The Pedagogical Role of Reggio-inspired Studios in Early Childhood Education

Laura Ann Ganus
University of Denver

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THE PEDAGOGICAL ROLE OF REGGIO-INSPIRED STUDIOS
IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

A Dissertation

Presented to
The Morgridge College of Education
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In Partial Fulfillment
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Doctor of Philosophy

By
Laura Ann Ganus

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Advisor: P. Bruce Uhrmacher, Ph.D.
ABSTRACT

The influence of the Reggio Emilia philosophy has been present in early childhood programs across the United States for decades, with many programs attempting to adapt the philosophy’s concept of a studio, but few studies have examined them. This study describes, interprets, and appraises two Reggio-inspired studios in the United States in order to provide an in-depth analysis and shed new light on such practices.

Four questions guided this study: 1) What is the role of a studio in a Reggio-inspired school? 2) What is happening in the studio? 3) What are children learning in this environment? 4) How does the studio cultivate children’s hundred languages?

Based on the methods of educational connoisseurship and criticism, this investigation provides a vivid description and interpretation of preschool-aged children’s experiences in Reggio-inspired studios. Two sites were studied, one in Colorado and the other in Missouri. Six dimensions of schooling provided the conceptual framework which guided this study: intentional, structural, curricular, pedagogical, evaluative, and aesthetic. Similarities and differences between sites and art studios are examined and discussed, along with implications for the field of early childhood education.
The overall findings that emerged reveal that Reggio-inspired studios have the potential to promote the following behaviors in children: 1) positive approaches to learning, 2) an ecological perspective, 3) creative thinking, 4) theory building, and 5) communication through many different languages. The findings also suggest that Reggio-inspired studios help children learn that there are many ways to express their thinking, questions, feelings and ideas. This occurs by children having access to a wealth of materials, the time to explore the materials, and the support to develop skills and techniques in the studio. As a result, children learn to use materials as languages and create their own toolbox or repertoire of communication strategies that they can carry with them.
I would like to thank my parents, Michael and Debra Ganus, for supporting me throughout my doctoral program. Without their support and encouragement, this would have not been possible.

Dr. Edith King, who has been my advisor throughout my time at the University of Denver, during both my M.A. and Ph.D. programs. Dr. King has opened my eyes to many worlds and cultures, instilling her trademark value of “worldmindedness” in me. Dr. Bruce Uhrmacher, the chair of my dissertation committee and professor of many of my graduate courses. Dr. Uhrmacher’s knowledge and wisdom has guided and also challenged me to find my own educational philosophy. Dr. Carolyn Elverenli, for offering her expertise on the Reggio Emilia approach and the education of young children, which has strengthened my research study. Dr. Frédérique Chevillot for serving as my outside chair. Dr. Ena Shelley, Dean of the College of Education at Butler University, who has continued to be an inspiration throughout my career from the first undergraduate education class I took with her in 2000.

I would also like to thank the studio teachers, teachers, administrators, families, and children at each school site for sharing their time and knowledge with me. Specifically, Chuck Schwall and Jennifer Selbitschka.

Lastly, I’d like to dedicate this dissertation (my largest academic and personal accomplishment thus far in my life) to my grandparents, Henry and Margaret Ganus. I wouldn’t be the person I am today without them.
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

What is so terribly impressive and exceptional about the Reggio experience and the world of Loris Malaguzzi is the way they have challenged the dominating discourses of our time, specifically in the field of early childhood pedagogy—a most unique undertaking for a pedagogical practice! (Dalhberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999, p. 121)

The Reggio Emilia philosophy is considered best practice in early childhood education by many educators. It is a progressive philosophy of early childhood education that places a strong emphasis on the arts, creativity and integrated curriculum. One central idea of the Reggio Emilia philosophy is that children have a “hundred languages,” a metaphor meaning that children have many ways of learning and communicating their thinking, ideas, questions and feelings. This philosophy received its name from the city in which it originated, Reggio Emilia, Italy. A 1991 article in Newsweek brought the Italian early childhood centers to the attention of educators around the world, especially in the United States. As a result many have flocked to see the centers in person. Jacobson (2007) reports that more than 18,000 educators from 90 countries have taken study tours to Reggio Emilia, Italy, to see the schools firsthand. I, too, was
one of those educators. After studying the philosophy for six years, I went on a study tour in 2006 to visit the infant/toddler centers and preschools in Italy.

The Reggio philosophy has become contagious amongst educators in the United States, as evidenced by the numerous conferences, workshops and study tours to Reggio Emilia. Many early childhood centers have begun implementing this philosophy. “The Reggio Emilia approach is being studied and adapted throughout the United States, not only in demonstration, laboratory, and private schools, but also in publicly funded programs such as Head Start” (McClow & Gillespie, 1998, p. 131). It has also been adapted for use in museum education programs (Donovan, 1997).

The North American Reggio Emilia Alliance (NAREA) provides a network of collaboration and exchange for those interested in learning more about the education project of Reggio Emilia, Italy (http://www.reggioalliance.org). According to administrative coordinator Cheryl Rapaport, NAREA currently has 1,335 members across Canada, Mexico, and the United States (personal communication, September 9, 2008). In addition, educators in the United States have formed study groups and collaboratives to support professional development regarding the schools in Reggio Emilia across the country from Indiana (Shelley, 2007) to Vermont (Goldhaber, 2007) to Missouri (Gandini, Hill, Cadwell, Schwall, 2005).

The visibility of the schools in Reggio Emilia has captured and retained the interest of educators around the world and is a provocation to school reform efforts in early childhood education (New, 2007). *The Hundred Languages*
Exhibit has been traveling the world showcasing the work being done with the young children in Reggio Emilia. This exhibit is proof that such pedagogy and approaches to working with young children are possible and inspires those who view it to take ideas back to their own contexts.

In addition, the Reggio Children International Network connects educators around the world in countries such as Denmark, Brazil, Korea, Peru, New Zealand, and Germany in collaboration and dialogue (http://www.reggioalliance.org). Nyland and Nyland (2005) also point out that the Reggio philosophy is being taught in a number of Chinese universities and is being implemented in some Chinese kindergartens.

The work being done with young children in Reggio Emilia is more than just a provocation;\(^1\) it is an example of putting theory into practice. As a result, the schools in Reggio Emilia have been widely studied and their ideas are being implemented in “countries and cultures in the developed and developing world” (Nyland & Nyland, 2005, p. 284).

With the current state of education in the U.S. focused on high-stakes testing and teacherproof materials, New (2003) explains that the fundamental philosophy of Reggio Emilia’s schools contradict a subject-centered, outcome-based view of education and therefore challenges educators to rethink their purposes and the capacity of what they do. “Reggio Emilia’s goals also stand in sharp contrast to a growing emphasis in the United States on high-stakes testing, a

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\(^1\) I use the term ‘provocation’ here as used by Loris Malaguzzi, to provoke or stimulate.
The Reggio Emilia philosophy can be considered a movement aimed at placing creativity, art, and play at the heart of early childhood curriculum. This philosophy also supports the current movement of integrated curriculum, spanning P-20 education. A large component of this progressive philosophy is the educator’s attention to the arts and aesthetics, encouraging children to express their thinking, ideas, questions and emotions through various symbolic languages also referred to as the hundred languages of children. Spaces in these schools called ateliers or studios are venues that make a wealth of materials available to children to encourage symbolic expressivity. “The Reggio Emilia philosophy of ‘art’ for children is a definite departure from what many teachers are taught in the United States, and challenges many assumptions about the use of art in early childhood classrooms” (Schroeder Yu, 2008, p. 128). This reconceptualization of art in early childhood has been adopted by educators around the world and offers fertile ground for a research study such as this.

Rationale for the Study

Arts and aesthetics are basic to the total curriculum, just as reading or mathematics, but do not receive such importance in American schools (Jalongo & Stamp, 1997). Rinaldi (2006) states “art has too often been separated from life and, like creativity, it has not been recognized as an everyday right, as a quality of life” (p. 120). The current trend in early childhood is a back-to-basics approach
where the arts are being cut from the curriculum so more time can be spent on the fundamentals (Schiller, 2000). The educational significance of math or reading is rarely questioned, while the arts often require substantial justification (Eglington, 2003). When the arts are not ignored in school settings, they are often used to make other subject matter more appealing (Brittain, 1979).

There is a considerable difference between the way many American educators view the role of art in early childhood and the beliefs held by educators in Reggio Emilia. In the United States many educators do not believe that the arts and aesthetics are significant types of learning, while in Reggio Emilia they hold quite the opposite view (Jalongo & Stamp, 1997). In American classrooms, creativity and the arts are often considered an extra and are only allowed if there is extra time (Jalongo & Stamp). Eglinton (2003) explains that because many educators have a “narrow view of what art in early childhood could potentially offer, many educators fail to understand the importance of art in the early years, and possess, at best, only a vague notion of how to support the artistic learning of young children” (p. 3). Educators in Reggio Emilia believe that art should be the right of every child because it is an essential element of human thinking (Rinaldi, 2006).

I offer five reasons for studying Reggio-inspired studios in the United States. First, the fact that there are Reggio-inspired programs being implemented across the world from Sweden to South Africa to India to Japan is remarkable in itself. Yet, little scholarly research has been done on Reggio-inspired early childhood studios in the U.S. One noteworthy book, *In the Spirit of the Studio,*
edited by Gandini, Hill, Cadwell, and Schwall (2005) stands alone as the only book focused on the influence of Reggio Emilia’s atelier in the United States. My study will shed new light and an in-depth analysis on Reggio-inspired studios, in the United States specifically, considering how the many cultural and contextual differences between Reggio Emilia, Italy and cities across the United States complicate the adoption of the philosophy (Lally, 2001).

