THE REGGIO EMILIA APPROACH

IN THE UNITED STATES

By

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Abstract: Progressive educational approaches are growing in interest in the United States. The Reggio Emilia Approach is one progressive philosophy that is gaining traction in the realm of early childhood education. Due to the approaches contextual nature and value placed on children and teachers, it could have benefits for the increasingly diverse population in the United States. Additional research is needed on the approach overall, particularly on its utilization in the context of the United States. Utilizing a survey with both open-ended and closed-ended questions, this study attempted to better understand what educators are using from the approach, their perceptions of the approach, and how the approach has impacted their practice and/or philosophy. This study found that educators are able to utilize a variety of Reggio-inspired aspects and have been impacted positively, but there was a very limited understanding of the approach and its philosophical foundations. This can inform future researchers, Reggio-inspired professional development, and Reggio-inspired teacher preparation programs to ensure a quality understanding of the approach and its philosophical foundations. This can also inform any educators who are interested in researching the approach themselves to focus on the philosophical foundations before the specific practices, but also to inform that it is possible to be Reggio-inspired in any context in the United States.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I never knew how privileged I was with regard to my Reggio-inspired infant-12

education until I began visiting different early childhood settings in my undergraduate career. I

knew my personal experience was different than a typical public school, but I never thought the

difference would be so severe, especially when everything I was learning in my university classes

reflected the kind of educational experience I had. I saw classrooms with children spending the

majority of their day one-on-one with their iPads. I saw classrooms that watched entire movies on

a daily basis. Time spent outside was never more than 30 minutes a day. Children's bodies were

controlled by forcing them to sit a specific way and in a specific spot for long periods of time,

making them walk in a straight line down the hall keeping their hands to themselves, and telling

them to put their heads down on the lunch table after eating and not to speak. Even at school

children are to be seen and not heard. Do not interrupt the teacher, do not yell, do not speak in the

hallway, do not talk to your classmates while you're working. "Work" means worksheets upon

worksheets that are supposed to prepare kids for standardized testing. I questioned why it was like

this. Why were teachers complying with these harsh and inappropriate expectations of children? I

have had several teachers tell me it's not possible to do   anything different. I knew this wasn't

true because I have witnessed teachers doing things differently. I have seen teachers in strictly

mandated public schools find a compromise between what they know is appropriate in early

childhood and what they are mandated to teach. I have seen settings that utilize the Reggio Emilia

Approach as that compromising factor. Because of this I want to explore one of those settings in hopes of gaining an understanding that can help aid other schools or teachers searching for ways to negotiate between the mandated and the desired.

This section discusses the history of the Reggio Emilia Approach (REA), key principles of the approach, the influence of the approach in the United States, and the current state of the U.S. public education system. Then the problem statement, research questions, methodology, purpose, and significance of the study are addressed as well as definitions of key terminology.

History

The Reggio Emilia approach, a progressive early childhood education (ECE) philosophy, comes from the town of Reggio Emilia in northern Italy. Right after World War II ended, the people of Reggio Emilia and surrounding towns desired a different approach to schooling young children, grounded in the importance of democracy. The fascist regime and the masses who followed blindly prompted many to rethink the education of young children, invoking the desire to educate children in a way that would focus on cultivating the ability to think for oneself (Reggio Children, 2022).

Loris Malaguzzi, with the help of many others, founded the first municipal preschool in Reggio Emilia in 1963 for children ages three to six. He was especially inspired by a town outside of Reggio Emilia called, Villa Cella, where men and women built a school from salvaged brick from bombed houses. They gathered and sold what was left behind by German soldiers to help fund the school. They had very little, but were determined to provide a place for children to learn and grow. In 1971, the first infant-toddler center was opened for children ages zero to three (Reggio Children, 2022). Today there are over 30 infant-toddler and preprimary schools combined (Edwards et at., 2011).

Although this was the first municipal preschool in the area, this was not the first attempt to provide preschools in the area. The very first preschool opened in 1860 in the greater province of Regio Emilia for children living in poverty. In 1913, a preschool was opened in a bordering

village, but all were forced to close by the fascist government in 1938 right before the start of the war. After the war, the women of the Italian Women's Union opened and managed 60 preschools in the province all on their own, starting with the school in Villa Cella that Malaguzzi was so inspired by. The determination of these women and the value they held towards children laid a foundation for the future municipal schools of Reggio Emilia there today (Reggio Children, 2022). Since then, schools across the globe have been inspired by this approach to early childhood education.

Key Principles

Key values as stated on the official website for the Reggio Emilia approach includes "children are active protagonists in their growing processes, the hundred languages, participation, learning as a process of construction, educational research, educational documentation, progettazione/designing, organization, environment and spaces, formation/professional growth, and evaluation" (Reggio Children, 2022). The following includes descriptions of the key values and principles.

The Role and Image of Children

In the Reggio Emilia approach children are seen as protagonists, collaborators, and communicators (Cadwell, 2003). Children are highly capable beings and rich in potential to construct and co-construct knowledge cultivate meaning from their experiences with others and the environment (Reggio Children, 2022). The strong image of the child is an image that views children as intelligent, strong, beautiful, ambitious and rich; rich with complexity, competency, and determination (Moss, 2016). Children are seen as competent and valued members of society entitled to rights (Rinaldi, 2006).

The Hundred Languages

The hundred languages of children is a metaphor created by Loris Malaguzzi to describe the "extraordinary potentials of children" and the infinite ways that children think, construct knowledge and meaning, and express that knowledge (Reggio Children, 2022). Malaguzzi

composed a poem on the hundred languages. He wrote that a child has a hundred languages, hands, thoughts; a hundred ways of thinking, playing, speaking, listening, marveling, and loving; a hundred joys for singing and understanding; a hundred worlds to discover, invent, and dream; "the child has a hundred languages (and a hundred hundred hundred more)" (Reggio Children, 2022).

Participation and Learning as a Process of Construction

Participation is essential to validating the hundred languages of children. Children cannot reveal their hundred languages without having active participation in their learning. Participation also "generates and informs the feelings and culture of solidarity, responsibility and inclusion, and produces changes and new cultures" (Reggio Children, 2022). Participation is key in the construction and co-construction of knowledge. Collaboration and small group work is essential to this approach which is rooted in, but not limited to, social constructivism (Cadwell, 2003).

Educational Research and Documentation

Research is core for children and teachers. Research is a tool for "interpreting the complexity of the world" (Reggio Children, 2022). Research is a part of the everyday and is displayed through documentation. Documentation is a visual process created by the teachers to display and interact with the learning process of the children. This may include teacher commentary, transcriptions of the children's dialogue, photographs displayed on panels, in books, or other forms of media (Cadwell, 2003). Documentation and research go hand in hand. When research is displayed it's not only a visual of children's' construction of knowledge, but it also allows for revisiting, rethinking, and continual analysis and discussions on the experiences shown. It invites discussion between children, teachers, and families. Documentation is also a research tool for teachers. It allows teachers to learn more about their students and to assess their teaching (Cadwell, 2003).

Progettazione/Designing

Progettazione is their term for curriculum, but it means something very different then how we view curriculum. Progettazione in its literal translations means "design". "Educational action is shaped through progettazione/designing of didactics, of environments, of participation, of the professional growth of personnel, and not by means of applying pre-defined programmes" (Reggio Children, 2022). Many describe the approach as an emergent curriculum, which is a curriculum that it directed by students' interests and has no predetermined outcomes (Ciezczyk, 2021). Emergent curriculum is often associated with the Reggio approach (Ciezczyk, 2021), but Carlina Rinaldi (2006), president of Reggio Children, expresses her concerns on how others attempt to classify the approach,

> In the effort of trying to understand what we are, and what is 'the Reggio approach', and to classify us, they make us out for example to be 'an emergent curriculum' or to fit some other type of curriculum. No, we are not! There is this need of capturing the secret… We cannot be classified with a label, in the way in which language is used to order the world (p. 200).

Instead, Rinaldi (2006) used the term, "contextual curriculum" in that the curriculum is based in the 100 languages of children and built "by the dialogue among children, teachers and the environment surrounding them", as well as the families and surrounding community (p. 205). Although this is only Rinaldi's attempt to construct an idea for those who "use the language of curriculum and believe in the importance of curriculum" (p. 205). It is not a word used in Reggio Emilia.

Organization

The REA is often misinterpreted as an unstructured approach, when in fact it is a highly organized system. It is seen as unstructured because there is not a concrete curriculum with standardized outcomes. Instead, the "structure" can be seen in the organization of the day, the

space, and the work (Reggio Children, 2022). Rinaldi (2006) defines organization as "a structure which gives value" (p. 159). Rinaldi (2006) wrote a simple but beautiful example of this idea,

>For example, laying the table with the children means understanding that you are not only organising the table in a functional way but organising a meeting or encounter because eating a meal together is an important moment for socializing, conversation and friendship. In the same way, it is important to agree that tidying up an area is a fundamental condition for being a community. (p. 159)

This is intentional organization. Each aspect of the day is intentional regarding the children's schedule, projects, and interactions. Organization also refers to networks and exchanges of people and culture within one's own context and with others. Malaguzzi revered organization as a value and a continuous process, not a product (Rinaldi, 2006).

Environment and Spaces

The environment is seen as the third educator in the REA after children and teachers and it is a living and ever evolving system (Edwards et al., 2011). This is why intentional organization of the environment is so important. Not only is the environment intentional with regards to current projects taking place, but it is also intentionally aesthetically pleasing and inviting. It should be a place where children feel comfortable to learn and express themselves in a non-constricting way. According to Malaguzzi, "the space in many ways reflects the culture of the people who create it" (Edwards et al., 2011, p. 331). Environments should be functional, but safe and inviting. They should be spaces conducive for collaboration and building relationships and community. Environments should be multisensorial including variation in color, light, and materials, and they should be flexible and adaptable (Edwards et al., 2011). The environment is "in a constant dialogue between architecture and pedagogy" (Reggio Children, 2022). This intentionality with the environment also promotes appreciation and respect from the children for their physical environment (Edwards et al., 2011).

Formation, Professional Growth, and Evaluation

Professional growth and formation is an essential aspect of the REA. Teachers are life-long learners and are committed to continuous professional growth. In Reggio Emilia, professional growth is included in working hours (Reggio Children, 2022). It generally involves intentional collaborative reflection and work with other teachers and staff. Professional development is designed by teachers and staff in a single preschool or infant-toddler center and plan for professional growth in Reggio Emilia's system for educational services. Evaluation includes the process of documentation as well as collaboration and continuous dialogue with services, organizations, families, the local community, the municipal system, and other schools (Reggio Children, 2022).

Reggio in the United States

The Reggio Emilia Approach first made its way to the United States in 1987 with the "Hundred Languages of Children" exhibit that shared the story of the approach (Reggio Alliance, 2022). This exhibit, along with national attention from Newsweek, Education Week, and PBS, sparked major interest in educators across the United States (New, 2007). Many educators saw that the ideals and practices portrayed in Reggio Emilia, Italy, reflected in some ways their personal philosophy regarding early childhood education. It also mirrored much of the progressive education discourse at the time (New, 2007). New (2007) also suggests it came at a time of major debate surrounding ECE. This included debate surrounding developmentally appropriate practice, socioconstructivism, and project-based approach. New (2007) suggested that the image of the child has had the greatest impact on American educators.

Unlike other popular progressive educational programs like Montessori and Waldorf, there is no Reggio accreditation or training for schools or teachers. The only Reggio Emilia schools are the ones in the town of Reggio Emilia. All other schools are Reggio-inspired. This is because children, schools, cities, and contexts are all unique. No two schools or classrooms in Reggio Emilia are the same. No two schools outside of Reggio Emilia should be the same. Each

school should have their own culture created by the students, families, and the context in which the school sits. The name Reggio, Reggio Emilia Approach, or Reggio-inspired is not regulated, therefore any entity could potentially use those names to describe their school or program. However, the North American Reggio Emilia Alliance (NAREA) has a list of schools and organizations on their website that have paid to be members of NAREA. The website states, "This listing of schools and organizations is a service of NAREA and does not represent an endorsement by NAREA" (Reggio Alliance, 2022). There are 121 schools and organizations included on this list, which is not inclusive of all Reggio inspired schools. For example, the school I attended is not affiliated with NAREA but is in direct collaboration with pedagogistas in Reggio Emilia regularly.

Although no two schools are the exact same, there will of course be similarities found across Reggio Emilia schools and Reggio-inspired schools. In the United States, similar interpretations emerge at Reggio-inspired schools such as an emphasis on the whole child, emergent curriculum, emphasis on the physical environment, project-based work, documentation, inquiry-based learning, collaboration, play-based curriculum, or interest-based curriculum (Abramson et al., 1995; Clapp, 1996; Gillespie, 2000; Kersting, 1995). As stated before, some of this is an interpretation and may not be terms that are used in Reggio Emilia.

State of the United States Public Education System

Americans tend to view schools as a business and the children are consumers (Vintimilla, 2014). Teachers are entrepreneurs who need to engage and entertain students in a fun way and fill them with knowledge in a way that is easily understandable so they are not bored. Schools are like factories where teachers fill students will predetermined and measurable knowledge (Vintimilla, 2014). Teaching is generally not viewed seen as a serious profession and are often limited to being seen as nice, timid, nurturing, and loving. These ideas stem from teaching as a traditional female practice (Vintimilla, 2014).

There are two directions U.S. early childhood education programs generally take, either a maturationist model or an academic model (Spodek & Sparacho, 2003). A maturationist model generally refers to child-centered, play-based, or emergent curriculum (Spodek & Sparacho, 2003). The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and their Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) (Bredekamp & Copple, 2021), is generally considered the standard for ECE college programs in the United States. Although NAEYC promotes a maturationist model which has been critiqued and not considered the gold standard by progressive ECE scholars (Spodek & Sparacho, 2003).

The academic model is what we see in most public schools where standardized academic content is the core of education. Even though the majority of states in the United States have public kindergarten and many have public prekindergarten, the state of these programs is questionable due to the abuse of the academic model (Harris, 2019). In public education, these programs have been subject to a push down of curriculum, now expecting preschoolers and kindergartners to achieve academic standards originally established for first and second graders (Harris, 2019). This is not considered appropriate for the proper development and education of young children (Apple, 2008), yet schools continue to push for high-stakes academics in preschool and kindergarten. This is not just an issue for the youngest grades, standardized curriculum and high-stakes testing continues to dominate elementary, middle, and high school public education, even though there is an abundance of research recognizing the consequences of this approach and calling for educational reform (Harris, 2019; New, 2007; Senent et al., 2021).

Problem Statement & Statement of Purpose

Due to standardized curriculum (Harris, 2019), high-stakes testing (Senent et al., 2021), and a poor public perception of children, teachers, and school (New, 2007), American public schools are in dire need of educational reform. The purpose of this study is to analyze the impact of the Reggio Emilia Approach in a public elementary school in the United States and to

understand the perceptions and practice of American educators with regards to the Reggio Emilia Approach.

