints

Educators in most early childhood educational settings struggle with the time constraints associated with documentation. In an article entitled *Documentation: A Hard to Reach Place*, a focus group, made up of teachers and student teachers, was used to obtain information on the “benefits and travails” of learning to document. “Time constraints, children's needs for adult involvement, play, and classroom demands imposed at various settings interfere with documenting children's work” (Kroger & Cardy, 2006).

The student teachers interviewed in the focus group felt that documentation was a distraction which was keeping them from performing their most important job requirements, such as interacting with the children and structuring the classroom for learning. As these teachers began the practice of documentation, they understood the philosophy behind it and began to re-evaluate the time they allowed for it to take place. Even though they continued to struggle with time resource and organizational conflicts, they were able to find solutions to make the documentation process easier such as taking turns, combining various forms of documentation and asking other staff members to help (Kroger & Cardy, 2006).

Professional Development

Professional development is another possible challenge to the implementation of the Reggio Emilia Approach. Within the community of Reggio Emilia-inspired programs, professional development is often limited to in-house trainings, NAREA conferences, study tours, and sending educators to Italy to observe the philosophy in the schools where it all began. While educators in Reggio Emilia try to stay abreast of the newest research conducted in different parts of the world, which could affect their philosophy, educators in the United States and other parts of the world look to those in Reggio Emilia, Italy to "show them the way". Therefore, for Reggio Emilia educators in the United States, study tours of other Reggio-inspired schools and viewing the documentation of children in those schools seems to be most beneficial.

Outside the community of Reggio Emilia-inspired schools, pre-service teachers may receive a glimpse into the philosophy through the course of their education. Usually is it lumped together with other early childhood curricula models, such as Montessori.

Because of the lack of access and use of an eclectic approach, it provides only a small window of opportunity for future educators to develop an interest in the philosophy but, not a deep knowledge of it which one may possibly never obtain because of its own emergent quality.

Collaboration

Reggio Emilia's commitment to collaborative relationships among all the adults involved in their work is impressive (Katz, 1994). These times of collaboration are arranged by administration and educators are expected to share ideas, classroom happenings and challenges they may be experiencing. In Reggio Emilia, Italy it is not uncommon for this collaboration to get heated, as educators become impassioned with their topic of discussion offering ideas, suggestions, and constructive criticism. What U.S. teachers enjoy the most about collaboration is that they are not alone. Teachers responded to a survey in 1990 and less than 10 percent noted any satisfaction with opportunities given to them to establish collegial relationships (Darling-Hammond & Sclan, 1996). Teachers in Illinois travel to workshops together and bring back new ideas to discuss with the faculty and groups in Ohio meet monthly in statewide Reggio Study groups (New, 2003).

The challenge with collaboration is finding the time for educators to meet during the day or finding educators who are willing to stay late in the evening after school hours to meet with other educators. It is recommended that educators meet for several hours each week. Programs may not have the resources to hire additional staff to care for the children while educators meet for collaboration. Teachers may also feel that collaboration is not beneficial and takes time away from their classrooms.

Definition of Terms

Atelier A studio where the atelierista and or the teachers work with small groups of children; also used as a place for meetings, documentation, etc.

Atelierista One for each preschool; a person with a background in the arts, helps teachers and children work with a variety of materials and is also involved in the documentation process.

Authoritarian Teaching Places firm limits and controls on the students; expects children to obey; highly demanding and directive, but not responsive

Collaboration To work, one with another; to cooperate, usually willingly.

Documentation An on-going process of a furnishing with documents, as to substantiate a claim. Collect data to tell the story.

Emergent Curriculum Planning as a method of work in which teachers lay out general educational objectives, but do not formulate the specific goals for each project or each activity in advance (Edwards et al., 1998) .

Environment External conditions or surroundings where people live or work.

Holistic Describing the term holism which is the theory that whole entities, as fundamental components of reality, have an existence other than as the mere sum of their parts.

Pedagogy The function or work of a teacher; teaching. The art or science of teaching; education; instructional methods.

Protagonist The leading character, hero, or heroine of a drama; the leader or principal person in a movement, cause, etc.

Provocation A challenge set up by the teacher to stimulate or provoke thought.

Limitations

This study will be limited to a small number of programs within the state of Oklahoma, that have implemented the Reggio Emilia Approach or those programs which are in the process of implementing the Reggio Emilia Approach. This study will benefit those who are implementing or considering the implementation of the Reggio Emilia philosophies so they may have a better understanding of which aspects of the philosophy are most challenging to implement and why.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

History of the Reggio Emilia Approach

In order to understand the philosophy behind the Reggio Emilia Approach, one must first know a little about its history. Lella Gandini, the Reggio Children United States Liaison for the Dissemination of the Reggio Emilia Approach, has written and edited many works on the subject. Amilia Gambetti was an educator in the Reggio Emilia Municipal Preschool for 25 years. She coordinates the North American Reggio Emilia traveling exhibitions and is a Reggio Children Liaison for North America. Both described the beginnings of the Reggio Emilia Approach.

It was a grassroots movement that was started by parents shortly after World War II. The people of Reggio Emilia sold a German tank, some trucks and some horses left by the German army after they retreated. A farmer donated land to the people and the first schools were built from the bricks and beams salvaged from bombed houses. The labor was all volunteered by parents who were determined to have a voice in the education of their young children.

Until this time, early education in Italy had been caught up in the relations between Church and State (Edwards et al., 1993). In the 1820's charitable institutions began to spring up to care for children. These were built with the poor in mind, to improve lives, reduce crime and make better citizens of the Italian people. By the 1920's the Fascist regime had taken over Italy, taking credit for improving child care by adding a medical-hygienic aspect to it and closing down any schools that were not compatible with the Catholic Church.

In 1945-46, for a short period right after the Second World War, people took many initiatives into their own hands. The state government was undergoing reorganization, and the Catholic Church was in no position to intervene. It was in this very period that, in localities with a strong tradition of local initiative, there arose spontaneous attempts to establish parent-run schools, such as Loris Malaguzzi describes so vividly for Reggio Emilia (Edwards et al., 1993).

The city of Reggio Emilia plays an important part in what makes the philosophy so unique. It lies in the northern part of Italy in a fertile agricultural area called Emilia Romagna, known for its parmesan cheese and balsamic vinegar. “The tradition of cooperative work is firmly rooted in the Emilia Romagna region and is based on the sense of community and of solidarity. People are accustomed to constructing and maintaining the connections with the community. They typically respond to immediate needs by forming cooperatives” (Gandini, 2008).