Second, the Reggio Emilia philosophy has been evolving for over 45 years, is continually evolving and will continue to evolve over time. With this in mind, and the fact that the philosophy evolves when adapted in other contexts, it is important to continually examine the implementation of this approach to build new interpretations—in this study the concept of the studio. Further, Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence (1999) explain that the educators in Reggio Emilia have been very much against a textbook approach to their practice with prescribed rules, goals and methods which is why they do not have a “program or a curriculum” that can be readily transferred and applied to other cultural contexts. This exemplifies the need to study how this philosophy is being interpreted and successfully implemented in different contexts.

Third, awareness of the philosophy is quite low in the United States and is commonly overlooked by many teacher education programs (Stager, 2002). This can no longer be the case in the present state of the early childhood field. Currently in the United States there is a push for nationwide, universal preschool (Zigler, Gilliam, & Jones, 2006) with many competing philosophical approaches to consider such as Reggio Emilia, High Scope, Creative Curriculum, Montessori,
Project Approach, and Portage, amongst others (Roopnarine & Metindogan, 2006). Universal preschool requires states to offer free public education for children as young as three years old and provide certified teachers in early childhood education. With many states already implementing universal preschool and searching for a guiding philosophy for their early childhood programs, this philosophy certainly deserves attention in teacher education programs.

A fourth reason for studying Reggio-inspired studios is that to improve the practice of early childhood education one must examine alternative approaches and ideas. The studios in Reggio Emilia offer an alternative way to think about working with young children, curriculum and pedagogy. “The most dramatic changes that have occurred in research on early childhood art and art education in the past decade involve changes of perspective or theoretical orientation” (Thompson, 2006, p. 224). Therefore, learning about this philosophy may serve as a provocation for teachers to reflect on and cultivate change in their own practice.

A fifth reason for studying this philosophy is to illuminate the importance of the arts and the use of many symbolic languages with young children by providing concrete examples of successful implementation. In the field of early childhood education there is a significant confusion regarding the arts. In the past decade, educators have questioned the research and theory on which the practice of early childhood art has been based (Thompson, 2006). This confusion results from many factors including what qualifies as art, questions about children’s
developmental levels, teacher’s own lack of training in the arts, and negative stereotypes about the arts (Jalongo & Stamp, 1997; Thompson, 2006). When young children have high-quality experiences in the arts and aesthetics, their learning and development is enhanced (Jalongo & Stamp). “The influence of Reggio Emilia is extensive, the questions it raises for early art education, profound and challenging” (Thompson, 2006, p. 236). Therefore, this study would help bring awareness and a greater understanding of the arts and their place in early childhood programs.

Overall, this research study will provide a description and interpretation of the most prominent features of Reggio-inspired studios in the United States in order to distinguish this pedagogical practice from other traditional art classrooms and practices in the field of early childhood education.

**Purpose of Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to describe and analyze how the implementation of studios, as utilized in the schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy, can contribute to improve early childhood programs in the United States for young children. This study seeks to understand the experiences of the children in Reggio-inspired studios and determine what can be learned from such pedagogical practices. By describing, interpreting, and appraising the intentions and operations of two Reggio-inspired studios, I hope to shed new light on an alternative approach to educating young children and the importance of art in the field of early childhood education.
This study is built upon four major questions to attain these goals. Below I explain each question further.

1. What is the role of the studio in a Reggio-inspired school?

2. What is happening in the studio?

3. What are children learning in this environment?

4. How does the studio cultivate children’s hundred languages²?

First, what is the role of the studio in a Reggio-inspired school? What does the studio teacher hope to accomplish in the studio? It is important to understand the goals and aims of the studio teacher. What distinguishes a Reggio-inspired studio from a traditional art classroom? To answer this research question I analyzed documents, observed in the studio, and interviewed the studio teachers and school administrators.

Two Reggio-inspired studios were observed for this study, one in St. Louis, Missouri and the other in Boulder, Colorado. Both school sites are widely known in the field of early childhood education for their implementation of the Reggio Emilia philosophy. Both schools have studios that play an integral role in the school, curriculum, and the daily lives of the children and teachers. I closely followed the studio teachers seeking to understand their intentions, as the teacher is a determining factor in how a classroom (in this case a studio) operates and impacts children.

² The ‘hundred languages’ refers to the poem written by founder Loris Malaguzzi, included in the appendices.
Second, what is happening in the studio? What is the studio teacher doing? What are the children experiencing? What symbolic languages are the children using to express their learning? What types of activities are the children partaking in? I observed children working in the studio to document their experiences. These observations allowed me to compare what was actually happening in the studio with the educational intentions. I focused on the daily life of the studio; what the children and teachers were doing. I looked at documentation and student work to gain an understanding of experiences that happened before my research study.

Third, what are the children learning in this environment? This question seeks to understand the received curriculum. What are students learning as a result of the activities occurring in the studio? To answer this question I interviewed the children and give them voice in the research study. I also interpreted my observations and artifacts, including student work and documentation.

Fourth, how does the studio cultivate children’s hundred languages? Educators in Reggio Emilia use the term “hundred languages” as a metaphor for the multiple ways children learn and communicate their thinking, ideas, questions and feelings. Many early childhood programs across the U.S. utilize only two languages, verbal and written forms of communication. What can the theory of a hundred languages offer children who cannot communicate verbally or on paper? What languages can a studio offer or open up to children?
The work done by children in Reggio Emilia, Italy is proof that their studios awaken many languages in children, but “how”? We (educators around the world) cannot learn or utilize this theory unless we understand the “how.”

The educators at the two school sites I have chosen for this research study have interpreted and implemented this theory with the children in their programs for many years and offer fertile ground for exploring the “how.”

Overall, children in Reggio-inspired studios certainly have different experiences than children who attend other programs. What are the implications and what could educators in other programs learn from Reggio-inspired studios? What does this mean for the field of early childhood education?

To answer these research questions, a guiding framework that incorporates six dimensions of schooling was utilized. These six dimensions are interconnected and influence the type of experiences children have. The six dimensions of schooling are the intentional, structural, curricular, pedagogical, evaluative (Eisner, 1998) and aesthetic (Uhrmacher, 1991). The intentional dimension considers the aims and goals of the educational endeavor. The structural dimension looks at how time, space, roles and subject matter are used. The curricular dimension refers to the purpose of the curriculum. The pedagogical dimension looks at how the content is mediated. The evaluative dimension refers to the multiple ways that teachers assess the children’s learning. Finally, the aesthetic dimension considers the type of sensory experiences that the children have.
Overview of Methodology

In order to understand, describe and analyze the pedagogical practices of Reggio-inspired studios, I chose educational connoisseurship and criticism for my research method. I chose two different Reggio-inspired schools which employ studios. I spent two weeks observing and interviewing teachers, children and administrators at each site. I explain my methodology further in Chapter Three.

Educational Connoisseurship and Criticism

Educational connoisseurship and criticism is a form of qualitative research that was developed by Elliot Eisner. The intent of this research method is to improve educational practices by using the information and/or data collected critically. The researcher helps the reader understand the data collected and apply the knowledge gained to other educational practices.

This method is a type of qualitative educational evaluation that has two parts, connoisseurship and creating criticisms. Connoisseurship is the art of appreciating qualities and relies heavily on perceptivity, which Eisner (1998) describes as the ability to experience and differentiate qualitative relationships. Criticism is the art of disclosure as it gives the data a public audience and it is dependent on the material made available through connoisseurship. Eisner makes it clear that criticism is not negative in nature, but rather is the illumination of qualities or relationships so that a judgment of its value can be made.
Choosing Participants

There are many schools and early childhood programs in the United States inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach but the degree of implementation varies. In some programs, the influence is strong when educators have studied the approach and adapted the ideas to use in their context. In other cases, the influence is more partial when only a few of the educators within a program embrace the philosophy and focus on only a few aspects of the approach.

For this study, I chose two school sites based on the following criteria: 1) the school’s reputation in the field of early childhood in connection with the Reggio Emilia philosophy, 2) the school’s affiliation with the North American Reggio Emilia Alliance (NAREA), 3) the school’s presence in the literature regarding the adaptation of the Reggio Emilia philosophy, 4) the level of direct collaboration and exchange with the educators in Reggio Emilia, 5) the school’s philosophy, and 6) the amount of years the school has been implementing the philosophy. It was important to find school sites that fully embrace the Reggio Emilia philosophy in order to study contexts in which my research questions could be best answered.

I contacted the directors of two highly respected Reggio-inspired schools, one in Colorado and the other in Missouri. I received written permission from their school directors to complete my study at their schools. The schools have agreed for their real names to be used in the study. I studied the Boulder Journey School in Colorado and The St. Michael School in Missouri. The Boulder Journey School is located in a city at the foothills of the Colorado Rocky Mountains. It is
a full-day, year-round private school that welcomes over 200 children ages six weeks through six years old, in a total of sixteen classrooms. The St. Michael School is a private school that serves 130 students, from three years old to sixth grade. I have previously visited the Boulder Journey School on four different occasions, through workshops and study tours offered by the school. I had never visited The St. Michael School before this study.

Data Collection

The collection of data in this study included observations, formal and informal interviews and the collection of artifacts. Throughout my data collection, I paid close attention to reoccurring themes as well as attending to contradictory information.