Research Questions & Methodological Overview

The following research questions inform this study:

1. How has the Reggio Emilia approach impacted public schools in the United States?

2. What are American educators' perceptions of the Reggio Emilia approach and how has it impacted their practice?

This study included a survey that inquired of educators' perceptions of the Reggio approach and how the approach has influenced their practice and philosophy.

Purpose and Significance

The purpose of this study was to understand how the Reggio Emilia Approach has impacted a public elementary school and to understand the perceptions of American educators regarding Reggio principles and how they have impacted their personal practice and philosophy. This study can inform future research, professional development, and teacher education regarding the REA.

Definition of Key Terminology

The following key terms are defined as they relate to the study:

Early Childhood Education (ECE): Early childhood education is defined by different ages depending on what entity is defining it. In Reggio Emilia, their schools include ages 0 to 6. In the United States, ECE generally includes ages 0 to 8.

Emergent curriculum: A type of curriculum that is not predetermined nor has predetermined outcomes. Curriculum is created by the teacher based on student interests and inquiries.

Constructivism: The theory that children construct their own knowledge.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP): Guidelines developed by the National

Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) for early childhood programs.

Documentation: A visual process created by teachers to display the learning process of the

children.

Hundred languages: A metaphor for the infinite potentials of children in their ability to

construct and express knowledge and meaning.

Pedagogista: Italian for teacher or educator, however their meaning is a little different than our

English interpretation. Pedagogistas in Reggio Emilia, Italy are pedagogical consultants. They

work with directly with teachers to help develop their practice.

Progettazione: An Italian word used to describe the type of curriculum used in Reggio Emilia,

best translated as design.

Reggio Emilia Approach (REA): The Reggio Emilia Approach is a progressive early childhood

education philosophy created in Reggio Emilia, Italy by Loris Malaguzzi.

Socioconstructivism: The theory that children construct their own knowledge through social

interactions.

The whole child: Refers to all developmental domains including cognitive, social emotional,

linguistic, and physical development.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature review discusses implementation, barriers of implementing, benefits of implementing, documentation, diversity, educational reform, and context as common themes found in research regarding the Reggio Emilia Approach (REA). After the current research is thoroughly reviewed, the beliefs of Malaguzzi and supporting theories will be discussed as the theoretical foundations for this study.

Current research on the REA includes several studies on the integration of the approach overall (Abramson et al., 1995; Clyde et al., 2006; Gillespie, 2000; Maynard & Chicken, 2010; Merz & Swim, 2011; Mphahlele, 2019), as well as research integrating specific aspects of the approach seen in Reggio Emilia, Italy such as documentation (Carlsen & Clark, 2018; Cooney & Currah, 2002; Giamminuti et al., 2022; Lyon & Donahue, 2009), and impact of the approach in various areas (Alamillo et al., 2019; Gencer & Gonen 2015; Schneider et al., 2014; Traci, 2020; Westerberg & Vandermaas-Peeler, 2021). Emerson & Linder (2019) conducted a study to review all the current literature on the Reggio Emilia Approach. Results indicated that there were several studies regarding implementation and advocacy, but found that there were no empirical studies supporting effectiveness of the approach (Emerson & Linder, 2019). Additional research has been conducted and published since the initial review. The majority of studies include a focus on the Reggio Emilia Approach in public early childhood settings that are not a part of elementary

schools, (Alamillo et al., 2019; Gillespie, 2000; Kuh, 2008; Lyon & Donahue, 2009; Merz & Swim, 2011; Traci, 2020), with very little in public elementary school settings (Abramson et al., 1995; Clyde et al., 2006; Vasinda, 2004), and some in private school settings (Kaynak-Ekici et al., 2021; Kersting, 1995; Sisson, 2009; Westerberg & Vandermaas-Peeler, 2021).

Implementation

Most research about integrating the Reggio Emilia philosophy overall focuses on two major issues. The majority of the literature on integration is about replicating what is seen in the Reggio Emilia schools with regard to (Abramson et al., 1995; Arbizzi, 2016; Aqeel, 2020; Baker, 2014; Clapp, 1996; Clyde et al., 2006; Gillespie, 2000; Heineman, 2022; Kaynak-Ekici et al., 2021; Kersting, 1995; Kuh, 2008; Mathis, 2011; Mphahlele, 2019; Sisson, 2009; Westerberg & Vandermaas-Peeler, 2021). Other studies focus less on replication and more about utilizing the approach to reflect upon and develop one's own philosophy and practice (Alamillo et al., 2019; Maynard & Chicken, 2010; Merz & Swim, 2011; Traci, 2020; Vakil et al., 2003). Even those that are simply trying to replicate practices seen in Reggio Emilia, Italy, generally ultimately notice changes and development in their own philosophy as a result from replicating those practices (Abramson et al., 1995; Arbizzi, 2016; Baker, 2014; Clapp, 1996; Gillespie, 2000; Kersting,1995; Kuh, 2008; Lyon & Donahue, 2009; Maynard & Chicken, 2010; Traci, 2020). Implementing specific practices varied across the literature, but generally included change in the environment and curriculum, increased collaboration, including or increasing the use of documentation, and increasing teacher, family, and student relationships and communication (Abramson et al., 1995; Clapp, 1996; Gillespie, 2000; Kersting, 1995).

Barriers to Implementing

Many difficulties have arisen in researching, implementing, and studying the Reggio Emilia Approach. Most studies indicated very similar difficulties which predominantly include lack of knowledge on the approach and its practices (Arbizzi, 2016; Aqeel, 2020; Clyde et al., 2006; Elliot, 2005; Jenny, 2000; Kersting, 1995; Mathis, 2011; Maynard & Chicken), curriculum

mandates and high academic standard expectations (Arbizzi, 2016; Aqeel, 2020; Clapp, 1996; Clyde et al., 2006; Heineman, 2022; Lyon & Donahue, 2009; Mathis, 2011; Maynard & Chicken, 2010), lack of support from families, administrators, or colleagues (Arbizzi, 2016; Aqeel, 2020; Elliot, 2005; Sisson, 2009), lack of time for learning about the approach and to implement (Aqeel, 2020; Clapp, 1996; Lyon & Donahue, 2009; Mathis, 2011; Maynard & Chicken, 2010), lack of space (Clapp, 1996; Lyon & Donahue, 2009), and that it is overall a slow, difficult, ongoing process (Clyde et al., 2006; Elliot, 2005; Gillespie, 2000; Kersting, 1995; Lyon & Donahue, 2009; Mathis, 2011). A commonality found across many of these studies, especially the ones conducted in public school settings, indicated government curriculum, standards mandates, and regulations as major barriers to implementing the REA. Nonetheless these studies showed the ability to successfully implement some aspect of the Reggio Emilia Approach such as documentation, emergent curriculum, collaboration, or classroom organization (Abramson et al., 1995; Arbizzi, 2016; Aqeel, 2020; Clapp, 1996; Clyde et al., 2006; Gillespie, 2000; Heineman, 2022; Kersting, 1995; Kuh, 2008; Lyon & Donahue, 2009; Mathis, 2011; Maynard & Chicken, 2010; Mills, 2013; Sisson, 2009; Traci, 2020: Vasinda, 2004). Although many studies indicated difficulties, several also indicated practices that helped mitigate these barriers and promote successful implementation. These practices include collaboration with other teachers (Elliot, 2005; Clapp, 1996; Gillespie, 2000; Kersting, 1995; Kuh, 2008), in-depth knowledge of the REA (Arbizzi, 2016; Heineman, 2022; Jenny, 2000) or instruction from experts or those more knowledgeable in the subject matter (Gillespie, 2000; Kersting, 1995; Maynard & Chicken, 2010), administrative or colleague support (Gillespie, 2000; Heineman, 2022; Kersting, 1995; Mathis, 2011; Merz & Swim, 2011), professional development (Arbizzi, 2016; Gillespie, 2000; Heineman, 2022; Kersting, 1995; Kuh, 2008; Lyon & Donahue, 2009; Maynard & Chicken, 2010; Merz & Swim, 2011), and personal beliefs aligning with the REA (Clapp, 1996; Kersting, 1995; Mathis 2011).

A national quantitative study surveyed professors, teachers, and graduate students on their perceptions surrounding reconceptualizing early childhood education through the REA. The findings indicated that collaboration was essential for growth and implementation but was also seen as the highest concern and the biggest challenge, but also the most successful and beneficial aspect (Elliot, 2005).

Benefits to Implementing

Although most research analyzes how and why the REA is integrated in U.S. educational settings, many benefits of the approach have been investigated as well. One study in Texas compared a 3rd grade Reggio-inspired classroom to the rest of the traditional 3rd grade classrooms at the school. The Reggio-inspired classroom included a Reggio-inspired environment, emergent curriculum, was dictated by student interests, and had further family involvement. The classrooms were compared based on reading and math test scores. The study found that there was no significant difference between test scores in the different third grade classrooms (Vasinda, 2004). Other studies also suggested students were still able to meet or even surpass academic standards (Abramson et al., 1995; Clyde et al., 2006; Kuh, 2008; Mphahlele, 2019; Sisson, 2009). This has important implications because many teachers, administrators, families, and policy-makers fear that progressive education models will take away from learning goals surrounding academic standards and hurt test scores.

The REA emphasizes the importance of smooth transitions for children whether it be from home to school or from their current school to new school or grade. One study sought to find the effects of implementing transition strategies influenced by the REA such as home visits, family and student orientation programs, and quality communication between teachers and families (Schneider et al., 2014). The study followed students as they transitioned from preschool to elementary school. Each school varied on their extent of Reggio-inspired transition practices. The schools with more Reggio-inspired transition practices had students that transitioned better in

the sense that students liked school better and had fewer behavior problems compared to the schools utilizing fewer or looser Reggio-inspired transition practices (Schneider et al., 2014).

Another study examined the effects of REA based projects on creative thinking skills in preschool aged children. Results indicated that the Reggio-inspired projects did boost creative thinking skills compared to a more boxed curriculum (Gencer & Gonen, 2015). Many studies also indicated that children were more engaged and participated more in these Reggio-inspired contexts (Abramson et al., 1995; Arbizzi, 2016; Clyde et al., 2006; Mills, 2013; Mphahlele, 2019), particularly the children who are usually quieter or struggle academically by promoting confidence and engagement in these students (Clyde et al., 2006; Maynard & Chicken, 2010). One study specifically examined teachers in a graduate course where they were encouraged to explore a child-centered philosophy in their own classrooms that are restricted by curriculum mandates. They recognized it is not an easy task, but ultimately were not only able to integrate this philosophy within their curriculum and classrooms, but also promoted their students' confidence, success, and engagement, as well as meet curriculum mandates and grade standards or even surpassed their district grade standards (Clyde et al., 2006).

Another study, which seemed to be the only of its kind, researched and compared individuals who attended the Reggio Emilia Municipal schools in Italy, other childcare facilities in Italy, and individuals who didn't attend any type of childcare between the ages of zero and six (Biroli et al., 2018). They found that there was a significant difference between individuals who attended Reggio Emilia Municipal schools and those who did not attend any childcare. Participants that attended Reggio Emilia infant/toddler centers and preschools had increased outcomes relating to high school graduation, employment, election participation, socio-emotional skills, and lower obesity rates. They did not find significant differences between Reggio Emilia Municipal schools and the other two childcare facilities they studied in Italy, but also indicated that those facilities over time have improved due to the influence of the Reggio Emilia schools (Biroli et al., 2018).

Overall, several studies indicated a common effect, whether purposefully intended or not, in that integrating aspects of the REA actually helped promote reflective thinking and develop practice and personal ideology in teachers (Arbizzi, 2016; Baker, 2014; Gillespie, 2000; Kersting,1995; Kuh, 2008; Lyon & Donahue, 2009; Maynard & Chicken, 2010; Traci, 2020). Many studies indicated that teachers were able to elevate their image of the child (Abramson et al., 1995; Clapp, 1996; Lyon & Donahue, 2009; Maynard & Chicken, 2010), that the REA increased collaboration between teachers which in turn improved practice (Abramson et al., 1995; Clapp, 1996; Elliot, 2005; Kersting, 1995; Kuh, 2008; Gillespie, 2000, and increased child-led and child interest-based curriculum (Arbizzi; 2016; Gillespie, 2000; Clapp, 1996; Maynard & Chicken, 2010).

A consensus found amongst the literature is that the process was difficult, but it was worth it. Every study indicated progress was made no matter how small. Many even recognizing that this may be the whole philosophy of Reggio Emilia, that it is a continual learning process, not a product to conform to (Elliot, 2005; Gillespie, 2000; Kersting, 1995; Lyon & Donahue, 2009; Merz & Swim, 2011).

Documentation

Documentation is the most popular singular aspect taken from the Reggio Emilia Approach seen in research. Studies solely focused on documentation included investigating the practice of documentation in various early childhood settings (Carlsen & Clark, 2018; Fochi, 2022; Giamminuti et al., 2022; Parnell, 2005; Pettersson, 2015) as well as introducing documentation to preservice teachers (Bond, 2022; Cooney & Currah, 2002; Edwards et al., 2020; Gibson, 2005; Kroeger & Cardy, 2006; Maldonado-Ruiz & Soto Gómez, 2021; Suarez, 2006; Warash, 2005) or in service teachers through action research or professional development (Cancemi, 2009; Given et al., 2009; Goldhaber & Smith, 1997; Harcourt & Jones, 2016; Jaruszewicz, 2006; Lyon & Donahue, 2009; Sussna, 1995; Yu, 2012). Literature on how documentation has been implemented in various settings is important due to the complexities of

documentation. It is a multifaceted process and can be difficult to utilize, especially if it is not fully understood. Several other studies that did not solely focus on documentation, but was a major component, contribute to the literature on the benefits and effects of documentation (Abramson et al., 1995; Clyde et al., 2006: Traci, 2020; Kuh, 2008; Sisson, 2009).

Documentation has been shown to elevate the image of the child as competent and capable beings (Bond, 2022; Goldhaber & Smith, 1997; Kroeger & Cardy, 2006; Lyon & Donahue, 2009; MacDonald, 2006), promote inquiry and meaning making (Bond, 2022; Buchanan & Cooney, 2001; Carlsen & Clark, 2018; Fochi, 2022; MacDonald, 2006; Merewether, 2018; Parnell, 2011; Salmon, 2008; Sevey, 2010; Suarez, 2009), and supported teachers in planning future curriculum by showing them children's interests and needs (Fochi, 2022; Kroeger & Cardy, 2006; Traci, 2020). Documentation can also help establish community within the classroom (Bond, 2022; Grunewald, 2014), support social development (Cencemi, 2009; Galbraith & Katz, 2006; Grunewald, 2014; Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006), and promote collaboration between teachers and their students as well as between teacher colleagues (Grunewald, 2014; Giamminuti et al., 2022; Kuh, 2008; Suarez, 2009). Lastly, documentation has also been shown to promote reflective practice and teacher development (Bond, 2022; Goldhaber & Smith, 1997; Harcourt & Jones, 2016; Kuh, 2008; MacDonald, 2006; Suarez, 2009), and promote communication between teachers, families, and students (Abramson et al., 1995; Bath, 2012; Fochi, 2022; Goldhaber & Smith, 1997; Grunewald, 2014; Kuh, 2008; MacDonald, 2006; Sisson, 2009; Traci, 2020; Warash, 2005). While several studies show the positive effects documentation has on reflection of learning, some studies specifically examined documentation and memory, which showed that documentation does improve memory from the school day, which ultimately enhances learning by promoting more thorough conversations with teachers and families about their day and what they have learned (Fleck et al., 2015; Fleck, 2009).