The children are very present in this city of 170,000 people. Children’s art work is seen on the curtains at the city’s theatre where they perform the opera. The square, or piazza, is very important to the city. The children visit the piazza regularly. Reggio Emilia is known as a City of Children and each year the schools in Reggio Emilia plan an event to show the children as citizens of the town (Gambetti, 2011).

Founder and philosopher of the Reggio Emilia Approach, Loris Malaguzzi was a young teacher when the war ended. He heard the rumor of a small village where the people had decided to build and run their own school and he hurried by bike to see for himself. Eventually several more parent-run schools would pop up in the poorest sections of towns. They fought to remain parent-run until funding became too great an issue for

them. In 1963, the first of many city-run schools for young children came into existence. Today, there are 50 centers in Reggio Emilia, 25 of those are infant/toddler centers or *Asilo nido* and 25 are preschools.

The history of both Reggio Emilia schools and Malaguzzi, the founder is rich with passion, strength and determination. The Reggio Approach aligns with Piaget's constructivist theory which argues that in order to provide an ideal learning environment children should be allowed to construct knowledge that is meaningful for them (Ozer, 2004). Reggio educators believe that children need to have a certain amount of control over learning and the direction it takes. Children learn through experience which should include all their senses and children have a right to explore and express themselves in endless ways. Edwards et al, (1993) "Children are encouraged to explore their environment and express themselves through all of their natural "languages", or modes of expression including words, movement, drawing, painting, building, sculpture, shadow play, collage, dramatic play and music"(1993, p. 3).

Documentation/Time Constraints

In review of the literature available on the implementation of the Reggio Emilia Approach in the American classroom, it has become quite clear that the focus of much of the current research available is on pedagogical documentation which is a crucial and defining characteristic of Emilia-inspired programs and certainly worthy of the attention that it receives. "Quality within a program is viewed as a process of *meaning-making* and pedagogical documentation is a tool which contributes to that process" (Giamminuti, 2009, p.8).

The power of pedagogical documentation is present in all Reggio Emilia-inspired programs because of its on-going visibility. If understood and used correctly, can be one of the most effective tools in the implementation of the Reggio Emilia philosophy in new programs.

In her study conducted at the University of Western Australia, Giamminuti focused on documentation as a potential to make values visible and build learning communities within early childhood settings. This study was of a qualitative nature that involved direct observation, focus groups, and individual open-ended interviews with children, families and educators, along with school documents and informal conversations with children, families and educators. The school documents included documentation panels, school newsletters, educators notes and artifacts of the children' work.

What emerged from her study were many different themes which presented themselves in the data collection. Giamminuti analyzed the themes for their meaning and pervasive qualities. The identifying feature of her case study and analysis was the artistic approach to the research itself and the interdependence of the themes including, but not limited to, beauty and aesthetics, language, narrative, memory and identity (Giamminuti, 2009).

Another study regarding pedagogical documentation and reflective practice by pre-service teachers during their student teaching semester in early childhood programs focused on the multiple modes of reflection and those preferred by the participants. This study gave credibility to the use of different forms of reflection as the pre-service teachers learned the process of teaching (Jones-Branch, 2008).

The Reggio Emilia Approach has become a highly recognized model that is used by many in higher education as a guide or framework for pre-service teachers of early childhood to develop curricula focused on reflective practices in pedagogical documentation. The most common modes of documentation are written modes in journals and narratives. What sets Reggio Emilia apart most from other models is the visual representation through the use of photographs and documentation panels (Jones-Branch, 2008).

The Reggio Emilia Approach is considered by many to be a holistic approach to education because it involves the needs of the child as a whole. A study which addressed the philosophy of teaching from a holistic approach defines holistic education as an eclectic and inclusive movement, emerging in the mid-1980s as a response to the then dominant worldview of mainstream education (Rudge, 2008). It is an educational paradigm that integrates the idealistic ideas of humanistic education with spiritual philosophical ideas. It incorporates principles of spirituality, wholeness, and interconnectedness along with principles of freedom, autonomy, and democracy. The study analyzed and evaluated pedagogical applications of the philosophical ideas advocated by the holistic education movement. The researcher looked at eight principles: spirituality, reverence to life/nature, interconnectedness, human wholeness, individual uniqueness, caring relations, freedom/autonomy, and democracy. For each of these principles, the researcher identified pedagogical features across the school systems that promoted a particular principle. The way and the extent by which they are applied were examined. Finally, the researcher compared the findings of all pedagogical features to determine the extent to which each principle is applied in each of the pedagogical

approaches to education. What was found, in the study, was that there are tensions in accommodating pedagogically the spiritual and humanistic principles of holistic education in one approach to education (Rudge).

Parent Involvement

A study was conducted in six Head Start classrooms throughout 5 counties in Iowa to examine the feelings of the parents regarding their initial experiences with the Reggio Emilia Approach. Parent involvement has been strongly emphasized in the past within Head Start programs. The program feels that parents are the most influential aspect on the child's development (McClow & Gillespie, 1998).

For this study, parents were asked to participate in focus groups and the questions posed to parents were: (1) How much do you feel you know about the Reggio Emilia Approach? (2) How do you feel about having a new curriculum in your child's classroom? (3) What do you like or dislike about the changes in your child's classroom? (4) Would you like to learn more about Reggio Emilia? (5) What is the best way for you to learn? (6) Do you have any concerns about the Reggio Emilia Approach? Parents were very helpful in explaining how they felt about the changes in their children's classrooms.

Parents generally felt that they did not know much about the Reggio Emilia Approach. Most of the parents were supportive of the new curriculum model but also expressed some concerns and suggestions for how to effectively educate the parents about the program. Several of the parents had an idea of certain aspects of the approach such as project work and the element of choice. None of the parents in the group expressed confidence in their understanding of the approach. Perhaps this is because the

approach was so new to the Head Start program that teachers did not have the confidence in the approach to be able to articulate it to the parents. Many parents stated that they were not “book smart” and they needed teachers to show them what it should look like. Parents requested videos, slides and informational meetings to gain a better understanding.