The most important data source for educational connoisseurship is the observation of teachers and classroom life (Eisner, 1998). My observations not only attended to the practices of the studio teacher and the interaction with children, but the physical environment as well. I shadowed the studio teacher outside of the studio during visits in the classrooms and in meetings with teachers and administrators. In addition, I observed what was happening around the school on a general level and this included walking the halls and visiting various classrooms.

My primary function was to observe and record the experiences of the children in the studio and their interactions with their studio teacher. My observations were recorded in the form of field notes and I included specific details of what I was observing and notes regarding my thoughts about what I was
seeing. Each day I typed my handwritten observations on my computer, which
gave me the opportunity to add any details that I might have missed or to
elaborate on something noted in journal.

I conducted both informal and formal interviews in person, at the school
sites. Interviewing is a mode of inquiry that allows the researcher to understand
the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience
(Seidman, 1998). Formal and informal interviews were conducted with the studio
teachers, classroom teachers, children and administrators at both school sites to
understand their experiences with the studio. I used a semi-structured interview
protocol with open-ended questions when conducting my formal interviews.

Artifact collection is another tool that I used in collecting data. The
purpose of connoisseurship is to understand what is happening, so any data source
that can help make sense of the situation is an appropriate resource (Eisner, 1998).
I collected materials from each school such as brochures, lesson planning
documents, informational booklets, newsletters, photocopies of the children’s
artwork, and other items that I deemed beneficial.

Data Analysis

I used multiple strategies when analyzing the data. My overall pattern of
data analysis was inductive, moving from specifics to generalizations. My data
collection and data analysis were simultaneous activities rather than separate
activities. I immersed myself in the data and used a coding system for themes that
re-occurred. By examining my field notes I looked for indicators of codes in
events and behavior and coded them on the document. When I felt I had a good
sense of what was happening in the studio to answer my research questions and the data had become redundant, I knew I had hit the point of saturation.

I used my conceptual framework of the six dimensions of schooling to help with my data analysis. The six dimensions of schooling include the intentional, structural, curricular, pedagogical, evaluative (Eisner, 1998) and aesthetic (Uhrmacher, 1991). However, when analyzing my data, I was open to data that did not fit within this framework to ensure that I did not miss anything of potential significance.

In Chapter Four, I provide a detailed illustration of each Reggio-inspired studio. The application of related literature to my data collection drives my interpretation, woven throughout my descriptions in Chapter Four. In Chapter Five, I take this a step further by using my data to answer my research questions and weaving together my interpretations and themes to provide the reader with implications for practice.

**Definition of Terms**

- *Atelier* is defined as a “workshop, or studio, furnished with a variety of resource materials, used by the children and adults in a school” (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998, p. 467). The term studio is commonly used by educators implementing these ideas in contexts other than in Reggio Emilia.

- *Atelierista* is defined as “the person with a background in the visual arts who works in close collaboration with the teachers to supply and organize
a wide variety of materials and tools in the atelier and around the school to provoke and observe children’s creative and learning processes” (Gandini, Hill, Cadwell, & Schwall, 2005, p. 197). The term studio teacher is commonly used by educators implementing these ideas in contexts other than in Reggio Emilia.

- **Documentation** is a tool used by educators to capture, record, and make visible the children’s experiences through various media such as photographs, transcriptions, samples of student work, and video footage amongst other strategies.

- **Early childhood education** is regarded as education for children from birth to age eight.

- **Hundred languages** is a metaphor created by Loris Malaguzzi referring to all of the ways children learn and communicate their thinking, ideas, questions and feelings. The terms graphic, symbolic, or natural languages may also be used.

- **Infant/toddler center** as defined in Reggio Emilia, Italy, is a “full-day program providing education and care to children aged four months through three years” (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998, p. 467).

- **La Dimensione Intenzionale**: section in Chapter Four that means “intentional dimension” and uses Eisner’s intentional dimension of schooling to help describe the purpose of the studio and studio teacher.

- **La Dimensione Strutturale**: section in Chapter Four that means “structural dimension” and looks at the physical affordances of the studio that
includes materials available to children, how time in the studio is managed, and how the work in the studio connects with the children’s primary classroom.

- *La Finestra Aperta*: section in Chapter Four that means “open window” and provides the reader with a contextual and descriptive introduction into each school and studio.

- *La Routine Giornaliera*: section in Chapter Four that means the “daily life” or “regular daily routine” and utilizes the pedagogical, curricular, evaluative, and aesthetic dimensions of schooling.

- *Pedagogista is defined as “a pedagogical coordinator who supports the work of teachers, enriches their professional development, supports their relationship with families, and facilitates the connection between teachers and the superintendent of schools” (Gandini, Hill, Cadwell, & Schwall, 2005, p.198).

- *Preschool center (preprimary school)* as defined in Reggio Emilia, Italy, is a “full-day program providing education and care to children aged three to six years of age (includes the American kindergarten year)” (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998, p. 467).

- *Reggio-inspired: centers or programs that are influenced by the philosophy and practice implemented in the infant/toddler and preschools of Reggio Emilia, Italy.*
Conclusion

The stories of the two studios I illustrate are only two examples of how programs in the United States are implementing the Reggio philosophy, in regards to studios specifically. However, I believe these studio stories offer a multitude of ideas for the way in which we think about early childhood education and young children’s learning. My goal is that these stories will provoke the reader’s thinking.

Next, Chapter Two explores the current context of early childhood education and delves deeper into the fundamental elements of the Reggio Emilia philosophy. Chapter Three explains the methodology of this research study; particularly in regards to the research method of educational connoisseurship and criticism and how I collected, analyzed, and interpreted my data. Chapter Four tells the stories of two Reggio-inspired studios, with my interpretation and evaluation interwoven. Finally, Chapter Five connects the two studio stories, responds to my research questions and offers the reader implications, further research and limitations of this study.
CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Overview

The literature review provides an overview of the current context of the field of early childhood education, the standing of art in early childhood curriculum, and an examination of the fundamental principles of the Reggio Emilia philosophy with a particular focus on the *atelier* and *atelierista*.

**Current Context of Early Childhood Education**

The current political climate is ripe for the field of early childhood education. According to President Barack Obama’s White House website, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act has invested $5 billion for early learning programs—including Head Start, Early Head Start, child care, and programs for children with special needs in 2009 (http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education/). This demonstrates President Obama’s commitment to providing support for our nation’s youngest learners, from birth to age five. The website also states that:
He [President Barack Obama] will urge states to impose high standards across all publicly funded early learning settings, develop new programs to improve opportunities and outcomes, engage parents in their child’s early learning and development, and improve the early education workforce.

The universal preschool movement is attempting to close the achievement gap by providing more access to early childhood programs, particularly for families who cannot afford such through state-funded programs. “Universal prekindergarten offers increased access to early education for low-income families, something to celebrate given the large numbers of children who currently aren’t served by affordable, quality early childhood programs in their communities” (Pelo, 2008, p. xiii). Pelo (2008) continues to explain that these early childhood programs, due to mandates of their funding sources, typically adopt standardized curricula with pedagogical approaches such as skill-and-drill teaching—compromising the quality of the programs. This ripple effect particularly hurts the low-income families attending these programs whom it intends to serve by depriving them of a quality early education.

According to a report by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) in 2008, the top ten states serving four-year-olds through state-funded preschool programs are: Oklahoma, Florida, Georgia, Vermont, Texas, West Virginia, Wisconsin, New York, Maryland and South Carolina. In these ten states, more than half of four year-olds attend public preschools. In 2008, more than 1.1 million children attended state-funded preschools across the nation (Barnett, Epstein, Freidman, et al., 2008).
“The growing enrollment in state pre-K, documented by NIEER, is valuable to children and the nation only if program quality is high to produce meaningful gains in learning and development” (Barnett, Epstein, Freidman, Boyd, Hustedt, 2008). This report goes onto explain how high quality pre-K not only helps to improve the educational achievement of all children, but decreases school dropout, crime and delinquency. High quality preschool programs have also been found to improve economic productivity and health of those who it serves.

It is estimated that universal preschool access will be provided to all four-year-olds in the United States in the next twenty years (Barnett, Epstein, Freidman, Boyd, Hustedt, 2008). This expansion and focus on early childhood education is good news to many, but there are still a lot of questions and uncertainty amongst educators in the field. “Parents, teachers, researchers and politicians often have strong and conflicting views about what is right for young children in the years before school” (Soler & Miller, 2003, p. 57). Early childhood educators represent a complicated assortment of beliefs, values and knowledge about child development, how children learn and the purpose of education itself (Edwards, 2005). Soler & Miller (2003) continue that “curricula can be ‘sites of struggle’ between ideas about what early childhood education is for, and what are appropriate content and contexts for learning and development in early childhood” (p. 57).

Krechevsky and Stork (2000) ponder what kind of education will serve our children best in the 21st century. “While there is broad consensus that how we
educate our children must change, there is less agreement as to the best ways to effect that change” (Krechevsky & Stork, p. 57). Early childhood curriculum is now feeling the same pressures as K-12 education. The ramifications of No Child Left Behind are now being felt in early childhood classrooms. Whitfield (2009) explains that “there is a growing demand for early childhood teachers to provide increasingly “academic” lessons – heavy on direct teaching and testing, with fewer and fewer opportunities for exploration and discovery” (p. 155). “Now concern over meeting standards is placing pressure on even early childhood teachers to teach the required skills in a direct and intensive way that leaves time for little else” (Copple, 2003, p. 764). Clyde, Miller, Sauer, Liebert, Parker, and Runyon (2006) offer the question “how important is it for children in the twenty-first century to be able to pose their own questions, offer hypotheses to understand their worlds, find their own solutions?” (p. 226).