Documentation was successfully used to make connections to mandated curriculum in public schools (Clyde et al., 2006) and help navigate policy constraints (Kuh, 2008). Sisson

(2009) also stressed that documentation was essential in obtaining trust from families as well as appeasing American families who tend to like the tangible standardized report card. Even though documentation is far more complex and meaningful than simply a replacement for report cards (Turner & Wilson, 2009), it could be a good starting point for teachers to begin to put pressure on the weight of standardization in public schools (Fochi, 2022; Suarez, 2014).

Diversity

A few studies focused on utilizing the REA in culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse settings. One focused on studying student teachers during their practicum in diverse American public elementary schools. They utilized the REA by implementing a project-based approach that was influenced by child interests and was student led. They found that the children were more interested in learning and obtained more meaning in their learning. They also found that the project-based approach helped bridge the communication gap between students with different first languages. It also promoted student collaboration and students were able to meet curriculum objectives. Student teachers also felt like utilizing the REA helped them create an enriching learning experience, but also allowed them to reach all of the students no matter their cultural differences (Abramson et al., 1995). Another study analyzed a pilot project that introduced documentation to teachers at a diverse urban public child development center. The project was deemed successful in not only being able to use documentation in their classrooms, but it also improved the teachers' image of the child, their views as the role of the teacher, and the classroom environment (Lyon & Donahue, 2009). Another study focused on how one culturally diverse urban school utilized principles found in the REA to be responsive to their culturally diverse students and families. They found that strong relationships and documentation, key components of the REA, was central in allowing them to remain culturally responsive to their students and their families (Traci, 2020).

In a Reggio-inspired dual-language Spanish immersion classroom, findings showed that the inspiration from the REA was crucial in the classroom for countering deficit perceptions of

dual language learners and encouraged linguistic and cultural diversity (Alamillo et al., 2019). In a university lab school, where the teachers described having students from all across the world, the REA promoted cultural and individual diversity (Kaynak-Ekici et al., 2021). Finally, in a racially diverse school, an art class explores two Reggio-inspired approaches including project-based learning and the use of the outdoor environment. For the first time in this class, students were given autonomy to choose their project and how the artifact would be created. As they did research and engaged in their surrounding native environment they gained an appreciation for the outdoor environment and discussed environmental concerns. The use of environment as a teacher and the autonomous project-based approach ultimately enhanced their experience, understanding, creativity, improved independent work and collaboration, and resulted in a more meaningful learning experience (Mills, 2013). All of these studies conducted in the United States in public schools has important implications for public schools in the United States as they tend to be more culturally diverse, especially in urban settings, than the schools in Reggio Emilia, begging the question if the approach can be adapted in culturally and racially diverse settings in the United States, which is supported in the literature (Abramson et al., 1995; Alamillo et al., 2019; Kaynak-Ekici et al., 2021; Lyon & Donahue, 2009; Mills, 2013; Traci, 2020).

Educational Reform

It is also important to note that Mills (2013) studied the Reggio Emilia Approach in not just a public school, but a public high school. This is a rare find in the literature. Only a handful of studies on the REA were completed in elementary schools, either including only public (Abramson et al., 1995; Clyde et al., 2006; Jenny, 2000; Vasinda, 2004) or both public and private elementary schools (Clapp, 1996; Heineman, 2022). This is concern as many public schools across the nation include Kindergarten and even Prekindergarten in their elementary schools. Mills (2013) stated,

> Learning tools of place, student-centered learning, collaboration, and problem solving are
> not constrained to those under the age of seven years, raising interesting issues about how

foundational learning techniques developed in young students might be supported

instructionally in middle and high school. (p. 42)

Not just middle and high school, but elementary school as well.

Research on the REA in schools is limited on its own, even more limited in public

schools, and even further limited in public elementary schools. This might be because

traditionally the schools in Reggio Emilia, Italy only served children ages 0 to 6, but why should

that mean that this philosophy is limited to those ages? The citizens of Reggio Emilia certainly

feel this way since they now have an elementary school through grade eight that is guided by the

same philosophy (J. Kesselring, personal communication, November 10, 2022). However, little is

known about it as access is only allowed through study groups. Not only can the Reggio Emilia

Approach inform early childhood contexts, but it has great potential to inform all public and

private education in the United States (Firlik, 1996; Hewett, 2001; Moss, 2016; New, 2007;

Senent et al., 2021).

New (2007) gives insight on the appeal of the REA to American educators. She stated

that initially teachers were captivated by the image of the child, but suggested that the image of

the teacher has sustained that initial interest. In the United States, teachers have been

progressively criticized and controlled (New, 2007). The image of the teacher in the United States

is far from the value and respect given to the teachers in Reggio Emilia. The image of the teacher

also includes the idea that teachers are life-long learners too. New (2007), regarding Reggio

ideals that sparked interest in American educators, suggests that, "none carried as much eventual

weight as the implicit message of what Reggio Emilia symbolized: a reconceptualization of an

early childhood education that nurtures and challenges adults as well as children (p. 10). The

REA continues to be enticing to American teachers because they look to the schools in Reggio

Emilia and see crucial elements they are missing in their school settings (New, 2007). New

(2007) suggested that it is possible to transfer it into our cultural setting and can be a catalyst for

school reform, but this change requires communities to come together and work toward a better image of children.

Firlik (1996) discussed the cultural differences between Americans and Italians that can hinder the embracement of this approach and how we can learn from them. Americans tend to embrace facts instead of ideas. Socio-constructivism will be difficult to adopt because to Americans it won't be practical enough and it is not easily measured like traditional school standards. Americans view the process of thinking as fact before ideas and Italians tend to view that process in the exact opposite in that fact comes from ideas. This is embedded in the Reggio Emilia Approach. Firlik (1996) also noted that, "American constitutional democracy and Italian socialism are essentially incompatible" (p. 218). Americans also separate work and play, where those lines are blurred in Italy. Firlik is not suggesting Americans need to change to fit the mold of the schools in Reggio Emilia, Italy. He suggests that we can learn from them, but that American educators also need to "accept and appreciate" their own society and culture. Assimilating ideals from the REA is possible in the American context, particularly focusing on child-centered practices, but needs to be done with "cautious optimism" due to the difficulties stemming from these major cultural differences (Firlik, 1996). Hewett (2001) echoed this stating that successful assimilation of the approach involves a mindful uncovering of the approach and carefully translating it into the new context.

Senent et al., (2021) also expressed the difficulties due to cultural differences, particularly the stress of assessment and standardized testing in the United States, and states that it cannot be replicated outside of Reggio Emilia, Italy. However, the approach may have great implications for public reform and be a template to guide the United States education system on human rights, inclusive practice, and respect for children as capable and autonomous beings.

Finally Moss (2016) also stressed that the schools are not to be replicated due to the contextual ties, but it should be seen as a source of inspiration for renewal of educational. But, Moss (2016) stressed the need for renewed thinking in education, "democratic politics of

education [to be] revived", vast political support, and exercising cautiousness in creating change. Just as the literature has already stated, Moss (2016) echoed the idea that the Reggio Emilia Approach can provoke ideas and action to create change.

Context

It is no surprise that many challenges are found with integrating this approach. It is very different than traditional schooling. It's also very contextual to the small town of Reggio Emilia, Italy which makes it hard to try to implement in other areas of the world. Studies have shown successful implementation in a variety of contexts including Abu Dhabi (Baker, 2014), Wales (Maynard & Chicken, 2010), Saudi Arabia (Aqeel, 2020), South Africa (Mphahlele, 2019), Turkey (Gencer & Gonen, 2015), Australia (Hesterman, 2016), and many others especially in the United States and Europe. Because the REA is heavily based on the context of Reggio Emilia, Italy, it can make it difficult to weave the approach into different contexts (Kersting, 1995; Sisson, 2009; Vakil et al., 2003). However, it's evident that despite these difficulties, various contexts across the globe are finding ways to be inspired by the REA, which supports the notion that scholars have demonstrated that it really can be inspired by and utilized in one's own context (Firlik, 1996; Hewett, 2001; Moss, 2016; New, 2007; Senent et al., 2021).

The REA not only provides practices that promote ideals that teachers may already have but it can also promote those ideals by utilizing those practices (Bond, 2022; Goldhaber & Smith, 1997; Kersting, 1995; Kroeger & Cardy, 2006; Kuh, 2008; Lyon & Donahue, 2009; MacDonald, 2006; Maynard & Chicken, 2010; Vakil et al., 2003). This also ultimately supports the idea that Reggio Emilia schools are not to be replicated, but used as a way to challenge thinking and practice as well as provide ideas on how to promote progressive ways of thinking in the classroom and curriculum, which has continually been promoted by those in Reggio Emilia, Italy (Rinaldi, 2006).

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in a theoretical framework that lays a foundation for the development of the research, resulting analysis, and discussion. This section focuses on constructivism, social constructivism, and the work of Peter Moss, Loris Malaguzzi, Carlina Rinaldi, and Karen Barad. Peter Moss is a well-known and respected professor and researcher who has greatly contributed to the field of early childhood education. Loris Malaguzzi founded the Reggio Emilia Approach and was the director of the Reggio Emilia municipal preschools until he died. Carlina Rinaldi took his place as director after he passed. She is no longer the director, but is the president of Reggio Children, an international center created for the safeguarding of the schools and the promotion of the approach (Reggio Children, 2022). An intertwining of the theories provides a framework for understanding the Reggio Emilia Approach as an inspiration to educational reform as well as development for this study.

(Social) Constructivism

Constructivism is the theory that children construct their own knowledge and meaning making as opposed to being filled with knowledge, which we so commonly see in American schools (Berk & Meyers, 2016). In constructivism, children are active participants in their learning and construct their knowledge from experiences and their environment. Jean Piaget fathered this idea as the cognitive-development theory, in which he believed that children actively construct knowledge through their environment (Piaget, 1952). Piaget changed the field of child development on how it viewed children, moving the field away from behaviorism and enriching the view of the child. Piaget opened the door for research on children and their interaction with the environment and with others (Berk & Meyers, 2016).

Social constructivism is the theory that knowledge is constructed with others through social engagement (Berk & Meyers, 2016). This idea first came from Lev Vygotsky who developed sociocultural theory, which indicated that knowledge is impacted by culture and

passed down from adults to children through social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). Piaget and

Vygotsky both believed that children constructed their own knowledge, but Vygotsky contributed

a larger emphasis on the impact of culture and social interaction on child development (Vygotsky,

1978). Vygotsky was also key in shifting the field to consider differences in how culture defines

knowledge and competency (Berk & Meyers, 2016). However, his ideas were more focused on

the transmission of knowledge and less on children's ability to create knowledge (Vygotsky,

1978). Social constructivism is similar to constructivism in that children construct their own

knowledge, but social constructivism focuses on the notion that children construct knowledge

through collaborative social interaction with their teachers and peers (Berk & Meyers, 2016).

Freeing Education from Predetermined Constructs

Moss (2019) challenged ethics in early childhood education and introduces ideas from

French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas' ideas question how we view others and

"assimilate" others into our own ways of "seeing and thinking" (Levinas, 1987). We see people

and put them in our own constructs because we have created our own systems to understand the

world around us. Levinas warned that by forcing others into our own constructs, it can lead to

oppression. He also suggested that by doing this it denies the individuality of others. Moss

suggested that the current education system that is so focused on "predetermined and

standardized outcomes" reflects this oppressive system Levinas articulated. Moss, echoing

Levinas, suggested we cannot put children in our own constructs and to respect them for who

they are and not what they look like within a system. Moss calls for considering a

reconceptualized world of education that is rid of standardization, assessment, and classification.

A world where educators respect children as they are, are open to the unknown, and are not

confined by the dominant discourse obsessed with control and outcomes (Moss, 2019).

Loris Malaguzzi (1993) reflected this same idea warning that we each have our own

construct or as he puts it, "an image of the child" that forces us to think about and interact with

children in a certain way. However, it is important to consider a child in their context and reality

of their own world. And in contrast to Levinas (Moss, 2019), Malaguzzi does invoke a construct, but one that views children as intelligent, strong, beautiful, and ambitious. All children are rich in Malaguzzi's eyes and born with a hundred languages; Rich with complexity, competency, and determination (Moss, 2016). Carlina Rinaldi emulated the beliefs of her predecessor and colleague, Loris Malaguzzi, especially on the image of the child. Rinaldi has reiterated over and over again the importance of valuing children as competent and capable citizens of society and stressed the importance of valuing children as humans with rights not separate from adults,

> These are thoughts that childhood has inspired, but childhood is not a separate phase of life or of human identity. Childhood is the loveliest metaphor for describing the possibilities of mankind, on the understanding that we let it exist, that we recognise it and that we cease all these processes of acceleration and imitation that, in denying childhood, destroy not childhood but man. (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 176)

Children deserve the same rights and respect that adults receive. There was a caution to not define childhood separately because when we separate we risk the separation of rights and respect as well. Children should be seen as human right alongside adults (Rinaldi, 2006).

Malaguzzi also had a refined image of teachers and schools, one that greatly conflicts the American view. You cannot have a rich child without a rich teacher. One who not only sees and respects the potentialities of children, but in oneself as well. A teacher who can question, adjust, and grow. As Moss (2016) quotes Malaguzzi, "The teacher should be understood as a co-constructor of knowledge, but also as a researcher, experimenter and 'a new type of intellectual, a producer of knowledge connected with the demands of society' (Cagliari et al., 2016, p. 210, as cited by Moss, 2016), working closely with parents and other citizens". The image of the school is one in which schools are seen as a space for children to construct knowledge and grow as autonomous beings as opposed to solely being filled with standardized knowledge, which Malaguzzi referred to as "prophetic pedagogy" and insisted is "so coarse, so cowardly, so humiliating of teachers' ingenuity, a complete humiliation for children's ingenuity and potential"

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(Cagliari et al., 2016, p. 421, as cited in Moss, 2016) and a "ridiculous simplification of knowledge and a robbing of meaning from individual histories" (Cagliari et al., 2016, p. 378, as cited in Moss, 2016). Rinaldi recognized the societal need for an outcome and did not criticize that, but rather criticized the definition of outcome. She pushed that process is outcome and should be valued as such in society (Rinaldi, 2006).