Parents gave positive feedback about their children’s interest levels. They enjoyed the element of choice but their biggest concern was that the children may not be ready for kindergarten and that project work may leave some children bored because they have spent too much time on one topic. Another concern that was mentioned was how to address the different levels of intelligence and how to assess the success of the approach.

The general consensus was that teachers need to increase communication with parents to help ease their minds. Parents also need to have opportunities to be involved in the classroom. Given the chance to help with documentation will help them better understand the benefits of the approach (McClow & Gillespie, 1998).

Professional Development through the North American Reggio Emilia Alliance

The North American Reggio Emilia Alliance was created as a home for educators who work in Reggio Emilia-inspired schools and those who are interested in the approach. It provides a map of current Reggio-inspired programs for parents and educators and information of upcoming conferences and the traveling exhibit.

The Editor of *Innovations in Early Education: The International Reggio Exchange*, Judith Allen Kaminsky, writes in her article titled, *Strengthening Relationships Through the NAREA Website*, that the mission of the North American Reggio Emilia Alliance is to build a diverse community of educators and advocates that

will promote and defend the rights of children, families and educators of all cultures through a collaboration of colleagues inspired by the experiences and philosophies of the birth to six education project in Reggio Emilia, Italy.

One of NAREA's goals, according to Kaminsky, is to strengthen professional relationships among its members by facilitating collaboration and exchange. The NAREA website is a vehicle through which members learn more about the schools, centers and organizations in North America. Other educators, also inspired by the experience and philosophy of the infant-toddler centers and preschools of Reggio Emilia, are invited to share information regarding their schools on the NAREA website. NAREA members are strongly encouraged to take advantage of opportunities to connect with colleagues throughout North America (www.reggioalliance.org). This website is most beneficial in finding resources in professional development in the Reggio Emilia Approach.

When Virginia Tech decided to implement the Reggio Emilia Approach in their lab school, a study was conducted that followed four educators as they documented their adaptation of the approach. Three educators traveled to Reggio Emilia, Italy several times to fully grasp the teaching philosophy and worked to translate the knowledge into a practice that could be successful in the lab school at the university. Another teacher, who became the curriculum director, help in the adaptation was included in the study. The study was done by conducted interviews and using the *naturalistic inquiry* process of data collection and documents relevant to the adaptation of the Reggio approach (Zehrt, 2009).

As themes emerged from the data, the researcher discovered that the four individuals all were attracted to the Reggio Emilia philosophy for different reasons. Any obstacles, or limiting aspects, that influenced the translation included differences in philosophical beliefs and associated rules and roles, alliance formation, and socio-political forces (Zehrt, 2009). The lab school was supportive in the development of the approach and realized the benefit there is to creating philosophically-based schools within the community (Zehrt).

A concurrent mixed methods study was done at a University in South Carolina which examined the diffusion of the Reggio Emilia Approach among early childhood teacher educators within the state. A Web-based survey along with semi-structured interviews was used for data collection (Hartman, 2007). Fifty-one teacher educators completed surveys and eight educators were interviewed.

Results showed a slow but increasing rate of implementation or adoption of the approach in the state's early childhood education preparation programs with 90% of those interviewed stating that they had knowledge of the approach (Hartman, 2007). Sixty percent of those interviewed said that they had adopted the Reggio Emilia Approach or had been provided explicit instruction about it in their courses.

Chi-square tests of independence show mainly two different professional development experiences found to be significant in the decision to adopt the principles, those being attending conferences about the Reggio Emilia Approach and taking tours of Reggio-inspired programs. Participants felt that high costs were associated with the implementation of the program. They also felt that the Reggio Emilia Approach is incompatible with the current structure and direction of education in the state. The

consensus was that the approach was difficult to understand, too complex, and difficult to observe because there were too few Reggio Emilia-inspired programs within the state (Hartman, 2007).

Chapter III

Methods

Previous research has indicated that teachers face many challenges with the implementation of the Reggio Emilia Approach in the areas of resources, time constraints involved with documentation, parent involvement, their personal understanding of the philosophy and limited opportunities for professional development. This study was conducted in order to assess the challenges teachers, in the field of early-childhood education, face in the implementation of the Reggio Emilia Approach. To be able to gather the necessary data, the researcher was able to utilize the descriptive method, using both qualitative, and also, to a lesser extent, quantitative approaches. Herein, the chosen participants were recruited through an on-line survey. Online survey methods were the research instrument used for the data gathering.

The educators who participated in this study completed a survey questionnaire to evaluate the challenges facing educators when they implement the Reggio Emilia Approach in their classrooms. Most of the items were based upon a Likert-scale for data interpretation. This chapter describes the methods and procedures to collect the data, the thematic analyzed of open-ended questions, and their interpretation, and finally, how the conclusions were obtained. The research covered the following areas: the design and research method, the participants which were studied, the data collection instrument (survey) and the analysis of the data.

Research Methods

The study used the concurrent mixed methods approach to explore the teacher's perspective on the challenges faced with the implementation of the Reggio Emilia

Approach. This kind of research was used to obtain first hand data from those who responded to the survey and who directly implement the curriculum. This allowed the researcher to make rational conclusions from the study which provided recommendation and direction for future implementation practices. Since this study was focused on the educator's perspective, the descriptive method was the most appropriate method to use.

Concurrent mixed methods research simply means that the researcher merges both qualitative and quantitative data to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem. In this design, the researcher collects both forms of data simultaneously and integrates the data into the interpretation of the results. The researcher may also embed one small form of data within a larger form of data collection in order to answer other types of questions remembering that qualitative responses address the process and quantitative responses address the outcome (Creswell, 2009).

Certain questions on the survey were open-ended and qualitative in nature as they addressed the personal accounts and insights of the respondents. The study employed both approaches to research in order to overcome the limitations associated with each individual research approach and was analyzed using thematic analysis.

Sample

The sample was obtained from educators in three local early childhood educational settings in Oklahoma. The researcher hoped to have a diverse sample of respondents from these schools in various stages of implementation of the Reggio Emilia Approach. The researcher hoped to have between 10 and 50 respondents. The sample was obtained from voluntary random sampling as all members of the population had an equal chance of becoming a research participant.

Procedure

A self-administered survey questionnaire, originally containing 40 questions, was narrowed down to 30 questions, which focus on the educator's experiences with implementing the approach. The questions asked about the educators' educational background and number of years they had been using the approach along with questions related to the schools where they teach and access to available resources. Most questions employed Likert-scale anchors and segments. The survey took participants approximately 30 minutes to complete. The respondents were given a 30-day time frame to complete the survey questionnaire. After collecting the survey questionnaires, the results were tallied, computed, analyzed and recorded. The researcher created a correlation matrix to look at associations between the responses to the questions.