While literacy and math skills are important to foster during the early years, Copple states “many educators and developmental psychologists have pointed to a set of fundamental capacities that not only underlie reading, mathematics, and other discipline learning but also make possible children’s development of self-regulation, problem solving, planning, and higher level thought processes” (p. 764).

Preschool-aged children are capable of using symbols to represent their thinking by using drawing and other art forms (Trepanier-Street, 2000). The importance of the development of young children’s symbolic thought and representational abilities during the preschool years is well documented by Piaget,
Vygotsky, Malaguzzi, Bruner, Gardner, and Sigel (Copple, 2003). “Children’s development requires multiple opportunities for representing thinking because they permit children to “see” their thinking” (Trepanier-Street, 2000, p. 19).

Glevey (2006) calls for a new approach to how children are educated which includes teaching children how to think. Smilan (2007) expresses a need to develop divergent thinking, as our students are not developing the skills they require to become creative thinkers. Going further, Smilan asks us to consider if we are educating children for the creative economy or training “widget-makers and test takers.” “The challenges that the world faces require new solutions and our success in finding them will, in part, depend on the effectiveness of our thinking” (Glevey, 2006, p. 301).

The Arts in Early Childhood Curriculum

In the U.S., the arts are typically taught as extension activities when time permits (Clyde, Miller, Sauer, Liebert, Parker, & Runyon, 2006). Whitfield (2009) believes that “the education of young learners has become a casualty of No Child Left Behind” (p. 153). Whitfield goes on to say:

While the mandates of this law have led to an intensively structured, narrow, teacher-driven academic curriculum accompanied by high stakes testing for all children, its exclusion of the arts has been particularly calamitous for children who do not come from White, middle-class homes. (p. 153)

Smilan (2007) explains that there is sufficient evidence that the arts increase student motivation and engagement, but rather the real question is how art and creative thinking is being taught in our schools? The relationship between
art education and early childhood is complicated, as art educators seldom teach young children directly. But Thompson (2006) points out that there is a growing area of interest in this area as preschool programs are being developed in public schools and the role of the *atelierista* in Reggio Emilia is providing examples for educators around the world.

Whitfield (2009) states the challenges we now face regarding art in early childhood education as a result of *NCLB*:

- Young children are currently being deprived access to such multimodal ways of knowing.
- Curriculum that overlooks the importance of providing opportunities for children to explore the world through their many intelligences – especially those intelligences that enable them to negotiate between and among symbol systems as they learn to read and write.
- The loss of spontaneity and joy they bring which is particularly brought about through the arts.
- The deprival of the opportunity to transmediate, (i.e., develop a repertoire of strategies to use across symbol systems) (p. 156).

The arts serve as an essential component in children’s ability to make meaning of their world (Whitfield, 2009). The work of Harvard’s Project Zero indicates that preschoolers’ drawings have the same expressiveness as adult art (Thompson, 2006), which has huge implications for early childhood pedagogy and curriculum. But beyond expressivity and meaning making, Catterall and Peppler (2007) suggest that “high quality arts education may provide children with positive views of themselves and the worlds they will face” (p. 559). Catterall and Peppler continue:
We conclude that high quality visual arts education encourages sense of self-efficacy as creative, original thinking. Such outcomes benefit all children. But they are particularly important when considering the lives of underprivileged children for whom educational and social advantages are scarce. (p. 559)

The current political climate for early childhood education is encouraging, but the current role of art in early childhood programs is undetermined. Thompson (2006) argues “the influence of Reggio Emilia is extensive, the questions it raises for early art education, profound and challenging” (p. 236). Reggio Emilia serves as an example of how multiple literacies can be naturally integrated into the curriculum as tools for thinking and learning (Clyde, Miller, Sauer, Liebert, Parker, Runyon, 2006). Thompson goes on to say:

Although serious and sustained research on the theory and practice of art education in the preschools of Reggio Emilia is accumulating slowly, the work routinely produced by the children who benefit from that practice demonstrates unequivocally the possibility of exceptional sophistication in teaching and learning, and the range of artistic expression that is possible for young children who are encouraged to explore challenging content through visual forms. (p. 236)

The Reggio Emilia Philosophy

The Reggio Emilia philosophy has been declared a global model and mecca for early childhood education (Savoye, 2001). Reggio Emilia is “a municipality in northern Italy which has a worldwide reputation for its cutting-edge philosophy, thinking and practice with respect to early childhood education” (Kinney & Wharton, 2008). The bedrock of the Reggio philosophy is the image
of the child. Founder Loris Malaguzzi advocated strongly for children believing they are beautiful and intelligent and full of possibilities. Malaguzzi believed this vision guided all aspects related to educating young children (Malaguzzi, 1994).

The core ideals built upon the image of the child include the ideas of: 1) relationships form through social interactions and collaboration, 2) emergent curriculum develops into long-term investigative projects, 3) the environment is the third teacher, 4) the teacher acts as a partner, nurturer and guide, 5) documentation allows learning to be valued and made visible, 6) parents are partners in education, and 7) the utilization of an atelier and atelierista to cultivate children’s hundred languages.

History

The birth of the Reggio Emilia philosophy is rooted in its own noteworthy history. This history is significant to understand in order to fully appreciate the uniqueness of these schools. According to the visionary founder Loris Malaguzzi (Gandini, 1998), it all began six days after the end of World War II in the small demolished village of Villa Cella in northern Italy. The people decided that they were going to build a school for young children out of the rubble remains from the war. Citizens of the city raised the money for construction by the sale of an abandoned German war tank, military trucks, and some horses. New (2002) explains that parents didn’t want typical traditional schools, rather “they wanted schools where children could acquire skills of critical thinking and collaboration essential to rebuilding and ensuring a democratic society” (p. 1). Malaguzzi, with the help of parents, opened the first school in 1963 (Gandini, 1998).
Overview of Philosophy

The Reggio philosophy incorporates ideas from many scholars including Susan Isaacs, Maria Montessori, Lev Vygotsky, Jean Piaget, Erik Erikson, John Dewey, David and Frances Hawkins, Humberto Maturana, and Jerome Bruner (Caldwell, 2003). In addition, New (2003) acknowledges the incorporation of Howard Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences, James Comer’s ideas about parental involvement, and Nel Noddings’s attempt to create caring schools. The Reggio Emilia philosophy can be described as social constructivist theory (New, 1998), fostering the relationship between individuals and the sociocultural context.

The underlying values are those of a strong image of childhood and the deserving rights of children. Loris Malaguzzi’s perspective was described as “a powerful image of the child, social from birth, full of intelligences, curiosity, and wonder” (Edwards, 2002, p. 6).

In practice, the child is a co-constructor of knowledge with the teacher and they actively create ideas, skills, and explanations of knowledge through experiences. “Children’s natural curiosity, thirst for knowledge, and interests in the world around them are sustained and nurtured” (Desouza & Jereb, 2000). Children create ideas that are received by teachers and channeled into long-term learning projects. And in addition to learning from teachers, children interact and learn from each other. “Children love to learn among themselves, and they learn things that it would never be possible to learn from interactions with an adult” (Malaguzzi, 1994, p. 56).
Children are encouraged to express their ideas through many symbolic languages, as Malaguzzi believed that “creativity is a characteristic way of thinking and responding to the world” (New, 2000, p. 1). At its core, this early childhood philosophy is grounded on the belief that children are powerful people and have the desire and abilities to construct their own knowledge (Day, 2001). And just as important as educating the child, Malaguzzi believed in promoting the health and happiness of the child as well (Malaguzzi, 1994).

The Reggio philosophy reaches and includes all learners. “One of the most remarkable benefits of our inquiry into the Reggio approach was its impact on kids who typically struggle in school” (Clyde, Miller, Sauer, Liebert, Parker, & Runyon, 2006). These researchers observed children who were typically reserved, assert themselves as their knowledge on a certain subject expanded.

Also, children with special learning needs are at the top of the lottery system in Reggio Emilia, Italy. “Although there may be waiting lists for the government-run infant-toddler centers in Italy, it is the child with special needs who receives preferred acceptance” (Gilman, 2007, p. 24). Edmiaston and Fitzgerald (2000) explain that the adaptation of Reggio Emilia principles help to promote inclusive programs in three specific ways. First, children with disabilities become full participants in the classroom community. “All children become familiar and comfortable with diversity, and in many instances children identify ways to accommodate differences” (Edmiaston & Fitzgerald, 2000, p. 69). Second, children with and without disabilities interact in an environment that promotes independence. And third, educational goals and instructional practices
are individualized to meet the needs of all children as “there is neither a typical child nor a place for one-size-fits-all instruction” (Edmiaston & Fitzgerald, 2000, p. 69).

Since the Reggio Emilia philosophy is very complex and all of its principles are interwoven, I will highlight only some of the prominent guiding beliefs. “The principles, although often described separately, do not function independently…Rather they comprise a system of related ideas and practices that exemplify experiences in the child care centers in Reggio Emilia” (Moran, Desrochers, & Cavicchi, 2007, p. 82).