The image of the school was particularly important to Malaguzzi because of how schools were historically viewed – "as welfare-orientated services that substituted for mothers and whose staff were primarily to display motherly qualities" (Moss, 2016), an idea that is still somewhat emanated in American society today (Vintimilla, 2014). The image of the school also includes the idea that schools are open public spaces for all citizens. This is in relation to Malaguzzi's thoughts that schools and the view of children are social responsibilities that need to be explicit and public to be "subject to discussion and argument" (Moss, 2016). The public discussions and decisions of image of the child comes first, "policy, provision, practice; structure and culture – must necessarily follow" (Moss, 2016). In turn, children are brought up in a pedagogy in which democracy is at the forefront. A pedagogy in which "children and adults [work] together to construct knowledge (and values and identities) – meaning-making through processes of building, sharing, testing and revising theories, always in dialogic relationship with others" (Moss, 2016).

Rinaldi (2006) cautioned against being defined by theories or ideas. She specifically references Piaget and Vygotsky and how Loris Malaguzzi, when referring to them or their theories, would say "our Piaget" or "our Vygotsky" in order to "avoid being a prisoner of any definition" (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 181) or a prisoner to a predetermined result. Theories and ideas used as a basis or inspiration, but not to be confined by them. Rinaldi (2006) argued,

> That is why although Reggio may be postmodern in its perspectives, we are not for postmodernism, because 'isms' are risky. Because they simplify and lock you in prison again. Instead your freedom is to challenge… I want each school to use theory, really, for interpreting, and not to be used, as we say, by theory. (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 182)

In an interview, Malaguzzi was asked about the theories that influenced the approach, he stated that there are of course a "long list of names", but he also quickly said,

> It is curious (but not unjustified) how resilient is the belief that educational ideas and practices can derive only from official models or established theories… It is important for pedagogy not to be prisoner of too much certainty but instead to be aware of both the relativity of its powers and the difficulties of translating its ideals into practice. (Edwards et al., 2011, p. 37)

Theory is an integral piece of education and philosophy, but theories are inherently boxes and constructs. They cannot be the only defining aspects of education because children and schools will not fit because they are unique and ever evolving.

Culture and Context

Within this same interview and the same question, Malaguzzi continued to discuss theoretical influences on the approach. He said,

> We must, however, state right away that we also emerged out of a complex cultural background. We are immersed in history, surrounded by doctrines, politics, economic forces, scientific change, and human dramas; there is always in progress a difficult negotiation for survival… Piaget has already warned us that the errors and ills of pedagogy come from a lack of balance between scientific data and social application. (Edwards et al., 2011, p. 36-37)

Malaguzzi is recognizing the importance of the context and culture in which the approach sits. This directly ties back to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and the impact of culture on knowledge and child development (Vygotsky, 1978). This is why they caution others who are investigating the approach to look for inspiration and not replication. Not because culture and context is binding in a way that prohibits it from being used in other contexts, but because the whole philosophy was born because of the very culture and context itself.

Continuous Process and Dialogue

When discussing what it means to be inspired by the Reggio Emilia Approach, Rinaldi expressed,

> Reggio is a metaphor and a symbolical place. Being in relation with Reggio allows people to hope, to believe change is possible… And there is also a feeling of belonging to something that is about education in its widest sense, as a hope for human beings. And Reggio is a place of encounter and dialogue, and not only with Reggio but with many related protagonists. So Reggio makes room for people to dialogue, it provides an excuse to do this. (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 197)

Dialogue is a term continuously used by Rinaldi and central to the philosophy. Dialogue is not an exchange of information, but it is a "process of transformation where you lose absolutely the possibility of controlling the final result" (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 184). Dialogue is about understanding things in a different way. She expressed that when educators come to visit and they talk about Reggio, they really end up talking about themselves. They are naturally entering into a dialogue with Reggio and evaluating their practice based on what they are seeing in Reggio Emilia, Italy, which is the true intention of being inspired by the REA. Malaguzzi's counsel to teachers is one that can be applied on being inspired by the approach. He said, "Teachers must learn to interpret ongoing process rather than wait to evaluate results" (Edwards et al., 2011, p. 49). Reggio is an inspiration to education. It is not a curriculum or set of ideas to implement and see if it works in your context. It's an inspiration to the ongoing process of learning and evolution of practice and society. Rinaldi stated, "Reggio itself is an interpretation of Reggio! The only thing that we can share with the others is our values and the reason why and the way in which we try to challenge ourselves" (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 197-198). Rinaldi said,

> I have to have the right to negotiate every moment, and that is the concept of process. So, it has to be clear that there is something that gives me hope something I strive for, but at the same time it is not yet perfect. Something that needs to be continuously challenged.

Reggio, in a way, is a process of being permanently challenged. Because it's in dialogue

with a changing context. (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 203)

Being Reggio-inspired is not about doing what they do. It is about using it as a tool and an

influence like you would any other theory. As stated before both Rinaldi and Malaguzzi

expressed that they are not confined by one theory or idea, but are influenced by many. The same

goes for those who feel inspired by the approach. It should be a theory that one is not confined to,

but uses as a way to further their own philosophy and practice.

Diffraction

Reflection is a term used throughout the literature review referring to the reflective

practice seen in the Reggio Emilia Approach and the reflective practice the Reggio Emilia

Approach can invoke. Reflection, defined as, "careful thought about something, sometimes over a

long period of time" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2022), does not fully encompass the process of

being inspired by the Reggio Emilia Approach. Barad explored the idea of diffraction and intra-

action:

Intra-actions enact agential cuts, which do not produce absolute separations, but rather

cut together-apart (one move). Diffraction is not a set pattern, but rather an iterative

(re)configuring of patterns of differentiating-entangling. As such, there is no moving

beyond, no leaving the 'old' behind. There is no absolute boundary between here-now

and there-then. (Barad, 2014, p. 168)

In other words, instead of comparing the United States education system against the Reggio

Emilia system or trying to become like the Reggio Emilia Approach, we must diffract the two

systems by splicing and interweaving the two into a continuous dialogue. Which is exactly what

Loris Malaguzzi did when producing the Reggio Emilia Approach. They utilized the ideas of

intra-action and diffraction with regards to various theories, visiting and collaborating with other

schools, and their culture and context and continuously intra-act and diffract as times and culture

evolves.

Conclusion

In the United States, education is viewed and valued in different ways. Malaguzzi sees it as a complex societal responsibility that includes the government, the citizens, the culture, and the context and it all starts with the image of the child (Edwards et al., 2011; Moss, 2016). The Reggio Emilia municipal schools may be public schools, but they were not created by the government, they were created by the people. "When it came to early childhood education, [Malaguzzi] thought the right policy was for the state to fund, the region to regulate and the local authority to provide" (Moss, 2016). In the United States, the government funds, regulates, and provides for public schools. This removes the influence of context entirely. It also removes responsibility from the public. And for those who have a great desire for that responsibility are given little to no autonomy or voice and are therefore forced to remove the involvement of the government entirely and open private schools. The lack of government in American private schools can potentially allow for a pedagogy that better reflects the ideals of Loris Malaguzzi, but it can never fully reflect the ideals of inclusiveness, equality, and democracy that are so core to the Reggio Emilia Approach. The government has the potential to provide equal opportunity for all children, but society informs the government. Pitfalls in society create pitfalls in the government, which creates pitfalls in government institutions, such as education. By pitfalls, I am referring to the American constructs of children, teachers, schools, and the general lack of public interest in early childhood education.

Malaguzzi had many ideas that greatly contribute to education, but the image of children, people, and schools formed by the collaborative public and the dedication to continual progression, is the most significant in that those ideas transcend the boundaries of the culture and context and can be the catalyst of educational reform across the globe to provoke continuous thinking, reflection, and dialogue in education including the image of the child, expectations of students and teachers, practice, context, and democracy.

The majority of the current research focuses on application of practices found in Reggio Emilia. Because of this, these studies generally have a predetermined outcome. However, predetermined outcomes were a concept that Loris Malaguzzi, the father of the Reggio Emilia Approach, adamantly opposed. If one has a desire to evolve their practice and philosophy through the REA, it might be more appropriate to be rooted in how Malaguzzi viewed practice, philosophy, and learning, and not rooted in an idea that is in direct opposition to the REA. Thus, much of Malaguzzi's philosophy as previously discussed serves as a framework for the current study. The survey focused on understanding the perceptions, not outcomes, of the Reggio approach and how it has had an impact on teacher and administrator development.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The initial purpose of this study was twofold: to understand how the Reggio Emilia

Approach (REA) has impacted public elementary schools in the United States and to understand

the perceptions of American educators regarding the Reggio Emilia Approach and how it has

impacted their practice and philosophy. Due to time constraints, not all components of the study

were able to be completed and only the second research question was able to be answered. This

chapter addresses the research approach, setting, sample and data sources, and data collection

methods. This chapter includes the original plan of the study as well as reports the components

that were not able to be conducted at this time.

Research Design

This study utilized a mixed methods approach gathering both qualitive and quantitative

data (Creswell, 2008). It included a survey for current teachers and administrators across the

United States who are inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach. Originally, select survey

respondents were to be interviewed, but time-constraints restricted these interviews from being

conducted.

The survey was a mixed methods design, where quantitative and qualitative data were

both gathered (Creswell, 2008). The survey inquired about teachers' and administrators'

perceptions of aspects of the Reggio Emilia approach and how the approach has influenced their

practice and philosophy. The survey also gathered data on the contexts of these teachers to

understand who is interested in the approach and where. The survey was created on Qualtrics. A

survey is appropriate for gathering descriptive data of teachers across the United States as well as

understanding their perceptions of the Reggio Emilia Approach.

Inclusion Criteria and Recruitment

The sample for the survey included teachers and administrators across the United States.

The only inclusion criterion was that participants are current teachers or administrators and feel

that their practice and/or philosophy has been impacted by the Reggio Emilia Approach. The

survey was administered through five Facebook groups of Reggio-inspired teachers who chose to

participate in the study. Schools associated with the North American Reggio Alliance (NAREA)

were emailed the survey as well. Emails were found on the NAREA website. Participants were

asked to pass the study along to other teachers and administrators they knew that are Reggio-

inspired.

Context and Setting

The setting for the survey included teachers and administrators across the United States.

The Reggio Emilia approach continues to grow in interest with American educators. There is only

one national study regarding the Reggio Emilia approach. This study focused more on the

perceptions of what it means to be Reggio-inspired and the contexts of the teachers and

administrators across the United States who identify as such. Survey respondents were from 23

different states, 38 different cities, and 42 different schools. 25% of respondents live in the

Northeast region of the country, 45% live in the South, 21.7% live in the Midwest, and 8.3% live

in the West. 6.7% of respondents are from rural areas, 53.5% are from urban areas, and 40% are

from suburban areas. Reported work settings included 13.3% in public schools, 65% in private

schools, 3.3% in laboratory schools, and 16.7% in other. Those who chose other indicated they

worked in a child care center, church preschool, early learning, independent school, large family

childcare home, local nonprofit, preschool, and both private and lab school. 91.5% of respondents indicated that their schools were considered Reggio-inspired. See table 1.

Table 1

Percentages of Demographics

Variable	Percent	*n*
Region of Country		60
Northeast	25.0%	15
South	45.0%	27
Midwest	21.7%	13
West	8.3%	5
Community Setting		60
Rural	6.7%	4
Urban	53.3%	32
Suburban	40.0%	24
Race		60
Black or African American	3.3%	2
Hispanic or Latino	3.3%	2
White or Caucasian	91.7%	55
Multiracial or Biracial	1.7%	1
Age Range		60
18 – 29	13.3%	8
30 – 39	30.0%	18
40 – 49	25.0%	15
50+	31.7%	19
Teacher or Administrator		60
Teacher	45.0%	27
Administrator	55.0%	33
Years in Profession		60
1 – 10 years	30.0%	18
11 – 20 years	35.0%	21
Over 20 years	35.0%	21

Work Setting		59
Public School	13.6%	8
Private School	66.1%	39
Laboratory School	3.4%	2
Other	16.9%	10
Highest Degree Completed		59
High School	3.4%	2
Associates	3.4%	2
Bachelors	45.8%	27
Masters	40.7%	24
Doctoral	6.8%	4
Considered Reggio-inspired school		59
Yes	91.5%	54
No	8.5%	5

Informed Consent and Protection of Human Subjects

This study received IRB approval before beginning. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Participants were notified and reminded that they can choose to cease participation at any point of the study. Names were not asked in the survey. Survey participants were asked to state their city, state, and school. Distinguishing this was important for better understanding the diversity of contexts from the participants. Other than those three indicators, participants were not asked any other identifiable information.

Survey Instrument

The survey was created on Qualtrics. The survey included demographics and asked educators to choose which principles and practices they utilize that are either inspired by or have been impacted by the Reggio Emilia Approach. They were also asked to describe how and when they learned about the approach, why they have chosen to utilize aspects from the approach, and the impact the approach has had on their practice and/or philosophy. See Appendix A. Demographics included city, state, school, years of teaching, degree(s), age range, race/ethnicity,

and school setting. School setting included defining their school as private, public, or charter, as well as early childhood center, elementary, middle, or high school. Participants were asked to select from a list of 16 Reggio aspects which principles or practices they utilize that have either been inspired by or impacted by the REA. After selecting all aspects that they do use, respondents chose what they considered to be their top three most important aspect and they ranked them 1 to 3, 1 being the most important. Based on their selections, they were then asked additional questions based on their top three ranked items. All survey-respondents received an additional six questions based on their ranked items. There were two questions for each item. See Appendix A for full survey.

Data Analysis

The survey included both quantitative and qualitative aspects, which enhanced the credibility of the study (Creswell, 2008). Survey-respondents answered both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Closed-ended questions focused on demographics and which Reggio Emilia aspects each respondent used. These questions were analyzed with descriptive statistics to better understand who is utilizing the Reggio Emilia approach in the United States. Some demographics were also analyzed against respondents' total number of Reggio aspects used in practice and/or philosophy. One-way ANOVAs, Independent Samples t-tests, and a correlation were utilized to test for any differences of demographic groups on total number of aspects used. There is a total of 60 survey-respondents in this study. Not every participant answered every single question of the survey. 53 survey-respondents answered every single question. Each finding will clearly identify how many responses there were for that particular finding.

Open-ended questions were coded thematically to better analyze American educators' perceptions of the Reggio Emilia approach and how it has impacted their practice and/or philosophy. The qualitative questions were coded through inductive and deductive thematic, descriptive, initial, and values coding (Saldaña, 2021). Both inductive and deductive coding were used to remain open to all possible codes, but also utilize reoccurring themes to find

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commonalities across the data. Frequency was also included with the codes to keep track of what concepts were being discussed most by respondents. Each question was analyzed on its own then was also analyzed across all questions to look for themes and topics that were popular throughout the survey. Some codes were collapsed in order to describe themes found across multiple survey responses. With regard to trustworthiness, as the sole coder I continuously conferred with my advisor and had frequent meetings and discussions.