Measures

Educators of Reggio Emilia-inspired programs completed a set of survey questionnaire which assessed their knowledge of the Reggio Emilia Approach and give their perceptions of the implementation of the philosophy in their classrooms. An example of the questions which were quantitative in nature would be:

- | | | | | | |
|-----|---|------------|---------------|------------|--|
| 10) | How well do you feel the school connects to the community? | | | | |
| | Very well | Quite well | Not very well | Not at all | |
| 11) | How well do you feel you understand the concept of Reggio Emilia inspired teaching? | | | | |
| | Very well | Quite well | Not very well | Not at all | |
| 12) | How well do you feel you understand the concept of the image of the child? | | | | |
| | Very well | Quite well | Not very well | Not at all | |
| 13) | How well do you feel you understand the process of documentation? | | | | |
| | Very well | Quite well | Not very well | Not at all | |

Items on this measure were rated on a 1 to 4 very well/ not at all scale with a score of 1 rating equal very well and a score of 4 rating equal not at all. The lower score reflected a greater understanding and more positive perception regarding the implementation of the Reggio Emilia Approach.

An example of those questions which are qualitative in nature will be:

- 24) What do you feel is the greatest benefit to the children within the Reggio Emilia Approach?
- 25) What do you feel is the greatest barrier to fully implementing the Reggio Emilia Approach?

These qualitative questions were then analyzed for thematic analyses and simple counts were generated for each theme.

Chapter IV

Results

To investigate the prevalence of the use of the Reggio Emilia Approach, an online survey was created using www.surveymshare.com. The teachers at three facilities in Oklahoma received an e-mail invitation to participate in the on-line survey. A total of 15 teachers responded to the survey. The data was downloaded from the online survey and were analyzed in SPSS by the primary investigator and co-investigator. The author and co-investigator cleaned the data for any missing values using logistical replacements based on the answers provided or mean substitution for any missing data. There were very few incidence of missing data.

The respondents were asked their highest educational level and the number of years they have been in the teaching profession. The responses were coded numerically as 1-High school, 2- CDA, Certificate of Mastery, CCP, or other child care certification, 3- Associate's degree, 4- Bachelor's Degree, 5- Master's Degree and 6- Doctorate. The results showed 13.3% had a CDA, Certificate of Mastery, CCP or other child care certification, 6.7% had an Associate's degree, 60.0% of those that responded had a Bachelor's degree, 13.3% stated that they had a Master's degree, and 6.7% had a Doctorate. These findings indicate that the majority of the teachers responding to this survey had at least a Bachelor's degree.

The *range* of years in the teaching profession were from 1 to 22 years with 46.7% having less than five years in the teaching profession and 53.3% of respondents having five or more years of experience. The natural break at five years of experience was later used in the analyses to investigate whether it was more likely that newer teachers were

more likely to use the Reggio Emilia Approach than other teachers. When asked how many years of experience they have had using the Reggio Emilia Approach the *range* was from 0 to 5 years of experience with 86.8% having three years or less of experience, and 13.2% having over three years of experience in the Reggio Emilia Approach.

Three additional questions gathered information about the schools' atelier/Atelierista or mini-atelier. When asked whether or not "The school has an atelier or studio" 92% responded *no* to this question. When asked if the school has an Atelierista or art teacher, 100% of respondents answered *no* to this question. Finally, when asked if "The classroom has a mini-atelier or mini-studio", 64.29% of respondents answered *no* with 35.71% stating that they did have a mini-studio in the classroom.

When asked whether or not the children had access to a variety of high quality materials, participants selected from the following scale: 1-Strongly disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Agree, and 4-Strongly agree. The *mean* response for this question was 3.07, a *median* of 3.00, with a standard deviation of 0.88. The participant's responses for "The school pays for the materials used in my classroom were recoded as 1- Strongly Disagree, 2- Disagree, 3- Agree and 4- Strongly Agree. The results for this question were a *mean* of 3.27, a *median* of 3.00, and a *standard deviation* of 0.88.

The respondents were next asked if they felt that the school had adequate resources to allow for the success of the Reggio Emilia Approach at the school. Again, the responses were numerically coded as 1- Strongly Disagree, 2- Disagree, 3- Agree and 4.- Strongly Agree. The results of these responses had a *mean* score of 2.80, a *median* score of 3.00, and a *standard deviation* of 0.94.

The respondents were asked how much time was spent in collaboration with other educators each week and how they would evaluate the ongoing dialogue with the other educators. The time spent was coded as follows: 0-1 hours =1, 1-2 hours =2, 2-3 hours =3, 3-4 hours =4, and 4+ hours =5. The results were a *mean* of 3.53, a *median* score of 4.00, the *standard deviation* was 1.642. They evaluated this collaboration with other teachers on a scale which consisted of 4-Excellent, 3- Fair, 2- Poor, and 1-Unproductive. The results for this data were a *mean* score of 3.60, *median* of 4.00, and *standard deviation* of 0.5.

Field trips into the community are a big part of the Reggio Emilia philosophy. The respondents were asked to what extent “My class takes field trips on the community which are related to their project work.” Once again, responses were numerically coded as: 1- Strongly Disagree, 2- Disagree, 3- Agree and 4- Strongly Agree. The *mean* score was 1.60, the *median* was 2.00, with a *standard deviation* of 0.63.

The next series of questions began to ask how well the respondents felt they understand the most important concepts of the Reggio Emilia Approach. For the next three questions the coding was the same: 4-Very Well, 3- Quite well, 2- Not very well, and 1- Not at all. Respondents were asked, "How well do you feel you understand the concept of Reggio-Inspired Teaching?" The *mean* response was 2.93, a *median* of 3.00, with a *standard deviation* of 0.59. When asked the question, “How well do you feel you understand the concept of the Image of the child?” Respondents reported a *mean* score of 2.80, a *median* score of 3.00, and the *standard deviation* of 0.68. The next question assessed “How well do you feel you understand the process of documentation?” Respondents reported a *mean* score of 3.40, a *median* score of 3.00, and a *standard*

deviation of 0.63. The next questions also address the subject of documentation. Respondents were asked if they felt that they had adequate time in their days for documentation. The results were coded as: 1- Strongly Disagree, 2- Disagree, 3- Agree and 4- Strongly Agree with a *mean* score of 2.60, a *median* score of 3.00, and a *standard deviation* of 0.50. The final question regarding documentation asked respondents, "How comfortable are you with the process of documentation?" This question was coded as: 4- Very comfortable, 3- Comfortable, 2- Not very comfortable and 1- Not at all. The respondents gave a *mean* score of 3.53, a *median* score of 4.00, with a *standard deviation* of 0.51.