*Image of the child*

The bedrock of the Reggio philosophy is the image of the child. Reggio educators believe that each of us has an image of a child inside of us and that it is very hard to act contrary to this internal belief. Malaguzzi (1994) states that the image of the child that all of us need to hold is one in which “the child is very intelligent, that the child is strong and beautiful and has very ambitious desires and requests” (p. 61). Cadwell (2005) offers another way to think about the image of the child:

They are not empty vessels waiting to be filled with the body of knowledge. Rather, they are vessels that are already full—full of questions and theories. When children can act on their questions and theories, they develop knowledge and, most essentially, the ability to think deeply and make meaning. (p. 190)
**Relationships**

Relationships are also at the heart of the Reggio Emilia philosophy. “Education has to focus on each child in relation to other children, the family, the teachers, and the community rather than on each child in isolation” (Gandini, 1993, p. 5). Malaguzzi (1994) believed these interactions are very important, saying that “children need to enjoy being in school, they need to love their school and the interactions that take place there” (p. 54). One feature of the philosophy that helps cultivate relationships between children, families, and teachers is that children are grouped together with the same teacher for three years. This allows children, teachers and families to build strong relationships with one another.

Relationships are also central to the curriculum. Cadwell (1997) explains that Reggio educators challenge and support children in discovering relationships by asking the children “to notice, think about, create, and express their unique perspective on relationships of all kinds through many languages” (p. 38). This exemplifies how relationships extend beyond people to materials and the physical environment.

**Emergent curriculum and project work**

Within the Reggio Emilia schools there is no mandated curriculum or standards by which learning should follow, as Malaguzzi felt this would push schools towards teaching without learning (Hewett, 2001). Curriculum is based upon discovering questions initiated by the children and constructing journeys to find such solutions. Therefore, the curriculum is dependant on the children’s interests and experiences (Stegelin, 2004). The types of projects done in Reggio
Emilia relate to students’ experiences and interests and therefore can be ideal ways to promote language and conceptual development (Abramson, Robinson, & Ankenman, 1995). Putting it another way, Malaguzzi (1994) states:

We don’t want to teach children something they can learn by themselves. We don’t want to give them the thoughts that they can come up with by themselves. What we want to do is activate within children the desire and will and great pleasure that comes from being the authors of their own learning. (p.55)

The curriculum is emergent, mainly constructed of long-term projects that promote inquiry among and between teachers and children (New, 2003). Projects may last weeks, months, or years. This emergent construction of curriculum is also referred to as contextual curriculum or negotiated learning. Reggio educators use the word *progettazione* to describe the process of flexible planning in regards to the curriculum (Moran, Desrochers, & Cavicchi, 2007). Moran, Desrochers, and Cavicchi go on to explain *progettazione* as a progressive curricula approach that:

Through its flexibility, new and sometimes unexpected curriculum directions emerge that often include changing roles and responsibilities, evolving questions and ideas, and developing strategies for systematically reflecting on and responding to the changing needs, interests, and abilities of children. (p. 82)

The planning and construction of curriculum takes a different approach in Reggio Emilia compared to most typical early childhood programs in the U.S. There are not curriculum guidebooks or standards that teachers follow. “Reggio teachers often start with questions or learning goals that are oriented toward domains and materials and include hypotheses about children’s thinking” (Krechevsky & Stork, 2000, p. 65). Teachers observe and listen closely to the
children to find out what their ideas, questions and interests are. Then, teachers make predictions and hypotheses about different ways they could extend this into project work.

In contrast to other approaches in early childhood, children in Reggio Emilia are not spending their time doing worksheets, tracing teacher-made patterns, and/or memorizing factual information, rather they are involved in much higher-level thinking activities (Hertzhog, 2001). In reference to children they had worked with using the Reggio philosophy, Abramson, Robinson, & Ankenman (1995) explain that projects enabled these young children “to achieve curriculum objectives in ways that were far more meaningful than using a textbook” (p. 201).

The schools in Reggio Emilia use an integrated curricular approach, rather than separating the learning domains. Long-term projects form the integrated framework through which children construct knowledge (such as number concepts, language, historical perspectives, etc.) rather than dividing the curriculum into separate content areas (Stegelin, 2004). For example, a project about “trees” might involve scientific thinking, language arts, and mathematical concepts integrated throughout the course of the project.

Cadwell (1997) goes on to explain that teachers ask open-ended questions so that children “are not asked to elicit right answers, but rather to stimulate children to think, imagine, remember, make comparisons, and formulate new ideas” (p. 40). The children’s skills and understandings are then expanded as they work in groups or individually (Gilman, 2007). “The influence of John Dewey on
the curriculum of Reggio schools is most apparent in the use of projects to provide multilevel instruction, cooperative learning, peer support, and the individualization of curriculum goals and learning experiences” (Edmiaston & Fitzgerald, 2000, p. 68).

Clyde, Miller, Sauer, Liebert, Parker, & Runyon (2006) comment that long-term investigations “result in real-life problem solving among peers, and numerous opportunities for creative thinking and exploration” (p. 216). Abramson, Robinson and Ankeman go on to explain that such project experiences that encourage children to use multiple modes of expression help “to build concepts and bridge language differences” (p. 201). Trepanier-Street (2000) explains:

Reggio Emilia allows children many opportunities to have active, concrete experiences with the topic; to share their conceptions and misconceptions about the topic; to negotiate the project’s direction with their peers and teacher; and, most important, to represent their ideas about the topic in all its multiple forms. (p. 19)

Building an amusement park for birds is one example of a project done by children in Reggio Emilia that is not typically found in early childhood curriculum books. This type of in-depth project work allows children to use their areas of strength and interest, and also use various forms of representation to express their learning.

Environment

The environment is considered the third teacher along with the children and teachers, and is constructed based upon the strong image of the child. This space is aesthetically pleasing, inviting, stimulating, and encourages exploration.
Spaces are designed to support relationships and encounters between adults and children, children and children, and between adults and adults. Tremendous thought is put into the architecture of the schools and a typical building has an entrance hall, dining hall, kitchen, a central space called a *piazza* in which all of the classrooms connect, an *atelier, mini-ateliers* connected to each classroom, and a room for music and movement (Malaguzzi, 1998). Schools also have interior and exterior gardens (Gandini, 1998).

Educators create an environment that communicates by speaking many different languages, promotes relationships while allowing children to have personal space, and has the ability to transform itself (Rinaldi, 1999). Environments are full of natural and recycled objects, large photographs and documentation panels on the walls, aerial sculptures, hanging mobiles, dress-up clothes, drawings, clay sculptures, plants, glass walls, sunlight, and mirrors (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998). Commercially-made items are rare in Reggio environments.

Materials are readily available for children to use and are beautifully displayed in clear containers to display their qualities and to serve as an invitation to children to use them. The block area contains many different types of materials such as tubes, cones, hoops, shells, stones, and wooden animals and people (Cadwell, 1997). Technology is integrated into the classrooms as children have access to light tables, cameras, overhead projectors, photocopiers, scanners and computers (Tarr, 2003). Lunch is served on tablecloths with real napkins and children use real silverware and glassware (Cadwell).
Role of the teacher

The teacher fulfills many roles throughout the learning process. Malaguzzi (1994) explains how the teacher has one-hundred languages and can serve as an author, actor, prompter, set designer, and an audience. Reggio educators promote relationships between children so that they use each other as resources instead of relying solely on teachers for the answers. Teachers listen to children but do not try to correct “mistakes” immediately, rather they give children time to find their own solutions to problems (Rinaldi, 2006).

In regards to the curriculum, Stegelin (2004) explains how the teachers serve as facilitators and partners in the learning. “Rather than delivering packaged programs, they [teachers] invent unique ways to support individual and group learning” (Clyde, Miller, Sauer, Liebert, Parker, & Runyon, 2006). Teachers ask good, open-ended questions to stimulate children’s thinking and to provoke discussion (Cadwell, 1997). Malaguzzi (1994) states “we need to define the role of the adult, not as a transmitter but as a creator of relationships – relationships not only between people but also between things, between thoughts, with the environment” (p. 56). Scaffolding ideas to prolong the children’s interest and learning is another significant role of the teacher (Desouza & Jereb, 2000).

Within the Reggio schools there are two teachers of equal rank in each classroom. These co-teachers partake in planning and collaboration with other teachers, pedagogisti, and families, and the entire school staff meets once per week (Malaguzzi, 1998). Collaborating, sharing experiences and concerns from their classrooms, coaching each other, and working together to find solutions are
impressive attributes of Reggio educators (Clyde, Miller, Sauer, Liebert, Parker, & Runyon, 2006).

Documentation

Essentially, documentation is a tool that captures, records, and illuminates the children’s experiences to make their learning visible. It serves many purposes from helping parents understand their child’s experience, assisting the teachers in understanding the children, encouraging children to evaluate their own work, and exchanging ideas with other educators (Gandini, 1993). It is also a key component of planning and assessment that focuses not only on the end product, but the process as well (Tarr, 2004). Shroeder Yu (2008) explains that in Reggio Emilia “these displays are not created to serve primarily as decoration or ways of showing off the work” (p. 127).

By documenting the process of the children’s work during several stages of a project, children feel that their work is valued and can actually see the progress they have made (Desouza & Jereb, 2000). “Documentation moves us beyond an interest in outcomes and moves us to an exploration of the relationships and feelings that form the context and stuff of educative experience” (Schroeder Yu, 2008, p. 132). Also, new discoveries can be made when panels or other forms of documentation are revisited (Clyde, Miller, Sauer, Liebert, Parker, & Runyon, 2006).

Documentation can take many different forms such as photographs of process and product, transcriptions of children’s conversations, student work, video footage, artifacts created by the children, writing samples, and audio
recordings. Large, wall-size documentation panels are often used to display a project and are left up in the schools for years to serve as a historical archive of the children and teacher’s experiences (Gandini, 1993). Schroeder Yu (2008) notes that panels are also displayed down low, at the children’s eye level.

Edmiaston and Fitzgerald (2000) point out that documentation can be especially useful when working with children who have special needs by providing records of the children’s experiences. Edmiaston and Fitzgerald continue to say that documentation serves as “evidence that children with disabilities are not only meeting their individual IEP goals but also are functioning as valued members of the classroom community” (p. 69).