Researcher Reflexivity and Positionality

I attended a Reggio-inspired private school for 18 years. I have also worked at the same Reggio-inspired school for 6 years during the summers, working with preschoolers and 1st through 3rd graders. I always loved school and I enjoyed working there so much I decided to pursue a degree in early childhood education. I have not had an abundance of experience in other educational settings other than over 1000 hours of field experience in a variety of contexts required for my bachelor's degree. Even though the majority of my experience has been in private school, I have a great interest in public education and have a strong belief in the importance of it. Because I had such a quality educational experience I feel very strongly that it's something everyone should get to have. My undergraduate education reflected what I had seen at the school I attended, which only deepened my preference towards the Reggio Emilia Approach. I recognize that this is a bias. I chose to do this study because of my fondness of the approach and my belief that it can have a positive impact for teachers and on education in the United States.

Limitations and Delimitations

A major limitation of this study is the sample size of 60 survey respondents, and only 53 respondents who fully completed the survey. This sample cannot be recognized as representative of the national population. Utilizing only a survey for qualitative data is a limitation due to not being able to receive more information from interviews. Time constraints were also a limitation. With more time, I would have been able to search more for Reggio-inspired educators, particularly in public schools.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to understand how the Reggio Emilia Approach has impacted a public elementary school and to understand the perceptions of American educators regarding Reggio principles and how they have impacted their practice and philosophy. Due to not receiving many responses from public school educators, the research question regarding public schools could not fully be answered. The second research question regarding perceptions of and impact on Reggio-inspired American Educators was able to be answered and will be discussed further in the following chapters.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings as well as the analysis as it relates to the research purpose which was to understand the Reggio Emilia Approach in public schools in the United States and to understand the perceptions of American educators regarding the Reggio Emilia Approach and how it has impacted their practice and philosophy. The findings and analysis focus significantly on the perceptions of Reggio-inspired educators due to a lack of responses from public school educators.

Survey-respondents answered both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Closed-ended questions focused on demographics and which Reggio Emilia aspects each respondent used. These questions were analyzed with descriptive statistics to better understand who is utilizing the Reggio Emilia approach in the United States. Some demographics were also analyzed against respondents' total number of Reggio aspects used in practice and/or philosophy. One-way ANOVAs, Independent Samples t-tests, and a correlation were utilized to test for any differences of demographic groups on total number of aspects used. Open-ended questions were coded thematically to better analyze American educators' perceptions of the Reggio Emilia approach and how it has impacted their practice and/or philosophy. This chapter discusses all findings from the survey.

Demographics

Of the survey respondents, 27 (45%) are current teachers and 33 (55%) are current administrators. 13.3% of respondents are between the ages of 18 and 29, 30% are between the ages of 30 and 39, 25% are between the ages of 40 and 49, and 31.7% of respondents are 50 and up. 3.3% of respondents are Black or African American, 3.3% are Hispanic or Latino, 91.7% are White or Caucasian, and 1.7% of respondents are Multiracial or Biracial. Years in profession ranged from 1 year to 40 years (M = 17.02, SD = 9.75). 3.3% of respondents' highest degree earned is a high school diploma, 3.3% an Associate's degree, 45% Bachelor's degree, 40% Master's degree, and 6.7% Doctoral degree. See table 1.

Survey respondents were from 23 different states, 38 different cities, and 42 different schools. The state with the most respondents is Massachusetts with 10 teachers and administrators. Oklahoma had the second most respondents with 8 teachers and administrators. 25% of respondents live in the Northeast region of the country, 45% live in the South, 21.7% live in the Midwest, and 8.3% live in the West. 6.7% of respondents are from rural areas, 53.5% are from urban areas, and 40% are from suburban areas. Reported work settings included 13.3% in public schools, 65% in private schools, 3.3% in laboratory schools, and 16.7% in other. Those who chose other indicated they worked in a child care center, church preschool, early learning, independent school, large family childcare home, local nonprofit, preschool, and both private and lab school. 91.5% of respondents indicated that their schools were considered Reggio-inspired. See table 1.

Respondents were asked to sort 16 Reggio Emilia aspects into three different boxes: I do use, I do use but was not inspired or impacted by the Reggio Emilia Approach, and I do not use. Aspects included emergent curriculum, project-based approach, hundred languages, documentation, collaboration, progettazione, constructivism/socioconstructivism, educational research, atelier, child-led curriculum, inquiry-based learning, physical environment, family

involvement, group work, professional development, and the whole child. Many respondents did not move over all of the aspects; therefore, I do use but was not inspired by and I do not use will not be discussed in the remaining chapters. Documentation is the most used aspect and progettazione is the least used aspect. See table 2.

Table 2

Percentages of Aspects Used by Respondents

Variable	Percent	*n*
Documentation	90.6%	48
Physical Environment	83.0%	44
Collaboration	83.0%	44
Hundred Languages	77.4%	41
Emergent Curriculum	75.5%	40
Child-Led Curriculum	73.6%	39
Family Involvement	69.8%	37
The Whole Child	66.0%	35
Inquiry-Based Learning	66.0%	35
Constructivism/Socioconstructivism	60.4%	32
Project-Based Approach	58.5%	31
Professional Development	56.6%	30
Atelier	49.1%	26
Educational Research	47.2%	25
Group Work	45.3%	24
Progettazione	35.9%	19

N = 53

All respondents utilized at least three aspects. Four respondents indicated they used all 16 Reggio aspects listed. See figure 1.

Figure 1

Summation of Reggio Inspired Aspects Utilized
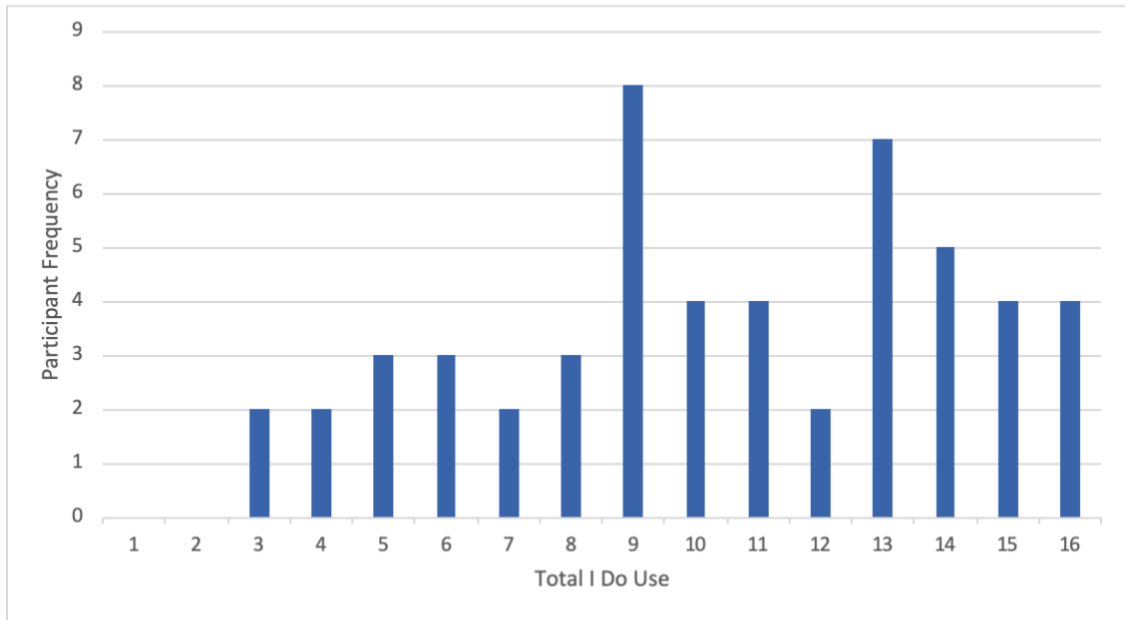
Note. The x-axis indicates how many total Reggio aspects used. The y-axis indicates how many participants used number of summed aspects. For example, two participants indicated they utilized three Reggio aspects in total.

Respondents ranked their top three I do use aspects. Emergent curriculum appeared in the rankings more than any other aspect and was ranked the most for first place. See table 3.

Table 3

Percentages of Ranked Reggio Practices

Variable	Rank 1		Rank 2		Rank 3	
	Percent	*n*	Percent	*n*	Percent	*n*
Emergent Curriculum	28.3%	15	9.4%	5	9.4%	5
The Whole Child	20.8%	11	3.8%	2	7.6%	4
Hundred Languages	13.2%	7	11.3%	6	13.2%	7
Child-Led Curriculum	7.6%	4	13.2%	7	7.6%	4
Project-Based Approach	5.7%	3	15.1%	8	0%	0
Constructivism/ Socioconstructivism	5.7%	3	5.7%	3	0%	0
Physical Environment	5.7%	3	11.3%	6	9.4%	5
Documentation	3.8%	2	9.4%	5	13.2%	7
Inquiry-Based Learning	3.8%	2	5.7%	3	9.4%	5
Collaboration	3.8%	2	5.7%	3	13.2%	7
Professional Development	1.9%	1	1.9%	1	1.9%	1
Family Involvement	0%	0	1.9%	1	7.6%	4
Atelier	0%	0	0%	0	1.9%	1
Educational Research	0%	0	1.9%	1	1.9%	1
Group Work	0%	0	0%	0	1.9%	1
Progettazione	0%	0	3.8%	2	1.9%	1

N = 53

Impact of Demographics on Total Reggio Aspects Utilized

I hypothesized that age group would have an effect on total number of Reggio-inspired aspects utilized in practice (N = 53), specifically that as age increased, total number of Reggio-inspired aspects utilized in practice would increase as well. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of age group on total number of Reggio Emilia-inspired aspects utilized in practice between ages 18 through 29 (M = 9.88, SD = 2.64), 30 through 39 (M = 11.19, SD =

3.17), 40 through 49 ($M = 11.70$, $SD = 3.50$), and 50 and up ($M = 9.21$, $SD = 4.46$). There was not an effect of age group on total number of Reggio Emilia-inspired aspects utilized in practice at the $p < .05$ level for the three groups, $F(3, 49) = 1.37$, $p = .26$. This does not support the hypothesis that age group would have an effect on total number of Reggio-inspired aspects utilized in practice.

I hypothesized that region of country would have an effect on total number of Reggio-inspired aspects utilized in practice. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of region of country on total number of Reggio Emilia-inspired aspects utilized in practice between Northeast ($M = 9.36$, $SD = 3.86$), South ($M = 10.32$, $SD = 3.77$), Midwest ($M = 12.00$, $SD = 2.79$), and West ($M = 10.25$, $SD = 5.06$). There was not an effect of region of country on total number of Reggio Emilia-inspired aspects utilized in practice at the $p < .05$ level for the three groups, $F(3, 49) = .98$, $p = .41$. This does not support the hypothesis that region of country would have an effect on total number of Reggio-inspired aspects utilized in practice.

I hypothesized that community setting would have an effect on total number of Reggio-inspired aspects utilized in practice. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of community setting on total number of Reggio Emilia-inspired aspects utilized in practice between Rural ($M = 10.25$, $SD = 3.10$), Urban ($M = 10.11$, $SD = 3.88$), and Suburban ($M = 10.73$, $SD = 3.77$). There was not an effect of community setting on total number of Reggio Emilia-inspired aspects utilized in practice at the $p < .05$ level for the three groups, $F(2, 50) = .16$, $p = .85$. This does not support the hypothesis that community setting would have an effect on total number of Reggio-inspired aspects utilized in practice.

I hypothesized that years in profession would have an effect on total number of Reggio-inspired aspects utilized in practice, specifically that as years in profession increased, total number of Reggio-inspired aspects utilized in practice would increase. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of total years in profession on total number of Reggio Emilia-inspired aspects utilized in practice between 1 to 10 years ($M = 11.50$, $SD = 3.16$), 11 to 20 years

(M = 10.80, SD = 3.11), and 20 or more years (M = 8.82, SD = 4.50). There was not an effect of

total years in profession on total number of Reggio Emilia-inspired aspects utilized in practice at

the p < .05 level for the three groups, $F(2, 50)$ = 2.46, p = .10. This does not support the

hypothesis that years in profession would have an effect on total number of Reggio-inspired

aspects utilized in practice.

I hypothesized that there would be a difference between teachers' and administrators'

total number of Reggio-inspired aspects utilized in practice. An independent samples t-test was

conducted to compare total number of Reggio-inspired aspects utilized in practice between

teachers (n = 24) and administrators (n = 29). There was not a difference between teachers (M =

10.04, SD = 3.30) and administrators (M = 10.66, SD = 4.08) on total number of Reggio-inspired

aspects utilized in practice, $t(51)$ = -.59, p = .56. This does not support the hypothesis that there

would be a difference between teachers and administrators on total number of Reggio-inspired

aspects utilized in practice.

I hypothesized that there would be a difference between the two groups in highest degree

earned on total number of Reggio-inspired aspects utilized in practice. An independent samples t-

test was conducted to compare total number of Reggio-inspired aspects utilized in practice

between Group 1: Highschool, Associates, and Bachelors (n = 27) and Group 2: Masters and

Doctoral (n = 26). There was not a difference between Group 1: Associates and Bachelors (M =

10.74, SD = 3.36) and Group 2: Masters and Doctoral (M = 10.00, SD = 4.11) on total number of

Reggio-inspired aspects utilized in practice, $t(51)$ = .72, p = .48. This does not support the

hypothesis that there would be a difference between the two groupings of highest degree earned

on total number of Reggio-inspired aspects utilized in practice.

I hypothesized that there would be a difference between the two groups of years in

profession on total number of Reggio-inspired aspects utilized in practice. An independent

samples t-test was conducted to compare total number of Reggio-inspired aspects utilized in

practice between Group 1: 1-15 years (n = 28) and Group 2: 16+ years (n = 25). Levene's Test for

Equal Variances was significant, therefore equal variances were not assumed. There was not a difference between Group 1: 1-15 years ($M = 10.93$, $SD = 3.04$) and Group 2: 16+ years ($M = 9.76$, $SD = 4.35$) on total number of Reggio-inspired aspects utilized in practice, $t(42.34) = 1.12$, $p = .27$. This does not support the hypothesis that there would be a difference between the two groupings of years in profession on total number of Reggio-inspired aspects utilized in practice.

I hypothesized that there would be a positive correlation between age and total number of Reggio aspects utilized in practice ($N = 53$). A Pearson correlation coefficient was conducted to evaluate the relationship between age and total number of Reggio aspects utilized in practice. There was a moderate negative relationship between age and total number of Reggio aspects utilized in practice $r(51) = -.324$, $p = .018$. The does support the hypothesis that there would be a correlation in general, but it does not support that there would be a positive correlation.

Perceptions of the Reggio Emilia Approach

The qualitative questions were coded through inductive and deductive thematic, descriptive, initial, and values coding (Saldaña, 2021). Both inductive and deductive coding were used to remain open to all possible codes, but also utilize reoccurring themes to find commonalities across the data. Frequency was also included with the codes to keep track of what concepts were being discussed most by respondents. Each question was analyzed on its own then was also analyzed across all questions to look for themes and topics that were popular throughout the survey. See appendix A.

Relationships to the Approach

Respondents were first asked about their relationship with the approach including how they first learned about it, what initially caught their interest, and why they use choose to use aspects from the approach in their practice.