Other important concepts of the Reggio Emilia Approach are the environment as the third teacher and the use of emergent curriculum. Respondents reported how well they understood the meaning of the environment as the third teacher. Their responses were coded as: 4-Very well, 3- Quite well, 2- Not very well, and 1-Not at all. Respondents expressed a high comfort level with a *mean* score of 3.27 and a *median* score of 3.00 and *standard deviation* of 0.45. When asked their understanding of emergent curriculum, respondents replied with a *mean* score of 3.13, a *median* score of 3.00, and a *standard deviation* of 0.51.

Respondents next addressed the parent's understanding of the Reggio Emilia Approach. Respondents were asked to what extent they agree with the following statement, "I believe that parents find it easy to understand and support the concepts of the Reggio Emilia Approach." This question was numerically coded as: 1- Strongly Disagree, 2- Disagree, 3- Undecided, 4- agree, 5- Strongly Agree. The *mean* score was 2.73, the *median* score was 3.00, and a *standard deviation* of 0.59.

The next series of questions were asked to discover where educators have received their training in the Reggio Emilia Approach. When asked if they had attended a North American Reggio Emilia Alliance conference or workshop all of the respondents answered *no*. When asked if the educator has been to Reggio Emilia, Italy for a study tour, all of the participants responded with a *no*. When asked whether "Training for the Reggio Emilia Approach is easy to find." Participants responded to the following scale: 1-Strongly Disagree, 2- Disagree, 3-Agree, 4- Strongly Agree. The *mean* score was 2.40, a *median* score of 2.00, and the *standard deviation* of 0.63.

When asked where their school was on the journey to becoming fully Reggio Emilia-Inspired, participants were given the choices: Just beginning (1), Using some but not all of the elements (2), Using most of the elements (3), Able to model the approach to others (4). Responses to this question were varied with no one responding that they are able to model the approach to others. The *mean* score was 1.93, a *median* score of 2.00, with a *standard deviation* of 0.63.

In the next question participants were asked to state in their own words what they feel is the greatest benefit to children within the Reggio Emilia Approach. The responses were categorized by the researcher using the over-riding themes of the responses. Only 14 educators responded to this question. Four educators felt that the greatest benefit to children is that they are allowed to explore and focus on topics that interest them. Four educators felt that the learning style within the approach is more applicable to natural, everyday learning. Four educators felt that the greatest benefit of the Reggio Emilia Approach is that it better allows children to construct their own knowledge. One educator

felt that The Reggio Emilia Approach is more suited to support varied learning styles and one educator felt that Reggio Emilia's focus on art was its greatest benefit.

The final question on the survey asked educators what they felt was the greatest barrier to fully implementing the Reggio Emilia Approach. The respondents gave multiple answers to this question. Three educators felt that teachers are not embracing the philosophy because of its non-traditional approach to learning. There were six educators that felt that the greatest barrier was in training. They felt that teachers were untrained and that training was not offered in their area. Three respondents answered that money was the greatest barrier because they needed to hire more staff and pay for training. Three respondents felt that parents were a barrier because they either do not support the approach, do not understand the approach or prefer a traditional educational experience for their children. Lastly, three educators stated that time was one of the greatest barriers.

Correlational Analyses

To investigate the association between variables, correlational analyses were performed. Given the small sample size, the ability to detect significance is greatly reduced, meaning the findings are likely to be very strong. However, with a small sample size these correlations were interpreted with caution; nevertheless, they indicate some interesting associations within the data.

In investigating the association among reported educator understanding of the Reggio Emilia Approach and educator understanding of subconcepts of the approach, two significant associations existed. Educators who reported greater understanding the Reggio Emilia Approach were also likely to report greater understanding of the image of the child, $r = 0.68, p < 0.01$; additionally, educators who reported greater understanding

of the Reggio Emilia Approach also reported better understanding of the documentation process, $r = 0.65$, $p < 0.01$. Finally, those educators who reported a greater understanding of the concept of the environment as the third teacher also reported greater opportunities for training in the Reggio Emilia Approach, $r = 0.59$, $p < 0.05$; and, although it was not significant at the 0.05 level, there appeared to be an association between the understanding of the process of documentation and the perception of greater opportunities for training, $r = 0.46$, $p = 0.08$.

Some surprising findings were the lack of significant association among the understanding of the Reggio Emilia Approach and the environment as the third teacher, the use of an emergent curriculum, time for documentation and adequate opportunities for training in the Reggio Emilia Approach. The lack of these correlations could be due to the sample size or a lack of understanding of the Approach on the part of the educators.

In investigating the associations among the subconcepts of the Approach, educators responses also resulted in a positive trend association between the importance of documentation and the understanding of the emergent curriculum, $r = 0.48$, $p < 0.10$, meaning that the greater teachers reported the importance of documentation, the more likely they were to report understanding the concept of the emergent curriculum. The analyses did also indicate a positive trend between training and understanding the importance of documentation, $r = 0.46$, $p < 0.10$, and a significant correlation between training and understanding the concept of environment as the third teacher, $r = 0.59$, $p < 0.05$.

In investigating the level of education of the teacher on its relation to understanding the Reggio Emilia Approach, correlational analyses indicated the greater

the education of the teacher, the less likely they were to report understanding the image of the child. The teacher's education and their reported understanding of the image of the child were significantly and negatively correlated, $r = -0.53, p < 0.05$. Additionally, there was not a correlation between those with a higher level of education and a greater understanding of some of the important concepts within the Reggio Emilia Approach such as the use of emergent curriculum, $r = 0.02, p > 0.10$. However, there was also a strong trend between the number of years using the Reggio Emilia Approach and understanding the concept of the image of the child, $r = 0.49, p < 0.10$.