Documentation in Reggio Emilia differs from the displays seen in most typical early childhood centers by the way it is organized and analyzed. In the majority of U.S. early childhood classrooms, children’s work is displayed on bulletin boards with manufactured borders of teddy bears, rainbows or stars surrounding the perimeter; the main purpose being to be a display or showcase. Schroeder Yu (2008) points out that both the content and aesthetic the display are important in Reggio Emilia. “Reggio-inspired documentation typically includes rich, detailed descriptions of the contexts of learning, historical accounts of children’s steps in learning, and ways teachers’ analyses of documentation informs and projects new curriculum initiatives” (Moran, Desrochers, & Cavicchi, 2007, p. 83).
Parents as partners

Parent participation is an essential element of the Reggio Emilia schools (Cadwell, 1997). Carlina Rinaldi (1999) states that the three interconnected subjects of education are the children, the teachers, and the families. Malaguzzi (1994) states that it is important for schools and educators to form strong alliances with families, as it is the family’s right to be involved in their child’s education. In addition to the daily participation in the life of the school, parent participation consists of attending meetings to discuss curriculum, exchanging ideas with educators, organizing activities such as dinners and celebrations, setting up spaces, building toys and equipment, and traveling on fieldtrips (Malaguzzi, 1998).

Atelier and Atelierista

The Reggio Emilia philosophy believes strongly in the idea of expression through various artistic or symbolic languages referred to as the hundred languages. Artistic expression, creativity, and aesthetics drive much of the work done with these young children. Although it may seem like art on the surface, it is actually much more. Gandini (1997) points out that “what is done with materials and media is not regarded as art per se, because in the view of Reggio educators, the children’s use of many media is not a separate part of the curriculum but an inseparable, integral part of the whole cognitive-symbolic expression involved in the process of learning” (p. 21). Tarr (2003) adds:

Experiences in visual expression are not add-ons or isolated activities but are a form of inquiry or way to investigate a theory, idea, or a problem, a way of clarifying understanding, the
communication of an idea…. Reggio educators present provocations to children that ask them to see situations from multiple perspectives, through the experiences they set up, and through the use of interpersonal encounters that challenge and support acceptance of diversity, flexibility, and creativity. (pp. 10-11)

Art takes on a different meaning in these Italian schools. The atelier and atelierista help to encourage children’s hundred languages through the use of a variety of materials. Tarr (2003) explains how Reggio educators “provide situations where children translate ideas developed in one media to another, which helps clarify children’s thinking about aspects of the problem not encountered in previous experience” (p. 10-11).

Each infant/toddler center and preschool in Reggio Emilia has a studio called an atelier. Malaguzzi chose the term atelier to differentiate the space from art rooms found in traditional elementary schools (Gandini, Hill, Cadwell, & Schwall, 2005). The teacher who works in this space with the children is called the atelierista and has training in the visual arts. The terms “studio” and “studio teacher” are often used by educators adopting these ideas in other contexts. I learned from this research study that the term “studio” is preferred over “art studio,” as these spaces contain many diverse materials.

The atelier is a workshop that cultivates connections between art, emotion, knowledge, and creativity by encouraging children to express their ideas through many different languages (Gandini, Hill, Cadwell, & Schwall, 2005). “Learning is an emotional experience that cannot be fully engaged or understood through simple paper-and-pencil activities” (Schroeder Yu, 2008, p. 132). Cadwell (1997)
explains that when children make their ideas come alive, it helps them to better understand their own thinking and that of others because they can see, feel, hold, and sometimes hear them. Gandini (2005) offers her view:

The atelier is a sort of multiplier of possibilities, of explorations, and of knowledge. For the children, this is evident because they can continually exercise their creativity, communicating it through the objects that they produce, and through their thought processes. They also can refine many languages as well as exchange different points of view. (p. 60)

Ateliers in the schools of Reggio Emilia are a host to a wealth of materials such as a variety of types of clay, watercolor paints, tempura paints, acrylic paints, chalk, seeds, dried flowers, rocks, sticks, leaves, string, wire, and recycled materials such as cones, various textures of paper, cardboard, tubes, plastic, wheels, and more. Large wooden easels are available for the children to use by themselves or with other children. Mirrors are placed on tables and on the walls to offer different viewpoints. Children also use light tables to explore materials and ideas. A mini-atelier is also connected to each classroom which allows for extended project work (Malaguzzi, 1998). This space resembles the central atelier and provides the opportunity for children to work in small groups with or without a teacher (Gandini, Hill, Cadwell, Schwall, 2005).

Lewin-Benham (2008) reflects on her experience with studios in the United States:

Studies look playful, but have a serious purpose—for children’s big ideas to meet respect, encouragement, and expectations that even bigger ideas are afoot. Every studio is different in its particulars because it reflects the interests and skills of its atelierista, the artist who runs it. (p. 57)
The types and variety of materials offered to the children in the *atelier* play an important role. Forman (1994) explains that each medium has a different affordance therefore allowing different languages to emerge. He defines an affordance as “the relationship between the transformable properties of a medium and the child’s desire to use that property to make symbols” (p. 38). Also, different materials allow children to express certain ideas more easily than others as a result of their physical properties. Depending on what the child wants to convey, certain materials may confine and constrict representation while other materials may offer more possibilities. Also, having a repertoire of multiple forms of representation allow children to select the form that best fits their thinking and learning styles (Trepanier-Street, 2000).

There were several reasons why Malaguzzi and the Reggio educators incorporated the *atelier* spaces in their schools. Malaguzzi describes the intent behind the *atelier* as a reaction to an education based on words and meaningless rituals (Gandini, 1998). The *atelier* provided children and educators an opportunity to try out different tools, materials and techniques. But essentially, the studio was designed as a catalyst for the hundred languages of children. Rinaldi (2006) adds that the role of the *atelierista* is quite significant by stating that “there is no creativity in the child if there is no creativity in the adult” (p. 120).

Preschool-aged children are capable of using symbols to represent their thinking by using drawing and other art forms (Trepanier-Street, 2000).
“Children’s development requires multiple opportunities for representing thinking because they permit children to “see” their thinking” (Trepanier-Street, 2000, p. 19).

The atelier is also an incubator for creative thinking. Malaguzzi believed strongly in development of creative thinking and its place in schools. Rinaldi (2006) defines creativity as “the ability to construct new connections between thoughts and objects that bring about innovation and change, taking known elements and creating new connections” (p. 117).

In Reggio Emilia, art is not seen as a separate part of the curriculum. Rather, art is using a hundred languages to communicate and experiencing the world in many different ways. As mentioned earlier, the theory of the hundred languages of children was created by Malaguzzi referring to all of the ways children learn and communicate their thinking, ideas, questions and feelings. Malaguzzi’s theory is based on relationships and communication; the interaction between knowledge, emotions and languages (Cavazzoni, Pini, Porani, & Renieri, 2007). In his poem, Malaguzzi argues that a child has a hundred ways of thinking, playing, speaking, listening, loving, singing, and understanding, but schools steal ninety-nine of them (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998).

The hundred languages are an interwoven component of the children’s educational experience and are not viewed as separate avenues of artistic expression or art education. These languages or the children’s symbolic representation may include words, movement, light and shadow, drawing, painting, building, sculpture, dramatic play, and/or music (Caldwell, 2003).
Cadwell (1997) explains that through these natural languages, children make their thinking visible and “have a right to use many materials in order to discover and to communicate what they know, understand, wonder about, question, feel, and imagine” (p. 5). Materials may include wire, paint, clay, and recycled items amongst others.

The range of expressive options children have available when they are encouraged to use a hundred languages is extraordinary. Lewin-Benham (2008) adds that “among the hundred languages are negotiating relationships, managing social situations expressing emotions rationally, and showing empathy” (p. 74). Edmiaston and Fitzgerald (2000) point out that the concept of a hundred languages is especially important in meeting the needs of children with disabilities because it allows them to express their understandings through a variety of symbolic representations.

The North American Reggio Emilia Alliance (NAREA) website explains that Reggio educators believe that the process of moving between languages is beneficial for children’s understanding and learning and therefore encourage children to use multiple languages to express their ideas on a particular topic (http://www.reggioalliance.org). Copple (2003) states that the children’s use of graphic representation is a defining characteristic of the Reggio Emilia philosophy. According to Rinaldi (2006), the power of the theory of the hundred languages is underestimated and undervalued and should be further developed.
Critiques of the Philosophy

Although the vast majority of literature about the Reggio Emilia philosophy is positive, the Reggio Emilia philosophy does have its critics. A common complaint of the philosophy from educators is that it is too complex to implement (Savoye, 2001). Implementing the Reggio philosophy does require a large time commitment from teachers. Along the same lines, another critique of the approach includes that the philosophy’s approach to curriculum planning is the most difficult aspect (Clyde, Miller, Sauer, & Liebert, 2006). Yet others find the philosophy hard to implement without structured or published curriculum guides. This in turn puts a lot of work on the classroom teacher’s shoulders without a guide to reference. Along with critiquing the difficulty of planning the curriculum, others feel that the curriculum lacks rigor or “academics.” Worksheets, rote memorization and direct instruction are not common instructional strategies that are used in the Reggio Emilia philosophy.