33 respondents first learned about the Reggio Emilia Approach in through their higher education. 15 respondents learned about if from schools they worked at or other teachers or

administrators at a school they worked at. 10 respondents learned about it in a variety of other ways including at conferences, online, or from their child's school.

Themes that arose from asking survey-takers about what initially caught their interest regarding the Reggio Emilia Approach include how the approach views children, curriculum aspects and what it allows children to do, the environment/materials, and the teacher's role. Many respondents indicated the view of the child in the Reggio Emilia Approach initially caught their interest including respect for children, valuing them, honoring them, viewing them as powerful, capable, competent with many abilities, and that children are equal citizens with rights. Respondents believed that this approach gives children autonomy, a voice, wonder, freedom, support, and many possibilities and allows them to follow their passion, be creative, develop their critical thinking skills, problem-solve, and be active respondents in their learning. Respondents also indicated they were intrigued by the emergent, unscripted, open-ended, play-based, child-centered, and child-led curriculum. One respondent noted, "At the time I was a public school teacher and was in a worksheet heavy early learning environment. I was intrigued that there was a better way!" Some were also intrigued by the documentation practices. Others indicated that the inviting, natural, and aesthetic classrooms were a point of interest as well as the open-ended and authentic materials. A few indicated that they were drawn to the idea of honoring and respecting families and the partnerships with and involvement of families. Teachers and administrators were interested in the ideas of co-constructing knowledge with their students, learning beside them, continuous learning as a profession, and the high level of professionalism. One respondent noted,

> The approach's ideas so clearly resonated with me and matched my beliefs about young children and how they learn. I also appreciated the way that the approach elevated the work of the early childhood educator and gave space for inquiry and continuous learning and growth as a professional.

When asked why they have chosen to utilize practices or principles from the Reggio Emilia Approach many indicated that it simply already aligned with their personal beliefs,

philosophy, or values, or that it made sense, felt natural, or felt authentic. Similar themes from the previous question emerged as well such as the respect for children and the strong image of the child. Others felt that the approach promoted engagement, curiosity, confidence, autonomy, and a love of learning. One respondent said, "I have seen first hand how children flourish under the practices of the Reggio Emilia Approach, and I have also seen first hand how a traditional learning environment stifles creativity and confidence." A few teachers said that they utilize Reggio-inspired aspects because they feel it is more meaningful to teachers, they have more autonomy, it allows them to meet children where they are, and enjoy co-learning and collaboration. One respondent noted,

> I find this approach to be enriching to myself, children, teachers, and families. It supports all learners and helps us stay curious and interested in the work of the child. It allows for innovation and change with the times and needs of the different classroom groups over time.

Most Ranked Reggio Aspects

Survey-respondents were asked to indicate which Reggio aspects they utilize in their practice and/or philosophy. Of those aspects they do use, they were asked to rank three of these aspects in order of most importance to. them. Then they were asked to answer additional questions based on their top three ranked items. With regard to the rankings, emergent curriculum, the whole child, hundred languages, documentation, child-led curriculum, inquiry-based learning, physical environment, project-based approach, and collaboration were ranked more often than the remaining aspects, therefore the additional questions for these top aspects had more responses because they appeared more often to respondents. See attached appendix for complete survey.

Emergent Curriculum. Although emergent curriculum was only the fifth most used aspect, it was the most ranked item. Emergent curriculum appeared in respondents top three rankings 25 times. It was also the most ranked item for the number one ranking. It was ranked as

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number one most important aspect utilized by 15 people. See table 3. Respondents who ranked emergent curriculum in their top three most important aspects utilized were then asked how and why they utilize emergent curriculum in their practice. Student interests appeared most in the responses for both how and why they utilize emergent curriculum in their practice. Many respondents indicated that they observe, communicate, and plan curriculum based on their students' interests, needs, and passions. A theme of children emerged including child-based, focus on children and their needs, co-learning, collaboration, communication with children, following children's leads, and respect for children. The component of an unscripted curriculum was iterated several times for the justification of using emergent curriculum. One respondent said, "This naturally brings children to what they are interested in. They are focused, passionate, they ask questions, they gather thought, ideas, conversations, hypothesis, etc. teachers can co-learn and collaborate with children in their learning." Another noted, "I believe that it is inspirational not only to children, but to teachers; they are not dependent on a predictable curriculum. It keeps everything fresh and vibrant for all." Respondents indicated that high-level of engagement, meaningful learning, and deeper understanding were key to their utilization of the approach. "We use it in order to adapt to the children's interests and needs. We believe that when they are interested in their work, it holds meaning, and therefore, they retain the information in a deeper, more significant way." While most respondents focused on the notion that their curriculum was based off of student interests and needs, there were two survey-takers that included the child's larger context including their families and cultures. One of the respondents said, "It actually engages the children at a deep level, it affirms who they are, their family and culture and is enfolding and developing in an authentic way," the other said, "It is developed based in the context of the children, and not contrived or predetermined by the teacher or determined by a seasonal 'theme'."

Whole Child. Respondents who ranked the whole child in their top three most important aspects were asked how they personally define the whole child and how the idea of the whole

child impacts their practice and/or philosophy. The whole child was generally described as an all-encompassing ideology surrounding children. Many referenced all the developmental domains which includes cognitive, physical, social-emotional, and linguistic. The majority of responses indicated a need to respect and consider all of these domains. Several others included these domains as well as a child's experiences, background, strengths, families, relationships, culture, and context. One respondent noted, "The child who walks through our front door in their entirety with every element of their development and all of their amazing background, family and unique experiences that they carry with them." Another survey-taker said,

> When you seek to know the whole child you are looking to find far more information about them than can be found on an academic report. The whole child is who they are, what makes them tick, the things they value, what they're interested in, their strengths, their hurdles, the things that make them happy, sad, etc. Knowing the whole child is knowing which learning styles suit them best, but it is also knowing how to engage, empower, and challenge them to be their best selves.

Respondents indicated that utilizing this idea of the whole child guides their entire practice. It allows them to differentiate, honor each student's individuality, and cater to their strengths and context. "The child is always at the center of all that we do, and all of the decisions that we make. The idea of the whole child drives us to listen, to get to know, to consider other perspectives, to build relationships, and to meet each child where they are." Another respondent said,

> My desire to know the whole child guides everything I do in my classroom. It is important to know how to read, write, and do math, but it is also important to understand yourself, your emotions, and how you impact the world. Learning is more than, "The Three Rs"; it is being curious and knowing where and how to find answers. It is trying, failing, and trying again. Learning is not about how many test questions can be answered in a certain amount of time. Learning is about growth, change, self-reflection, ambition,

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perseverance, and so much more. I believe that when you know the whole child, you give

students the power to be all that they can be.

Hundred Languages. Respondents who ranked the hundred languages in their top three

were then asked how they personally define the hundred languages and how the idea of the

hundred languages impacts their practice and/or philosophy. The most common theme that

appeared in the responses to these questions was the expression of children. The majority of

responses suggested that their definition of the hundred languages was that children have an

infinite amount of ways they express themselves, communicate, and learn and that each child is

unique in this matter. Several respondents indicated that because of this idea, they ensure that

their classroom environment supports the infinite ways children learn, communicate and express

themselves with a variety of materials and mediums to do so. Many responses also included that

this idea helps them to see, consider, and appreciate the different ways of learning and expressing

oneself. One respondent said,

> Through this lens, it is my goal to always meet my students where they are. Being able to
>
> see the world through their eyes opens up a whole world of possibilities that many adults
>
> have forgotten because they were trained to do things one way. In truth, there can be
>
> many paths to success and remembering the hundred languages reminds me as an
>
> educator that the way I see things is far from the ONLY way. Children are so full of ideas
>
> and imagination and when we tap into that, the classroom becomes a very lively and
>
> inquisitive place.

Documentation. Respondents who ranked documentation in their top three most

important aspect were then asked how and why they utilize documentation in their practice. The

vast majority of responses included that they use documentation to capture and display the work

done in their classrooms. This is for families, the children, and other educators to see and engage

with. They use pictures, observations, and interpretations in their displays. A couple indicated

that the displays allow children to revisit and continue their learning. A few respondents indicated

that they utilize the documentation to learn about children and collaborate with other educators to inform their curriculum. "We use it to learn more about the children's thinking, inform our future planning and to make the learning visible to our families and the wider community." A few responses also noted that documentation allows them to assess their students. "We use it as an assessment tool and a teaching tool. For our teachers, it drives their inquiry to where a project might go next. As a lab school we use it as a teaching tool for our students to connect developmental objectives to organic play. And for parents we use it to make the learning visible for them." The responses were very similar to each other and did not have a wide variety.

      Child-Led Curriculum. Those that included child-led curriculum in their top three most important aspects used were then asked how and why they utilize child-led curriculum in their practice. The idea that arose the most was student interests. Respondents named this as both a how and why the utilize child-led curriculum. They put students interests at the forefront of their curriculum. Many indicated that they observe, listen, and ask questions to students to understand their interests. When asked why child-led curriculum is a part of their practice and philosophy, responses comprised of the respect it gives children, that it allows for increased engagement, excitement, collaboration, and that it gives children agency and freedom in their learning. One respondent said, "I believe children learn more in an environment where they are considered co-constructors of their learning. Children have so many 'languages' to help them learn, and they need to have a voice in their learning journey."

      Inquiry-Based Learning. For those that included inquiry-based learning in their top three most important aspects, they were then asked how and why they utilize inquiry-based learning in their practice. The word "wonder" appeared several times throughout these responses. One respondent said, "We wonder. I rephrase children's questions as Wonders & record them to investigate in the future rather than provide immediate adult given answers. We research topics of interest & record findings. Activities presented often center on the topics of inquiry." Responses discussed how their students' wonders and questions guide them to research topics that they

investigate. They utilize inquiry-based learning because it honors and values children. It allows them to problem-solve, gives them power over their learning, and provides meaning.

Physical Environment. Respondents who included physical environment in their rankings were asked to describe aspects of the physical environment in their classroom that are Reggio-inspired and why they choose to create their physical classroom environment in that way. Many respondents described their classroom environment as warm, calming, welcoming, and home-like. Many also included the use of loose parts and a variety of materials, especially natural materials. One noted,

> The materials match the student's interests, needs, and developmental level. My space never looks the same each year as each year new students are part of the classroom. It reflects the home environment by being welcoming and representative of the classroom community. I try to have more natural and open ended materials.

A few also discussed the accessibility of a variety of materials for the children. Student work, documentation, and family pictures were also included. Respondents indicated that they choose to create their environments in this way for a variety of reasons including that the environment is aesthetically pleasing, peaceful, inspirational, welcoming and allows children to feel comfortable, learn and grow more, be more confident and engaged, and feel more supported.

Project-Based Approach. Respondents who ranked project-based approach were then asked how and why they utilize a project-based approach in their practice. Student interest and ideas were a common theme for how this approach is utilized. One respondent noted, "We feed interests with opportunities and we become co-researches together." Another said, "Our children's ideas often scaffold into other related ideas and before you know it, the kernel of an idea evolves into something even bigger!" Respondents had slightly different ways of discussing projects, but generally focused on taking in the interests of their students. Responses for why they utilize this approach also varied. A couple said they use it because children are more interested and engaged in their learning and it is more meaningful. A couple others said projects are like real life. One

individual said that it allows them to create multidisciplinary curriculum. One respondent noted that they use project-based approach, "to help support teachers who are new to the philosophy and might need some extra guidance." Another said, "It gives structure to Reggio".

Collaboration. Those who indicated collaboration was in their top three practices were then asked to describe how collaboration is a part of their practice and why collaboration is important to them. Responses included collaboration between students, teacher-child collaboration, teacher-family, teacher-teacher, and teachers-administrators collaboration. Although only one response included all of these. The other responses either only focused on collaboration with and between students or collaboration only with other adults. Answers for why collaboration is important included both teachers and students learning from each other and together, access to multiple perspectives, support for teachers, and modeling. One respondent said, "We learn through our work and engagement with others. It might not always be easy, but our work is made exponentially richer through collaborating with others."

Least Ranked Reggio Aspects

Progettazione, constructivism/socioconstructivism, educational research, atelier, family involvement, group work, and professional development appeared the least amount of times in respondents' rankings of their top three most important aspects utilized, therefore responses to follow-up questions were limited because they appeared to very few respondents.

Those who included constructivism/socioconstructivism in their rankings were asked how they define these theories and how they impact their practice and/or philosophy. There were five responses for each question. Co-learning, co-creating, and collaboration were present in all responses for how they define these theories. Respondents discussed how their curriculum is impacted by these theories through projects, emergent curriculum, creating opportunities and investigations, group work, inquiry-based learning, documentation, and experiences.

Those who included family involvement in their rankings were then how they involve families in their students' education and why family involvement in important to them. Four

respondents answered both of these questions. Responses indicated that families are interacted with in a variety of ways through conferences, emails, journals, home-visits, and family nights. Three of the respondents indicated they also try to involve and incorporate families into the classroom through learning about different families and cultures, inviting families into the classroom, inviting families to volunteer, and inviting families to come teach and share things they are passionate about. Two of the four survey-takers specified a respect for parents being the child's "first teacher" or "primary teacher". One respondent noted, "We are stronger together." Responses indicated that collaboration with families, family engagement, and teacher-family relationships is important for growth and success.

Those who included professional development in their rankings were asked to describe how professional development is a part of their practice and why professional development in important to them. Three respondents answered both of these questions. Respondents indicated that it is something that they do often through meetings and professional development. One response stated, "We are learners alongside the children in our program." All three survey-takers suggested that adults and educators never stop learning and growing either.

Progettazione appeared in "I do use" the least, but it didn't appear the least in the rankings. Those who included progettazione were then asked how and why they utilize progettazione in their practice. Two respondents answered both of these questions. Both responses acknowledged co-construction. One response said,

> Progettazione is the constructing of the entire experience- it is the prefiguring that happens before you work with children, the design of the learning contexts including the environment and materials, it is the work with children and families, the observation and documentation, the analysis and interpretation- it IS the daily life with children!

One respondent said that they use progettazione because it is best practice and the other said, "Because it is a holistic view of education, taking into account the values, principles, research, and children with their families. It is all encompassing and is the REA."

Those who included educational research in their rankings were asked how and why they utilize educational research in their practice. Two respondents answered both of these questions. One respondent indicated a variety of professional development practices and that the environment, parent involvement, the image of the child, and meeting children where they are is critical in their practice. The second respondent said that research guides their practice and that "it is sound practice" to utilize educational research.

One respondent provided answers for how and why they utilize the concepts of atelier in their practice. They indicated that creative resources are easily accessible at all times and that the concept of the atelier "promotes curiosity and creativity amongst children, educators, and families."

One respondent was asked to describe how group work is a part of their practice and why group work is important to them. This respondent stated that they always have a collaborative project in the works and that these usually stem from student interests. It was indicated that many skills can be learned from group work and that it provides a strong foundation for life and students need to practice and learn how to collaborate and "navigate being on a team."