In the investigation of associations among resources, materials, and implementation of the approach, educators reports indicated a strong correlation between availability of high quality materials and the resources schools had to implement the program, $r = 0.76, p < 0.01$. there was also a trend between children having access to a variety of high quality materials and the school paying for those materials, $r = 0.68, p < 0.10$, and also, a correlation between having adequate resources to allow for the success of the program and the school paying for materials and resources, $r = 0.55, p < 0.05$. There is also a positive trend which indicates that those facilities that felt they have adequate resources are more likely to have a mini-atelier in their classrooms, $r = 0.48, p < 0.10$. There was not, however, a significant correlation between having adequate resources and taking field trips $r = -0.02, p > 0.10$. There is a trend toward having adequate resources to insure success and where the centers are further in their journey to becoming fully implemented in the Reggio Emilia Approach, $r = 0.41, p < 0.10$.

These correlation analyses show some significant associations and trends that provided some insight to the full implementation of the Reggio Emilia Approach.

Chapter V

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

Results of this survey are beneficial in understanding the challenges that educators face with the implementation of the Reggio Emilia Approach and why there are so few programs in Oklahoma which are fully implemented in the Reggio Emilia-Approach. The results of the survey show that respondents have the education to make the program work. Although, 60% of respondents have at least a bachelor's degree, there is not a strong significance between the level of education and the years of experience using the Reggio Emilia Approach. There could be many reasons for this. It could show that educators have not been out of school very long and have not had much experience in the classroom. It could also indicate that the Reggio Emilia Approach is newly implemented at the schools which participated in the survey. The researcher is aware that of the three facilities that were surveyed, most of the results came from two programs, neither of which are fully implemented in the Reggio-Emilia Approach.

The results of the survey show that there is not a correlation between those with a higher level of education and a greater understanding of some of the important concepts within the Reggio Emilia Approach such as the use of emergent curriculum. This may be due to the fact that participants with a Master's degree or Doctorate may hold an administration position. Because they are not in the classroom, they would not necessarily have a greater understanding of this particular concept of the Reggio Emilia Approach.

There was also a trend between children having access to a variety of high quality materials and the school paying for those materials, and also, a correlation between having adequate resources to allow for the success of the program and the school paying for materials and resources. Teachers reports also indicated a strong correlations between availability of high quality materials and the resources schools had to implement the program. Schools that have more money would show a higher level of success in the implementation of the Reggio Emilia Approach or any other quality early childhood curriculum simply because they can put more back into the program to insure its success.

Results of the survey also show that not all schools have an atelier or an Atelierista which is a very important part of any fully implemented Reggio Emilia program. There was however, a trend which indicates that those facilities that felt they have adequate resources were more likely to have a mini-atelier in their classrooms. These mini-art studios can be created and enhanced with the help of the community and the parents. Educators can fundraise for additional materials needed to create an atelier or mini-atelier. Parents could ask businesses to donate items and search for found objects around their homes that can be used for sorting and investigation. Getting parents and administration to understand the importance of having an atelier would be made easier once they have more knowledge about the approach.

What was surprising is that even with adequate resources, 93.34% either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement "My class takes fieldtrips in the community which are related to the children's project work." There was no association between having adequate resources and taking field trips. Perhaps educators are not allowed the resources such as school buses or vans for fieldtrips. Another challenge may

be that additional staff members are needed to supervise these field trips and adequate resources are not allocated for the hiring of additional staff.

The study indicates that nearly fifty percent of those surveyed (46.67%) spend 4+ hours in collaboration with other educators and 60% would evaluate the on-going dialogue with other educators as excellent. The other 40% of those surveyed evaluated the dialogue as fair. In other words, educators found the time spent in collaboration to be productive and useful. It is during these hours of collaboration that ideas and concepts are formulated and understood.

The survey asked if educators believed that parents find it easy to understand and support the concepts of the Reggio Emilia Approach and the response was only 6.67% agreed with the statement, 33.33% disagreed with the statement and 60% were undecided. Since parental involvement is a very important concept in the Reggio Emilia Approach and educators feel that they (parents) do not understand or support the approach, this is a major challenge in the implementation of the approach.

There was also a strong trend between the number of years using the Reggio Emilia Approach and understanding the concept of the image of the child. The image of the child is a concept that expands over time but begins with the belief that children are full of potential, competent and capable of discovering and building their own theories of learning about the world around them. It stands to reason that the more experience an educator has investigating with children, documenting their discoveries, collaborating with other educators and parents, the more in-depth their understanding will be of the image of the child.

A lot can be said for the importance of documentation in the understanding of emergent curriculum. Emergent curriculum is based on the children's interests. There was a significant correlation between the two. Reggio-inspired educators discover through their documentation what the children know and want to know and what they need to do to make that happen successfully.

The major patterns in the study show that training in the approach is very limited and expensive. Students in early childhood education programs in colleges and universities may gain a surface understanding of the Reggio Emilia philosophy. The most extensive Reggio-Emilia training to be found requires a trip to either a conference or to Italy for a study tour of one of the schools. None of the participants in this study had been to Italy for that training. The North American Reggio Emilia Alliance holds conferences throughout the United States a few times per year and none of the participants in this study had been to a NAREA conference. When asked if educators found training easy to find, 66.67% disagreed. This would indicate to the researcher that most of the training that educators in the Reggio Emilia Approach have received is tertiary training which can lose some of its meaning and effectiveness. The results also show that 86.8% of educators surveyed have three years of experience or less teaching the Reggio Emilia Approach.

The study does indicate a trend between training and understanding the importance of documentation, and an association between training and understanding the concept of environment as the third teacher. One would believe that with greater access to training in the Reggio-Emilia Approach, these levels would continue to increase.

There is a trend toward having adequate resources to insure success and where the centers are further in their journey to becoming fully implemented in the Reggio Emilia

Approach. That may be because a large amount of the resources have been used upfront in the start-up expenses but there are not enough to fund the program later on.

Of the participants in the study, 28.57% were just beginning their journey in becoming fully implemented in the Reggio Emilia Approach, 50% indicated that they were using some but not all of the elements of the approach, 21.43% stated that they were using most of the elements of the approach one participant did not respond and no one indicated that they were able to model the approach to others. The fact that there were no strong correlations between where they are in their journey and having a mini-art studio in the classroom could indicate that the participant did not understand the question or the definition of a mini-studio since having an art studio is essential to the success of the program. There was also not a strong correlation between where the schools are in their journey and having adequate materials or taking field trips. It appears that these are challenges that teachers may face in the implementation.