The Reggio Emilia philosophy is also more common in private schools (Savoye, 2001). One reason may be the focus on creativity, the arts, and flexibility in the curriculum. Also, as discussed earlier in the review of the literature, a large emphasis is put on environments in the Reggio Emilia schools. The cost associated with creating such beautiful environments may be problematic for public schools in which funds are limited and more feasible in private schools.
Savoye (2001) points out that the long-term impact of the philosophy on children is difficult to predict because it is still fairly new in the United States. There have not been any significant quantitative or long-term studies on the approach. Therefore, those who like numbers or quantitative evidence have no such proof.

**Previous Research**

The Reggio Emilia philosophy is difficult to study as it is very complex and it is not a definitive curriculum. Edwards (2005) explains that it is more of a theoretical and philosophical framework that offers possible educational approaches, based on the school and community context. As previously stated, the research on the Reggio Emilia philosophy has been dominated by qualitative studies. Previous doctoral research includes the following dissertations, all of which are qualitative studies:

- *Emergent Literacy Opportunities and Experiences in a Reggio Emilia-Inspired Preschool Program in the United States: A Qualitative Study*, by Carolyn Elverenli in 2002
- *Aesthetic Education for Young Children in Three Early Childhood Settings: Bank Street, Reggio Emilia, and Waldorf*, by Boo Yeun Lim in 2000
- *Teacherwork: A Journey to Recast the Reggio Emilia Approach for a Middle School Within the Context of Power, Politics, and Personalities*, by Lynn Hill in 1999

Other research includes a comparative study by Carolyn Pope Edwards in 2002 entitled: *Three Approaches from Europe: Waldorf, Montessori and Reggio Emilia*. A research study that utilized a mixed method case study and quantitative analysis, was conducted by Beth Erlich and Navaz Bhavnagri in 1994 entitled: *Teacher Change Using Reflective Practice When Attempting to Move Forward a Reggio Emilia Approach*. Currently, there are not any quantitative research studies on the Reggio Emilia approach.

In addition, there are not any qualitative research studies focused on Reggio-inspired studios in the United States. Numerous books and articles include the topic of Reggio-inspired studios, but there is only one scholarly book worth citing related to my research. *In the Spirit of the Studio*, edited by Lella Gandini, Lynn Hill, Louise Cadwell, and Charles Schwall, was published in 2005.
This book explores the presence of the Reggio Emilia philosophy in studios across the United States. My research study will stand-alone as the only qualitative research study focused on Reggio-inspired studios in the United States, with a particular focus on the theory of a hundred languages of children.

**Conclusion**

I have provided a contextual overview of the current state of early childhood education, showing how government funding is expanding universal access for preschool-aged children. I have discussed the current position of art in early childhood education, expressing the need for further exploration in this area. I have also summarized the Reggio Emilia philosophy to give the reader a foundational understanding of what this philosophy has to offer the field and how it differs from many practices currently enacted in preschool programs in the U.S. I also presented the reader with critiques and previous research about the Reggio Emilia philosophy. Next, in Chapter Three, I discuss the research method I employed in this study.
CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research in the field of early childhood education is under-realized and is a paradigm that has much to offer in regards to learning about the experiences of young children (Hatch and Barclay-McLaughlin, 2006). Qualitative research is a method based on exploring and understanding a social or human problem where the researcher builds a complex, holistic picture by analyzing words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducting the study in a natural setting (Creswell, 1998).

A qualitative method was chosen for this study for several reasons. First, qualitative research allowed me to understand the complexities of the studio and the lived experiences of children within their natural setting. “Qualitative researchers assume that social settings are unique, dynamic, and complex; they resist quantitative approaches that reduce complex settings to isolated and disconnected variables” (Hatch & Barclay-McLaughlin, 2006, p. 498). Quantitative methods would not be able to secure this type of rich and
multifaceted information. Second, I wanted to illuminate the detailed experiences of the children interacting with the studio and give them a voice in this research project. According to Lourdes Diaz Soto (2005), children make the best theorists if we take the time to listen to what they say. Third, context played a significant role in this research study. Qualitative research allows the context to be considered and valued. And finally, Clark (1990) adds that “people can and have been moved to take specific action, advocate change, and make consequential decisions inspired or influenced by reports of qualitative inquiry” (p. 338). My hope is that my research will become a provocation and catalyst for change regarding the role of art in early childhood settings.

**Educational Connoisseurship and Criticism**

Educational criticism and connoisseurship is a qualitative research method developed by Elliot Eisner and is widely used in educational research. The intent of this method is to improve education. I chose this research method for this reason and for its capability to reveal the type of information that would answer my research questions. In this method, the researcher submerges him or herself in an environment to gain perspective to then be able to offer the reader an interpretation and understanding of the educational experience. “Educational criticism as a form of qualitative research relies on the abilities of the researcher to study school life in much the same ways an art critic studies a painting or symphonic work” (Hatch, 2002, p. 29).
This method is a type of qualitative educational evaluation that has two parts, connoisseurship and creating criticisms. Connoisseurship is the art of appreciating qualities and relies heavily on perceptivity, which Eisner (1998) describes as the ability to experience and differentiate qualitative relationships. “Connoisseurship is the means through which we come to know the complexities, nuances, and subtleties of aspects of the world in which we have a special interest” (Eisner, 1998, p. 68).

Eisner (2002) states that “if one is to develop connoisseurship of wine, one must drink a great deal of wine” (p. 215). I began studying the Reggio Emilia philosophy about ten years ago. During those years I have been an early childhood teacher in a Reggio-inspired school, director of a Reggio-inspired infant/toddler center, director of a Reggio-inspired preschool, Reggio Emilia Curriculum Coordinator for a public school district, visited and studied in the schools in Reggio Emilia, Italy, attended numerous conferences about the philosophy, and presented locally and nationally about Reggio Emilia. But Eisner goes on to say that the amount of experience one has in a field is not necessarily an indicator of the level of connoisseurship one has achieved. Rather, one must be able to see and perceive instead of just looking and recognizing. However, for the sake of this educational criticism I do feel it is important to share my background, as I was able to use my prior knowledge when interpreting and analyzing the data.

Criticism, on the other hand, takes the private act of connoisseurship and “illuminates, interprets, and appraises the qualities that have been experienced”
Criticism is the art of disclosure as it gives the data a public audience and it is dependent on the material made available through connoisseurship. Eisner makes it clear that criticism is not negative in nature, but rather is the illumination of qualities or relationships so that a judgment of its value can be made. This research method allows the critic to appraise the educational value of what they are observing in the school settings in which they are trying to understand.

Overall, educational criticism and connoisseurship is a type of arts-based research method that is well suited for those interested in studying teachers and their teaching (Dotson, 2007) and is an ideal method for securing the data needed to answer my research questions.

The four dimensions of educational criticism that provide a framework for the critic are description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematics (Eisner, 1998). These dimensions form a system of inquiry that I used to guide my research process. The first dimension, description enables readers to visualize a setting that the critic is trying to help them understand. The critic does not write about everything happening in a situation, but rather focuses his or her attention and writes about what he or she chooses to attend to (Eisner, 2002). Description blends into the aspect of interpretation, as interpretation explains the why or how of the account in context. For each school that I observed, I offer a detailed description of the daily life of the studio, which includes instructional and curricular choices, child and teacher interactions, environmental conditions, and other pertinent characteristics.
Both artistic and factual, the descriptions I present the reader are composites of all my observations; that is, the activities, conversations, and events did not necessarily happen in the sequence provided—but they did happen at some point. I have synthesized my observations to recreate the daily life typical to each setting. Each quotation, conversation, experience, and activity described did occur at some point during my observations, as I take factual information and paint a written picture or story for the reader.

The description and interpretations are intertwined throughout the criticism. The purpose of interpretation is to utilize ideas or theories that help the critic apply meaning and understand what they have observed. Interpretations can be either intrinsic or extrinsic. Intrinsic interpretation focuses on finding meaning in patterns within a particular case, while extrinsic interpretation focuses on the research’s relationship to outside concepts and theories from disciplines such as history, politics, etc. (Dotson, 2007).

To help interpret the data I was collecting, I used Eisner’s (2002) three questions to guide my thinking: “What does the situation mean to those involved? How does this classroom operate? What ideas, concepts, or theories can be used to explain its major features?” (p. 229). I also applied my conceptual framework of the six dimensions of schooling in interpreting my data.

The third dimension evaluation judges and assesses the educational significance of what has been interpreted. Based on my interpretations and related literature and theories, I build my evaluation of the implementation of Reggio-inspired studios in the United States. The intent of educational criticism
is to contribute to the improvement of educational practice and therefore, through evaluation, I offer my criticism and implications.

And finally, thematics are recurring messages or themes that emerge in the criticism. These themes provide the reader with guidance for anticipating what may be found in other similar contexts (Urhmacher, 1993). By evaluating my data and finding themes, I am able to offer implications for early childhood education and the field of education in general.

**Research Questions and Study Design**

This study focuses on preschool-aged children who attend two Reggio-inspired schools in the United States and their experiences with the studio and studio teacher. Specifically, this study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. What is the role of a studio in a Reggio-inspired school?
2. What is happening in the studio?
3. What are children learning in this environment?
4. How does the studio cultivate children’s hundred languages?

There are many schools and early childhood programs in the United States inspired by the Reggio Emilia philosophy but the degree of implementation varies. In some programs, this influence is strong when educators have studied the philosophy and adapted the ideas to use in their context. In other cases, the
influence is more partial when only a few of the educators within a program embrace the philosophy and/or focus on only a few elements.