Common Themes

Codes from the matrix questions were combined to discover themes across all questions. Common themes that emerged include best practice, collaboration, deeper learning/understanding, engagement, student interests, meaning making and meaningful learning, and value/respect children.

Best practice appeared across emergent curriculum, progettazione, educational research, and physical environment. These responses were all answering why they were utilizing a specific Reggio-aspect. One respondent stated, "I feel it is what is best for children."

Collaboration as well as codes similar such as co-learn, co-construct, co-create, co-research, learn together, and learn with children emerged in responses related to emergent curriculum, documentation, child-led curriculum, physical environment, whole child,

progettazione, collaboration, constructivism/socioconstructivism, professional development, family involvement, and project-based approach. Responses included discussing collaboration and co-learning between teachers and families, teachers and other teachers and administrators, between students, and between teachers and students. One respondent noted, "Co construction is key, discourse is where we learn the most, being good listeners and active participants is part of this pedagogy"

Deeper learning, thinking, and understanding were coded across physical environment, project-based approach, collaboration, emergent curriculum, and documentation. One respondent said, "When humans are invested in their learning they go deeper and develop meaning. They sustain the interest for longer periods of time and create connections."

Engagement was found in emergent curriculum, physical environment, collaboration, and project-based approach. These responses were generally discussing increased student engagement in their own learning. One respondent said, "It actually engages the children at a deep level, it affirms who they are, their family and culture and is enfolding and developing in an authentic way."

Student interests appeared in emergent curriculum, child-led curriculum, inquiry-based learning, physical environment, whole child, family involvement, project-based approach, collaboration, and group work. These responses were generally discussing creating curriculum based on student interests as well as the benefits from it. One respondent noted, "We believe that when they are interested in their work, it holds meaning, and therefore, they retain the information in a deeper, more significant way."

Meaning making and meaningful learning appeared across hundred languages, inquiry-based learning, project-based approach, emergent curriculum, and child-led curriculum. One respondent stated, "Meaningful learning experiences are created when children's ideas are respected." Another said, "When children drive the course of study and the content has context and meaning intrinsic motivation peaks and learning is exciting and meaningful. It sticks."

Value, respect, and rights of children emerged in responses regarding hundred languages, inquiry-based learning, emergent curriculum, whole child, physical environment, and child-led curriculum. One respondent noted, "I feel it's important to show the children that I'm really listening to them on every level. They are seen, heard, valued in our creative learning process." Another respondent stated, "We are very thoughtful and respectful of children and their rights. We listen, we observe, we dialog with the children."

The Impact of the Reggio Emilia Approach

After completing the additional open-ended matrix questions, all respondents were asked if they felt like the Reggio Emilia Approach has positively impacted their practice and philosophy and to elaborate why or why not. Responses varied greatly. Many indicated the approach reflected and validated their own beliefs. A few indicated they felt like the Reggio Emilia Approach reflects best practice. There were more codes focused on the impact on the individuals as educators and professionals, but there were still many that focused on the impact on the students as well. One educator said,

> It has changed our lives, our school, and our community. We are no longer working in silos, but instead work collaboratively within the school and community. We created an inclusion program for children with special rights so that we truly live what we believe that all children have a right to excellent education.

For some, it has validated their important work as a teacher and a mother, and helped them become better educators and mothers. The approach allowed them to challenge themselves, see different perspective to education, continuously learn, and become a more intentional educator. It kept the job interesting, exciting, and engaging. One respondent said, "It has kept my job interesting and engaging for 16 years! Plus, I feel like I can believe fully in what I do, engaging in thought and conversation to help me continuously be a learner along with the children." Another individual said, "The Reggio approach is why I'm still practicing and will continue to practice until retirement." It helped disrupt burnout, reduce stress, and improved relationships

between children, families, and staff. One respondent stated, "Each day is a new and exciting day in the classroom. Many educators are getting burned out because of the monotony of the same things each day/year and with this teaching philosophy, that simply doesn't happen." Another respondent said, "Everyone feels less stress & more joy." Respondents also discussed the impact the approach has on their students. Responses included that it allows for children to feel safe, capable, confident, and to have a voice. That their students are happy and enjoying learning. One respondent said, "My students are thriving because they take ownership of their learning. Our classroom is a joyful place and my kids love coming to school." Another stated, "I can't even put into words what it has done for my classroom and for my students. They are truly so much happier and are learning more than ever before." Finally, one respondent described the potential limitations of the approach, noting,

> While I do feel that the Approach has positively impacted my practice and those of our school, I believe it can also be limiting. It has been important to our school to consider the context in which we operate and to feel comfortable adapting the Approach accordingly."

All respondents were also asked if there were any other concepts or approaches that influence their practice and/or philosophy and to describe them. There were a few who said no, but the majority of respondents indicated multiple other approaches or philosophies they like or use will be addressed further in the discussion.

The few who indicated they were in public-school settings were asked if they felt like the Reggio Emilia approach is beneficial in a public-school setting and to explain why or why not. All responses said yes, but had different explanations. Two indicated that it is not a perfect fit in a public-school setting, but is possible and can be beneficial and impactful. Two respondents said yes because it is developmentally appropriate practice. Purpose and freedom appeared within the responses. One respondent said, "Yes. It reinforces a respect for different perspectives and collaboration which is needed in all aspects of society."

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This section discusses the analysis of the results in response to the research question of what are American educators' perceptions of the Reggio Emilia Approach. Results were analyzed in a few different ways. Demographics were analyzed for who considers themselves Reggio-inspired educators and where they are. I analyzed the responses and corresponding codes to understand respondent's perception or understanding and implementation of Reggio principles or practices. Second, I analyzed responses and codes to look for evidence of diffraction and intra-action. Responses for how they utilize an item told us what they are doing and could be indicative of diffraction. Responses for why they utilize an item tells us the philosophy behind the practice, which could be indicative of intra-action.

Demographics

Demographics not only showed the distribution of survey respondents, but it told us who is utilizing Reggio principles and practices and where they are. This doesn't necessarily answer the research questions, but we were interested in gaining insight on who is utilizing aspects from this approach. The data cannot be considered a national representation, but the survey reached respondents from almost half of the states. Very few respondents were in rural areas. A little over half were in urban areas, and a little under half were in suburban areas. I expected this to be the case. Many people think that progressive education can only be found or work in affluent areas,

so I would need to know more about these urban and suburban schools before making any assumptions. Many people also think that progressive education can only be found or only work in private schools. 65% of the respondents indicated that they worked in private schools at the time, which may indicate that Reggio-inspired pedagogy can be found more often in private school, but it doesn't mean that it doesn't exist outside that domain. 13.3% of respondents were working in public schools. This is a small amount, especially since the sample size was so small, but it does show that Reggio-inspired educators do exist in public schools and that they are able to utilize aspects from a progressive approach in a public-school setting.

Impact of Demographics on Total Reggio Aspects Utilized

The statistical analyses were run to investigate any impact of certain demographics on Reggio practices and approaches. We might expect that age, region of country, community setting, years in profession, and highest degree earned might have an impact on amount of Reggio practices and approaches used. The results of these analyses did not indicate any difference between any demographic categories. This indicates that the amount of Reggio or Reggio-inspired practices does not differ based on these categories and the Reggio Emilia Approach is utilized to any extent by any type of educator in any setting.

Perceptions and Understandings of Reggio Principles and Practices

All respondents indicated they utilized and were inspired by at least three Reggio aspects that were listed. Four respondents utilized all 16 Reggio aspects. Some of these Reggio aspects overlap or a very similar. Some of the items listed are terms of practices or approaches that are specifically used in the Reggio Emilia Approach, some are terms of practices or approaches that are more often utilized in the United States, but have a corresponding Reggio Emilia term, and some are neutral terms. For example, project-based approach and inquiry-based learning are popular terms used in the United States and are similar to educational research. Although they are not perfectly interchangeable, they are very similar practices. Having both the Reggio term and the term used more in the United States can help give insight on educators' perspective of the

Reggio Emilia Approach. Reggio-specific terms included educational research, hundred

languages, documentation, atelier, progettazione, and physical environment. Terms more often

used in the United States, but are similar to aspects in the Reggio philosophy included emergent

curriculum, project-based approach, child-led curriculum, inquiry-based learning, and the whole

child. These were included because the Reggio Emilia Approach is often labeled as some of these

approaches. Neutral terms included collaboration, constructivism/socioconstructivism, family

involvement, group work, and professional development. These items are terms utilized in both

Reggio Emilia and the United States. There seemed to be a reoccurring misunderstanding of the

Reggio-specific terms, but due to so few responses for the Reggio-specific aspects, it is hard to

know for sure based on those responses. However, the disconnect was evident in the responses

for the hundred languages.

Hundred Languages

"The hundred languages are a metaphor for the extraordinary potentials of children, their

knowledge-building and creative processes, the myriad forms with which life is manifested and

knowledge is constructed" (Reggio Children, 2022). Malaguzzi composed a poem on the hundred

languages. He wrote that a child has a hundred languages, hands, thoughts; a hundred ways of

thinking, playing, speaking, listening, marveling, and loving; a hundred joys for singing and

understanding; a hundred worlds to discover, invent, and dream; "the child has a hundred

languages (and a hundred hundred hundred more)" (Reggio Children, 2022). The responses for

defining the hundred languages largely focused on the many ways in which children express

themselves, communicate, and learn. This is a large component of the hundred languages, but

responses were completely missing the infinite and "extraordinary potentials of children" (Reggio

Children, 2022). When asked how the idea of the hundred languages impacts practice and/or

philosophy, many responses referred to the environment or variety of materials in that classroom

utilized to cater to the different ways children learn and express themselves. These responses

were also missing the idea of extraordinary and infinite potential children have. The focus on

environment may be a way that respondents are using a concrete practice in response to the hundred languages. This could be either to help them construct meaning of the hundred languages in a more concrete way or it could be due to a shortsighted understanding of the concept.

Perceptions and Understandings of Reggio Adjacent Practices and Philosophies

The Reggio-specific terms were generally far less used and far less ranked than the non-Reggio terms. This could be indicative of not knowing the Reggio terms or thinking the non-Reggio terms are Reggio terms. The respondents could have recognized that they don't fully encompass the Reggio terms and that is why they more often chose the Reggio-adjacent terms, but then their responses for how and why they use the Reggio-adjacent terms should have been reflective of an integrated Reggio-inspired philosophy.

Emergent Curriculum

Emergent curriculum is curriculum that is developed based on students' interests, needs and context and does not have predeveloped plans (Bredekamp, 2017). Survey respondents mirrored this idea in their responses. Their responses focused on developing an unscripted curriculum through observations and communications based on student interests and needs. About 75% of participants indicated they use emergent curriculum in their practice. It was also the most ranked item. Almost half of the survey-takers ranked it in their top three most important practices used and it was also ranked as the number one most important aspect by 15 people, more than any other aspect. The matrix had three boxes to input: I do use, I do use but was not inspired by the Reggio Emilia Approach, and I do not use. Even though I did not use data from the second two boxes, the I do use aspects should be indicative of aspects used because of the Reggio Emilia Approach. It is possible that survey respondents could have confused this especially since not everyone moved over every aspect. Regardless, the data says that emergent curriculum is important to many survey-respondents as a Reggio-inspired aspect. Emergent curriculum is not a term utilized by the Reggio Emilia Approach, but it is a term that is often associated with the Reggio Approach (Ciezczyk, 2021). So, how can you be inspired by an aspect

of an approach that doesn't exist within the approach? Theoretically, emergent curriculum should have been in the I do use but was not inspired by the Reggio Approach box, because it is not a Reggio aspect. It is possible that survey respondents meant that their practice of emergent curriculum is impacted by the Reggio philosophy in some way, but that was not indicated in the responses to the questions of how and why they utilize emergent curriculum. The responses well reflected the definition of emergent curriculum. This suggests that there is a misunderstanding that emergent curriculum is the same as the Reggio Emilia Approach. This is also supported in the literature that Reggio is commonly mislabeled as being an emergent curriculum or other types of curriculum or approaches (Ciezczyk, 2021).

Child-Led Curriculum

Child-led curriculum is also not a term used in Reggio Emilia, but the idea of child-led curriculum is similar to Reggio Emilia aspects. Child-led curriculum is more about students having autonomy in their learning, which was somewhat reflected in the responses, but respondents focused more on curriculum being driven specifically by the interests of children. This sounds more like emergent curriculum, although the two are very similar and overlap. One respondent even said, "This is the same as emergent to me." Agency is a major aspect of the Reggio Emilia Approach, but they do not use the term child-led curriculum or the word curriculum at all. This is also similar to emergent curriculum in that it theoretically should have been placed in the "I do use but was not inspired by the Reggio Approach" box because it is not a Reggio aspect. It's possible that survey respondents meant that their practice of child-led curriculum is impacted by the Reggio philosophy in some way, but that was not indicated in the majority of the responses to the questions of how and why they utilize child-led curriculum. This again suggests that there is a misunderstanding that child-led curriculum is the same as the Reggio Emilia Approach. There were a few responses that showed implications of Reggio-inspired child-led curriculum, which will be discussed further in the following section.

Inquiry-Based Learning

Inquiry-based learning is not a term used in Reggio Emilia, but the idea of inquiry-based learning is similar to Reggio Emilia aspects. Responses well reflected the concept of inquiry-based learning. Like emergent curriculum and child-led curriculum, this concept theoretically should have been placed in the "I do use but was not inspired by the Reggio Approach" box because it is not a Reggio aspect. It is possible that survey respondents meant that their practice of inquiry-based learning is impacted by the Reggio philosophy in some way, but that was not indicated in the majority of the responses to the questions of how and why they utilize inquiry-based learning. This suggests that there is a misunderstanding that inquiry-based learning is the same as the Reggio Emilia Approach. There were a few responses that showed implications of Reggio-inspired child-led curriculum, which will be discussed further in the following section.

Project-Based Approach

Project-based approach is also not a term used in Reggio Emilia, but the idea of project-based approach is similar to Reggio Emilia aspects. The responses for project-based approach generally reflected the definition of this approach. This concept also theoretically should have been placed in the "I do use but was not inspired by the Reggio Approach" box because it is not a Reggio aspect. Again, it is possible that survey respondents meant that their practice of project-based approach is impacted by the Reggio philosophy in some way, but that was not indicated in the majority of the responses to the questions of how and why they utilize project-based approach. This suggests that there is a misunderstanding that project-based approach is the same as the Reggio Emilia Approach. There were a few responses that showed implications of Reggio-inspired project-based approach, which will be discussed further in the following section.