The results of this survey would indicate that the majority of respondents are just beginning their journey in the Reggio Emilia Approach and lack the confidence of those educators that have had a greater experience in studying and using it over many years. The respondents have indicated that they share a fair amount of knowledge about the central tenets of the approach but without more accessible training, the understanding will not deepen. The Reggio Emilia Approach is a philosophical approach which addresses the attitudes of the educators. It takes time to understand and develop a personal belief about the approach. Participants in this study have indicated that time is a major constraint to them already in the area of documentation.

The results of this study are significant in that they help us better see the reasons why these programs are not fully implementing the Reggio Emilia Approach. These schools are not using all of the elements. The educators in Reggio Emilia, Italy stress that all of the elements of the approach must be in place to make it work, (Katz, 1994). The task of adopting all of these elements can be so daunting that many teachers become discouraged. It becomes even more discouraging if they must explain their reasoning to administration for asking for additional materials, time or staff.

Essential to the Reggio Emilia Approach is parental support and involvement. The results of this survey find a lack of support and understanding from the parents. We have already discussed that with training comes a confidence in better explaining the approach to parents. But, it could also be said that parental involvement happens because of the quality of the experiences of their children and is not simply the consequence or result of high parental involvement (Katz, 1994).

Also significant in this study was the discovery that these programs do not have an atelier or an Atelierista on site and only a few have a mini-atelier in their classrooms. We have to ask then, how important is this to the success of the Reggio Emilia Approach and can the approach be adapted without this element?

Children in Reggio Emilia are a visible presence in their community, making important connections with the world and in their play. Educators create cooperatives with members of the community utilizing businesses and community leaders as additional resources. This study indicates that educators either do not understand the importance of this element of the approach or are not allowed these freedoms by administration. Perhaps educators see their classroom as the children's environment and

have not adopted the idea that their environment stretches further than the walls of the school or playground.

Another suggestion may be that because of safety and supervision concerns they choose not to take field trips. In the United States, we are under constant scrutiny for how we protect our children. Transporting children on fieldtrips adds to the school's liability. American society looks for problems and complaints can be made against the schools and teachers. The teachers may have concerns about how to supervise a large number of children in a public place. They may feel the pressure of the public's opinion.

As mentioned earlier, the schools may not have the resources they need to allow classes to take field trips. Additional staff, buses and gas cost the schools more money that they may not have. Whatever the reason may be, according to the results of this study, children are not taking fieldtrips and therefore missing the opportunity to connect with their world on a deeper level. As a result, omitting this element could prevent these schools from becoming more fully implemented in the approach.

The researcher sought to answer the question of what challenges there are in the implementation of the Reggio Emilia Approach and why there are not more Reggio Emilia -inspired programs in Oklahoma. The similar question is asked in the conclusion of *The Hundred Languages of Children*, "Why, then is the practice not normative in the United States?" What we now know from this research is that educators believe that the Reggio Emilia Approach benefits children in the way they learn. Respondents feel that the approach supports the many different ways that children construct knowledge providing freedom and empowering children to feel successful. They feel that full

implementation of the Reggio Emilia Approach could be made possible with additional training, money, time and the support of the parents.

Conclusion

What is needed and what can we do to make it possible for these programs and others to become fully implemented in the Reggio Emilia Approach? Looking back at what we believe about children will help answer that question. Educators in the Reggio Emilia Approach believe that all young children have active and lively minds from birth and a basic disposition to make sense of their experiences, investigate them, care about others, relate to people and adapt to their physical environments. Under the right conditions, all of these can flourish (Katz, 1994).

The Importance of Training

To begin with, we need to address the lack of training that is offered in the state of Oklahoma. The Reggio Emilia Approach is mentioned in curriculum text books at the college level along with many other early childhood curricula models. Students are quizzed on the central tenets and differences between these various early childhood curriculum models and unless an interest is sparked or they have somewhere to apply this knowledge, it is not utilized and the significance is lost. The general public is not aware of the Reggio Emilia Approach. It will remain difficult for parents to understand and support if the educators are not confident in educating them about the central tenets of the approach. I feel that this confidence can only come with more in-depth training, observations in lab schools which have fully implemented the Reggio Emilia approach.

The Webster University in St. Louis, Missouri has partnered with the University of Modena in Italy to create the Graduate Certificate in Pedagogical Coordination in the

Reggio Emilia Approach. This is a two semester certificate program consisting of full time study and internship and is offered either in Italy or St. Louis. One of the required classes is entitled *Negotiated Learning: The Reggio Emilia Approach to Early Education*. The course focuses on the role of documentation in the Reggio Emilia Approach. Students learn various ways to observe and document learning processes of children and study their documentation to see how they can support children's learning. They learn that documentation is used as a database for reflective teaching and enables teachers to create designs for future learning experiences.

If this course or any of the others in this certificate program such as: *Applied Research, Creating Learning Environments* or *Valuing the Expressive Languages in Education* were offered to educators in our state, they would have a deeper understanding of the role of documentation and emergent curriculum in the Reggio Emilia Approach. It would give them better skills in planning their environments and confidence in their ability to model the approach to others. I believe this will increase understanding and support for both administration and parents. Understanding why we do something is the key to change.

The Importance of the Atelier/Atelierista/Mini-Atelier

To be fully implemented, an importance much be placed on each school having an atelier, an Atelierista and/or a mini-atelier. However, finding a teacher that is trained in the arts could be quite difficult. Rather than being overly concerned with hiring an Atelierista, I believe schools' focus should be on the mini-atelier which is a realistic goal for any program that is determined to become fully implemented. Most early childhood

classrooms already have an art interest area. What is different about the mini-atelier is the quality of the materials and the choices that children will have.

In all programs, but especially where resources are limited, it is of great importance to allow the children to investigate the properties of the materials before giving them the freedom to begin independent projects. This investigation creates a level of understanding and therefore respect for the materials. The materials are more likely to be cared for properly and not wasted. Children will discover what they can do and cannot do with the materials. For example, when working with glue, children observe its qualities while wet and dry, its ability to make things "stick" together, and what materials work best with it. Once the children have reached a certain level of knowledge and teachers are comfortable with where they are, they can be given freedom to create. This will happen at different times for different children.

In Reggio Emilia-inspired programs the materials are displayed in clear glass or plastic containers at eye level and are readily accessible to spark curiosity and investigation in the children. Materials do not always have to be store bought but can be found or recycled objects. Teachers can enlist the help of other teachers, administration, parents and the children themselves in collecting objects that will create or enhance their mini-atelier. Children express their creativity as they discover, collect, sort, arrange, experiment and think. Giving them the opportunity to take part in the creation of a mini-atelier allows children to value what they have accomplished. We already believe that children express themselves with a hundred different languages. The mini-atelier is a vehicle for which this can take place and an essential element of the Reggio Emilia Approach.

The importance of having adequate time

Time is an important, indispensable, and energy-demanding resource (Katz, 1994). Educators need the support of administration to help with time constraints. Educators feel there are a great deal of demands made of them within the approach including documentation and collaboration. Additional staff trained in the approach could lighten their load and add to the success of the program. This is not always possible with the monetary challenges that many programs face. Parent volunteers can be used to help with documentation, assist on field trips and be involved in planning the curriculum.

The study shows that respondents felt that time spent in collaboration is productive and useful. Having the support of administration is essential and knowing that the children are being supervised by qualified staff is beneficial to educators as they meet for collaboration. To work collaboratively with other teachers, they need enough time to think through and organize themselves for the time they will be with the children, (Cadwell, 1997). Teachers themselves must determine how much time is needed for collaboration. In some programs, they meet each morning for half an hour and then one afternoon a week for an hour. Other programs meet only one afternoon a week for a couple of hours.

A typical preschool schedule is often set up in 30 minute increments: from 8:30 - 9:00 a.m. the children will do art and from 9:00 - 9:30 a.m. it is circle time. Reggio teachers ask that traditional teachers look at their day differently and ask what the *musts* are. It is suggested that there are really only four "musts" to a day in a Reggio-inspired program:

- a time to meet with the children for group discussion

- a time for project or individual/group work
- a time to eat
- a time to rest

Looking at the day in these simple terms, frees up a great deal of time for teachers to use for documentation, collaboration and organization. They even suggest going one step further and consolidating the first three *musts* into one large group which would allow for a community morning meeting, extended period for art and a longer more enjoyable lunch time (Wurm, 2005). Everything that is not a "must" falls under the "should" or "could" category and can be added into the time allowed for the "musts". For example, tooth brushing could be added to the lunch time. Being flexible and fluid is one of the appealing aspects of the teaching style that affects the way "time is lived at the school". The emphasis is on creating an environment that flows effortlessly and naturally from one part of the schedule to the next (Wurm, 2005).

The importance of parent involvement

In Reggio Emilia the parent's role receives a great deal of attention and because of that they have numerous ways for the parents to be involved in the program from work evenings to cooking for holiday parties. The culture in Italy is familial in nature where families sit and have elaborate dinners together, sharing and celebrating. Generations cook together, sharing recipes. This culture naturally is part of the dynamic within the schools. The same is not always true in American culture.

Many working parents in the U.S. barely nod at teachers when they come in to pick up their children. Asking them to spend an evening working or cooking may be too much. However, understanding the culture behind the Reggio Emilia Approach can only

enhance their respect for the approach. Teachers spend an enormous part of their lives with the same children. They get to know them on a personal level; they know when younger siblings are born or when a dad loses his job. If teachers take the initiative to model the approach to parents, they will see how stopping and taking the time to experience a part of their child's day is an important part of their learning process. The only way parents will understand and support the Reggio Emilia Approach is if teachers are actively soliciting the involvement of parents.

The fully implemented Reggio Emilia Approach has a high success rate around the country. It is a program that requires more money upfront for start-up expense and training. It demands additional staff in the classrooms and a great deal of time for documentation and the involvement of parents. The approach itself requires that educators be thoughtful, reflective and be introspective on their beliefs about children. The approach requires that educators and parents slow down and listen to the needs of the children. Together, teachers and parents alike learn with the children, offering them continuous, limitless opportunities to investigate their curiosities and encourage them to construct their own meaning and knowledge.

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Appendix

Reggio Emilia Approach

Educator Survey

School Background Information

1. City and State:
2. Number of children served in the school:
3. The school is private pay only. Yes or no
4. The school receives state or federal subsidized childcare funding? Yes or no

Teacher Background Information

5. Education level: High School Undergraduate Degree Masters
 Doctorate
6. Number of years' in teaching profession:
7. Number of years' using Reggio Emilia Approach:

Questions about your Reggio Emilia Experience

8. The school has an atelier or studio. Agree Disagree
9. The school has an Atelierista/o or art teacher. Agree Disagree
10. My classroom has a mini-atelier or mini studio. Agree Disagree
11. The children to have access to a variety of high quality materials.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
12. The school pays for the materials in my classroom.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
13. My school has adequate resources to allow for the success of the Reggio Emilia
 Approach.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

14. Number of hours you spend collaborating with other educators per week.

0-1 1-2 2-3 3-4 4+

15. How would you evaluate the ongoing dialogue with other educators you collaborate with?

Excellent Fair Poor Unproductive

16. My class takes fieldtrips in the community related to the projects they are working on.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

17. How well do you feel you understand the concept of Reggio Emilia inspired teaching?

Very well Quite well Not very well Not at all

18. How well do you feel you understand the concept of the image of the child?

Very well Quite well Not very well Not at all

19. How well do you feel you understand the process of documentation?

Very well Quite well Not very well Not at all

20. I have adequate time in my day for documentation.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

21. How comfortable are you with the process of documentation.

Very Comfortable comfortable Not very Comfortable Not at all

22. How well do you feel you understand the concept of the environment as the third teacher?

Very well Quite well Not very well Not at all

23. How well do you feel you understand the concept of emergent curriculum?

Very well

Quite well

Not very well

Not at all

24. Parents find it easy to understand and support the Reggio Emilia Approach.

Strongly Agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

25. I have attended a NAREA conference or workshop.

Agree

Disagree

26. I have been to Reggio Emilia for a study tour.

Agree

Disagree

27. Training on the Reggio Emilia Approach is easy to find.

Strongly Agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

28. Where is your school on the journey to becoming fully Reggio Emilia Inspired?

Just beginning

Using some but not all of the elements

Using most of the elements

Able to model the approach to others.

29. What do you feel is the greatest benefit to the children within the Reggio Emilia Approach?

30. What do you feel is the greatest barrier to fully implementing the Reggio Emilia Approach?