Diffraction and Intra-action

Whole Child

The whole child is a term that refers to all developmental domains which includes cognitive, physical, social-emotional, and linguistic. It is generally referenced when referring to

progressive teaching practices that should consider and cater to all developmental domains. It does consider the context and experiences of each child, but only for how that impacts development. Many responses on the whole child did reflect this idea, but there were a few responses that transcended the idea of the whole child. Some respondents indicated context and experience as an important aspect of a child and not just as something that impacts development. They also referenced interests, strengths, and individuality of each child. These few respondents placed children at the center of their practice and philosophy. They mention relationships, differing perspectives, empowering and honoring students, and indicate a belief in the infinite capabilities of children. This is not reflective of the concept of the whole child. This is more reflective of a Reggio-inspired way of thinking. The few respondents who emulated this also discussed the developmental domains and indicated that both concepts were important. This shows these respondents understanding of the whole child as well as how the Reggio Emilia Approach has elevated this concept. This indicates that there is a diffraction and intra-action between these two concepts, which was discussed in the theoretical framework as a way to utilize Reggio Emilia aspects and ideas into our context in the United States (Barad, 2007).

Documentation

Documentation was the most used aspect within survey respondents. This is reflected in the current literature in that documentation is the most studied Reggio aspect (Giamminuti et al., 2022; Parnell, 2005; Pettersson, 2015). It was also frequently found in other studies that researched multiple Reggio aspects. Reggio Emilia did not invent documentation, but their practice of documentation is unique to the approach and an integral aspect of the approach. Documentation was the most used aspect, but it was not the most ranked. Over 90% of respondents indicated they utilize documentation, but only 26% of respondents included it in their top three rankings of most important aspects they utilize in their practice and/or philosophy. So, it seems as if documentation is a popular practice, but it is not seen as the most important. This might be because documentation is a tangible practice. It might be easier to conduct a specific

practice than it is to conduct a specific philosophy through practice. Most respondents stated that they utilize documentation for making learning visible and for further engagement for the students, their families, and other educators. This was the overwhelming response for how documentation is used, but this is only one aspect of documentation practice seen in Reggio Emilia. Documentation is about creating various visuals to display the learning process to promote interaction and further learning, but it it's not a product, it's a process. Documentation is not used to just show parents pictures and prove that their children are learning something, it should allow for continual analysis and discussion surrounding a child's construction of knowledge. A few respondents did suggest this idea, but it seemed as if the responses were inferring that documentation is a product. Documentation is also a professional development tool for teachers, which was not found in the survey responses. A few survey responses did indicate that it was used to inform curriculum, which is also how it is used in Reggio Emilia, but it also can allow teachers to reflect and improve upon their own practice. A few respondents did mention that it allows them to learn about their students and this is reflected in Reggio Emilia Approach. Using documentation as an assessment tool is not how documentation is discussed in Reggio Emilia, but the literature indicated that using documentation as an assessment tool may be a starting point and potential negotiating point in public schools (Fochi, 2022; Suarez, 2014). One study specifically noted that documentation was important in obtaining trust with families and appeasing American families' desire for a traditional report card (Sisson, 2009). So, although it may not be how documentation is practiced in Reggio Emilia, Italy, it might be a starting point for those who want to learn more or a negotiating point for educators who are in strict, standardized settings and want to elevate their practice.

Physical Environment

The physical environment is considered the third teacher in the Reggio Emilia Approach. The classroom environments are highly intentional designs. The responses well reflected aspects of a Reggio-inspired classroom environment. Most respondents noted a few different things they

use and why. They all took pieces of Reggio Emilia's idea of the physical environment. This shows diffraction of the concept, but there wasn't really any evidence of intra-action. The intra-action could be the negotiation between the non-Reggio-inspired classroom aspects and the Reggio-inspired aspects, but respondents were only asked to discuss what aspects were Reggio-inspired.

Child-Led Curriculum

Within the child-led curriculum responses, other aspects emerged in a few of these responses that intra-act with more Reggio-like ideas including capable children, honoring children, co-construction, hundred languages, and references the environment and materials. This shows a diffraction and intra-action between the philosophical values of the Reggio Emilia Approach and a popular American progressive practice.

Inquiry-Based Learning

A few responses for why survey respondents utilize this approach had Reggio-like qualities including constructivism, respect for children, value children, and honors children. This also shows a diffraction and intra-action of the philosophical values of the Reggio Emilia Approach and popular American progressive practice.

Project-Based Approach

Within the responses for project-based approach, two respondents did bring in Reggio-inspired ideas. One defined the teacher as a co-researcher and the other referred to the hundred languages. This shows a diffraction and intra-action among these approaches. What was most interesting about these responses though was that two people had responses that indicated that a project-based approach could be an introductory idea of the Reggio Emilia approach and that it gives structure to the approach and can support teachers who are new to the philosophy. This could mean that other approaches like emergent curriculum, child-led curriculum, inquiry-based learning and others could be used as concrete introductory vehicles for the Reggio Emilia Approach. There is evidence that it is possible to have both, to negotiate, to diffract and intra-act

the various concepts, approaches, and philosophies, but this idea is different in that it seems like these respondents know that project-based approach is not a Reggio concept. This may have been the case for other respondents, but that was not implied with the data that we do have and the inferences we have made from that data.

Intra-action with other Philosophies and Approaches

When asked what other approaches influence practice and/or philosophy, almost all survey respondents specified multiple other philosophies, practices, or approaches that the use or are inspired by. This is another indication of diffractive and intra-active pedagogies and that the Reggio Emilia Approach can be integrated into many other approaches.

Limitations

One of the limitations of this study was sample size. While meaningful data did emerge from the limited respondents, a larger sample size could have yielded a better understanding of the data. Another limitation is the lack of responses from educators in public schools. It was difficult to reach Reggio-inspired public-school teachers because they were hard to find. I don't think this means they are significantly small in number. I think this simply means they are more difficult to find and contact. That was at least the case in this study. I was not able to answer one of the original research questions regarding the Reggio Emilia Approach in public schools, but I was able to gain insight on the perceptions of Reggio-inspired educators in the United States. Utilizing only a survey for qualitative data was limiting due to not being able to probe further into responses or ask for clarification.

Implications for Future Research and Practice

Future research could probe further into the perceptions and utilization of Reggio principles. One recommendation is to conduct interviews with Reggio-inspired educators. Future research could include investigating more the understandings of Reggio-inspired teachers regarding the approach. Even though the data suggested that there is some misunderstanding, we do not know for sure if respondents knew that the Reggio adjacent topics were not Reggio terms.

Future research could also specifically ask educators what they think it means to be Reggio-inspired. Future research could also focus on learning about the Reggio Emilia Approach as a process and a discourse, which is the intention of the educators in Reggio Emilia, Italy. Lastly, I recommend further research specifically investigating the idea of using existing structured approaches as a way to help learn about or convey the Reggio philosophy.

More than half of the respondents indicated they first learned about the Reggio Emilia Approach in college classes. This can inform teacher preparation programs, particularly the programs who have a major focus on the approach, to ensure an understanding of the differences and distinctions between various early childhood approaches. A quarter of the respondents indicated they first learned about the Reggio Emilia Approach at a school they worked at. Considering that the majority of the respondents worked at a Reggio-inspired school, this can inform administrators of Reggio-inspired schools to ensure that professional development focuses on an understanding of the complex approach.

Even though very few respondents worked in public school settings, the small amount of data collected on public schools is indicative of the ability to utilize aspects of the Reggio Approach in public schools. The evidence of diffraction and intra-action also supports this idea. It also can inform those who are weary about the approach or think it is a program that has to be replicated.

Closing Thoughts

There are a few major takeaways from this study. One is that a lack of understanding of the approach is highly evident. The Reggio Emilia Approach is not an approach to be perfectly replicated and it is not an approach that can't be used without perfect expertise on the matter, but there may be benefits to understanding the approach better. The Reggio Emilia Approach can be a tool and a resource for all educators. It is a highly complex approach. Not understanding even the basic core values incredibly diminishes the approach. I do not think you can understand the practices without understanding the philosophical foundation that informs the entirety of the

approach. The evidence of diffraction and intra-action are examples of the infinite possibilities for utilizing aspects of the approach, but integrating a few aspects is also an oversimplification of the approach. It is meant to be a never-ending process of learning and discourse. The educators in Reggio Emilia, Italy are sharing their experiences with the world just as much as they are learning about others' experiences. While this study did not allow opportunities for that idea to arise, it did develop a conceptualization of Reggio-inspired aspects and their interpretations. This is a start to understanding the perceptions of Reggio-inspired educators in the United States and how the approach can be used in this context for those who are interested in learning more.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Survey

Default Question Block

Consent Info Here

◯ I consent, begin the study

◯ I do not consent, I do not wish to participate

The following questions will ask you information about your role as a teacher or administrator. You can skip any questions.

What state do you currently work in?

[   ]

What city do you currently work in?

[   ]

What is the name of the school you currently work at?

[   ]

Which of the following best describes you?

◯ Asian or Pacific Islander

◯ Black or African American

○ Hispanic or Latino

○ Native American or Alaskan Native

○ White or Caucasian

○ Multiracial or Biracial

○ A race/ethnicity not listed here

What is your age range?

○ 18 - 29

○ 30 - 39

○ 40 - 49

○ 50-59

○ 60+

Are you a teacher or administrator?

☐ Teacher

☐ Administrator

☐ Other [   ]

How many years have you been working in the profession?

[   ]

Please select the setting you currently work in.

○ Public School

○ Private School

○ Charter School

◯ Laboratory School

◯ Other [   ]

Please select the degree(s) you have completed and type in the title of your degree(s).

☐ High School Diploma/GED

☐ Associate Degree [   ]

☐ Bachelor's Degree [   ]

☐ Master's Degree [   ]

☐ Doctoral Degree [   ]

☐ Other [   ]

Please select the setting you currently teach in.

☐ Early Childhood Center-Based

☐ Family Child Care

☐ Elementary School

☐ Middle School

☐ High School

☐ Other [   ]

Is your school associated with a public school district?

◯ Yes

◯ No

◯ Other [   ]

What age(s) do you currently work with?

☐ Infants

☐ 2 year olds

☐ 3 year olds

☐ 4 year olds

☐ 5 year olds

☐ 6 year olds

☐ Other [_____]

What grade(s) do you currently teach?

☐ Pre-Kindergarten

☐ Transitional Kindergarten

☐ Kindergarten

☐ 1st Grade

☐ 2nd Grade

☐ 3rd Grade

☐ 4th Grade

☐ 5th Grade

☐ 6th Grade

☐ Other [_____]

What grade(s) do you currently teach?

☐ 4th Grade

☐ 5th Grade

☐ 6th Grade

☐ 7th Grade

☐ 8th Grade

☐ 9th Grade

☐ Other [   ]

What grade(s) do you currently teach?

☐ 9th Grade

☐ 10th Grade

☐ 11th Grade

☐ 12th Grade

☐ Other [   ]

Is your school considered a Reggio-inspired school?

◯ Yes

◯ No

Are there other Reggio-inspired teachers at your school? If yes, about how many?

◯ Yes [   ]

◯ No

How did you first hear/learn about the Reggio Emilia Approach?

[   ]

What initially caught your interest regarding the Reggio Emilia Approach?

[   ]

Why have you chosen to utilize practices or principles from the Reggio Emilia Approach?

[   ]

Please drag each item into the boxes. Then, rank the items in "I do use" based on level of importance to you with 1 being most important.

Items	**I do use**
Emergent Curriculum	
Project-Based Approach	
Hundred Languages	
Documentation	
Collaboration	**I do use, but was not inspired or impacted by the Reggio Emilia Approach**
Progettazione	
Constructivism/Socioconstructivism	
Educational Research	
Atelier	
Child-Led Curriculum	
Inquiry-Based Learning	
Physical Environment	**I do not use**
Family Involvement	
Group Work	

Professional
Development

The Whole Child

You will be now be asked a few more questions about your top 3 ranked items in "I do use". If you forgot to rank them based on level of importance to you, you can click the orange back arrow and rank your items.

How do you utilize emergent curriculum in your practice?

[   ]

Why do you utilize emergent curriculum in your practice?

[   ]

How do you utilize progettazione in your practice?

[   ]

Why do you utilize progettazione in your practice?

[   ]

How do you define the whole child?

[   ]

How does the idea of the whole child impact your practice and/or philosophy?

[   ]

How do you define the hundred languages?

How does the idea of the hundred languages impact your practice and/or philosophy?

How do you define constructivism and socioconstructivism?

How do these theories impact your practice and/or philosophy?

How do you utilize educational research in your practice?

Why do you utilize educational research in your practice?

How do you utilize documentation in your practice?

Why do you utilize documentation in your practice?

How do you utilize the concepts of the atelier in your practice?

Why do you utilize the concepts of the atelier in your practice?

How do you utilize child-led curriculum in your practice?

Why do you utilize child-led curriculum in your practice?

How do you utilize inquiry-based learning in your practice?

Why do you utilize inquiry-based learning in your practice?

Describe aspects of the physical environment in your classroom that are Reggio-inspired.

Why did you choose to create your physical classroom environment in this way?

[   ]

How do you involve families in your students' education?

[   ]

Why is family involvement important to you?

[   ]

How do you utilize a project-based approach in your practice?

[   ]

Why do you utilize a project-based approach in your practice?

[   ]

Describe how collaboration is a part of your practice.

[   ]

Why is collaboration important to you?

[   ]

Describe how group work is a part of your practice.

Why is group work important to you?

Describe how professional development is a part of your practice.

Why is professional development important to you?

Do you feel like the Reggio Emilia Approach has positively impacted your practice and philosophy? Why or why not?

Are there any other concepts or approaches that influence your practice and/or philosophy? If yes, please describe which other concepts or approach you are influenced by.

Do you feel like the Reggio Emilia Approach is beneficial in a public-school setting? Why or why not?

We are interested in better understanding how the Reggio Emilia Approach has impacted teachers' and administrators' practice and philosophy. Would you be

interested in participating in a follow-up interview? The interview would be around 30 minutes and will be conducted on Zoom.

◯ Yes

◯ No

Thank you for being willing to participate in a follow-up interview! Please provide your name and email address below. If chosen for an interview, we will follow up with you soon.

Powered by Qualtrics

Appendix B: IRB Approval Letter

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date:	02/08/2023
Application Number:	IRB-23-43
Proposal Title:	The Reggio Emilia Approach in Public Elementary Schools
Principal Investigator:	Ashtyn Fox
Co-Investigator(s):	
Faculty Adviser:	Larisa Callaway-Cole
Project Coordinator:	
Research Assistant(s):	
Processed as:	Exempt
Exempt Category:	

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in 45CFR46.

This study meets criteria in the Revised Common Rule, as well as, one or more of the circumstances for which <u>continuing review is not required.</u> As Principal Investigator of this research, you will be required to submit a status report to the IRB triennially.

The final versions of any recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are available for download from IRBManager. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:
1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be approved by the IRB. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI, adviser, other research personnel, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any unanticipated and/or adverse events to the IRB Office promptly.
4. Notify the IRB office when your research project is complete or when you are no longer affiliated with Oklahoma State University.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact the IRB Office at 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu.

Sincerely,
Oklahoma State University IRB

VITA

Ashtyn Fox

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: THE REGGIO EMILIA APPROACH IN THE UNITED STATES

Major Field: Human Development and Family Science

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in Human Development and Family Science at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2023.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in Human Development and Family Science at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in 2021.

Experience:

Graduate Research/Teaching Assistant, August 2021 – May 2023