Therefore, I have created criteria for site selection in order to find contexts in which my research questions can be best answered. The criteria that guided my site selection included the following: 1) the school’s reputation in the field of early childhood in connection with the Reggio Emilia philosophy, 2) the school’s affiliation with the North American Reggio Emilia Alliance (NAREA), 3) presence in the literature regarding the adaptation of the Reggio Emilia philosophy, 4) the level of direct collaboration and exchange with the educators in Reggio Emilia, 5) the school’s philosophy, and 6) the amount of years the school has been implementing the Reggio Emilia philosophy.

The Sites and Participants

For this study, two school sites granted me access and permission to conduct my research. In order to gain access to these studios, I contacted the directors of two highly respected Reggio-inspired schools, one in Colorado and the other in Missouri. I received written permission from their school directors to complete my study at their schools.

The Boulder Journey School is a private preschool that serves over 200 children, from six-weeks to six-years-old, in a total of fourteen classrooms. There are five classrooms that serve preschool children, ages three- to five-years-old. The St. Michael School is a private school that serves 130 students, from three-years-old to sixth grade. The St. Michael School has one classroom of preschool-aged children. I have previously visited the Boulder Journey School on four
different occasions, through workshops and study tours offered by the school. I had never visited the St. Michael School prior to this study.

The St. Michael School is a private Episcopal school for children of all faiths in a suburb of St. Louis, Missouri. This school is accredited through the Independent Schools Association of the Central States. The majority of students who attend The St. Michael School are Caucasian, whereas 26% of the student population is minority. Tuition per school year is approximately $12,000. The St. Michael School is a commuter school, as the student population is drawn from thirty zip codes in the St. Louis Metro area. The St. Michael School staffs eighteen faculty members who average sixteen years of teaching experience.

The Boulder Journey School is located in a city at the foothills of the Colorado Rocky Mountains. It is a full-day, year-round private school that welcomes over 200 children ages six-weeks through six-years. Tuition per school year is approximately $13,660 but varies on the age and schedule of the child. The physical layout of the school encompasses fourteen classrooms. The teaching faculty includes 17 full-time mentor teachers who have a Master’s degree in education and a Colorado Teaching License and approximately 20 part-time intern teachers each year who have a Bachelor’s degree and are enrolled in the teacher education program, working on their Master’s degree. Although not officially documented, based on my observations the majority of students who attend the Boulder Journey School are Caucasian.

Within each school I observed children primarily in the studio, with additional observations throughout the schools. I spent approximately ten days at
each school. I assumed the role of a participant observer during my research study, which allowed me to observe the children and teachers in their natural environment. I was responsible for the gathering of data.

Data Collection

The collection of data in this study includes observations, formal and informal interviews and the collection of artifacts. Throughout my data collection, I paid close attention to reoccurring themes as well as attending to aberrations or contradictory information.

The most important data source for educational connoisseurship is the observation of teachers and classroom life (Eisner, 1998). My observations attended to not only the practices of the studio teacher and the interaction with children, but the physical environment as well. Within each school I observed three- to five-year-old children primarily in the studio, with additional observations in the children’s main classroom. On occasion, at the Boulder Journey School, I was able to observe even younger children—ranging in age from six-weeks to five-years-old. I also shadowed the studio teachers outside of the studio during visits in the classrooms and in meetings with teachers and administrators. In addition, I observed what was happening around the school on a general level and this included walking the halls and visiting various classrooms.

My primary function was to observe and record the experiences of the children in the studio and their interactions with their studio teacher. My observations were recorded in the form of field notes and include precise details
of what I was observing and notes regarding my thoughts about what I was seeing.

I observed at each school for ten days. Teachers at each site welcomed me into their school with open arms and were very interested in participating in my research study. School administrators and teachers at both sites were open to sharing information and helping with my research. I felt like it was an ideal environment to conduct my research study.

The first day at each site, the children’s curiosity pursued my presence by asking me who I was and what I was doing. After the first day or so, I seemed to blend into the environment and the children and teachers became accustomed to my presence. Generally, I sat at or near the table (or space) where the children were working and took handwritten notes. During my studio observations, I was careful to record the dialogue and interaction not only between the studio teacher and the children, but also between the children themselves to capture an authentic portrayal of their experiences in the studio. Over the course of my observations, I recorded detailed descriptions of the studio. I noted the types of materials and tools, displays, documentation, arrangement of the furniture, and other aspects of the physical environment.

Each day I typed my handwritten observations on my computer, which gave me the opportunity to add any details that I might have missed or to elaborate on something noted in my journal.

I conducted both informal and formal interviews in person, at the school sites. Interviewing is a mode of inquiry that allows the researcher to understand
the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience (Seidman, 1998). One of the primary concerns of qualitative researchers is to capture the insider perspective and interviewing is one way to do this (Hatch & Barclay-McLaughlin, 2006). Eisner (1998) contends that the interview is a powerful way to understand how people perceive situations in which they work.

Formal and informal interviews were conducted with the studio teachers, administrators and several of children to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences with the art studio. I conducted one formal interview with each studio teacher, in addition to numerous informal interviews throughout my time at their schools. When conducting the formal interviews, I used a semi-structured interview protocol with open-ended questions. With permission of the participants, I audio-taped the interviews. Informal interviews included casual conversations with children, teachers, administrators, parents and other school personnel throughout my visits.

The structure of my interviews with children varied by school site. Since I was an outsider coming in, I first asked the teachers at each school for recommendations of working with their young children. At The St. Michael School, I conducted formal interviews with small groups of children—approximately two to three children in a group. Since there is only one class of preschool children at The St. Michael School, I was able to build up rapport with the children after spending time with them in their natural environment.

After spending a week in the classroom at The St. Michael School I interviewed a total of ten children, four boys and six girls, all of whom had
parental consent. Even though the student population is not very diverse at this school, I interviewed children ranging in age from three-years to five-years-old, two of the children I interviewed were born in England and another child was adopted from Russia who also had speech and language difficulties. The interviews were conducted in the hallway outside of the children’s classroom at a round table that was a familiar setting to them. I provided the children with paper and drawing utensils in the case that drawing might help them express their thinking more clearly. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. I also conducted informal interviews before and after school and during transition activities with the children.

At the Boulder Journey School I did not conduct formal interviews with the children. The Boulder Journey School has a total of fourteen classrooms. Since I was spending my time in the studio, I observed three classrooms a day—each for an hour. I was not able to spend as much time with the children in their classrooms (as I did at The St. Michael School) to be able to establish rapport with the children. I decided not to conduct formal interviews, but rather record their conversations during studio time and ask them informal questions when the opportunity was right. I noted the children’s reactions to classroom experiences and their comments and conversations before, during and after an activity. The abundant and detailed documentation, throughout the entire school, proved to be just as important as the interviewing.

Artifact collection was another tool that I used in collecting data. The purpose of connoisseurship is to understand what is happening, so any data source
that can help make sense of the situation is an appropriate resource (Eisner, 1998). I collected materials from each school such as brochures, lesson planning documents, informational booklets, newsletters, photocopies of the children’s artwork, and other items that I deemed beneficial. I also took photographs of the children’s artwork.

Documentation is an integral component of the Reggio Emilia philosophy and was highly utilized at each school site. Documentation is a tool that captures, records, and illuminates the children’s experiences to make their learning visible. At both the Boulder Journey School and The St. Michael School, documentation was present in many different forms such as photographs of process and product, transcriptions of children’s conversations, student work, video footage, artifacts created by the children, writing samples, and audio recordings. Both sites also created large, wall-size panels to display the work done by the children and teachers. Some of the panels I observed were created years ago and were left up in the school to serve as a historical archive. These panels and other forms of documentation were valuable sources of data for my study.

Data Analysis

I used multiple strategies when analyzing the data. Educational criticism “assumes that multiple realities exist, the researcher is portraying only one, and researcher interpretation is at the center of analysis procedures” (Hatch, 2002, p. 29). The overall pattern of data analysis was inductive, moving from specifics to generalizations. First I typed my field notes on a daily basis, which re-engaged
me in the material I experienced earlier that day. Second, I personally transcribed all interviews, which again re-engaged me with the data.

I immersed myself in the data and used a coding system for themes that re-occurred. By examining my field notes I looked for indicators of codes in events and behavior and coded them on the document. Creswell (1998) recommends starting with a short list of tentative codes (5-6 codes), expanding the number of codes when reviewing and re-reviewing data (no more than 25-30 codes), and reducing that number in the end (roughly 5-6 codes) in writing the narrative. When I felt I had a good sense of what was happening in the studio and data had become redundant, I knew I had hit the point of saturation.

Data collection and data analysis were simultaneous activities rather than separate activities. I typed my field notes and transcribed my interviews daily after each school visit. This early analysis helped me to shape my data collection the following day. I worked with the data first by analyzing and coding my field notes, interview transcriptions, photographs and documents. From the coding, I came up with general themes. My beginning codes and categories were tentative and flexible, becoming more sophisticated as my analysis progressed.

Finally, I used my conceptual framework of the six dimensions of schooling to help in my data analysis. These six dimensions are the intentional, structural, curricular, pedagogical, evaluative (Eisner, 1998) and aesthetic (Uhrmacher, 1991). This framework helped guide my observations, interviews, interpretations, and analysis. However, even with this framework in mind, I was
open to data that did not fit within this framework to ensure that I did not miss anything of potential significance. Eisner (1998) makes the point:

Knowing what to look for makes the search more efficient. At the same time, knowing what to look for can make us less likely to see things that were not a part of our expectations. (p. 98)

Combined, these strategies guided my collection and analysis of data while allowing for data to emerge from my interactions within the setting. From data collected from observations, interviews, and artifacts ―educational critics construct stories or portraits of what they experienced and understood in the settings explored‖ (Hatch, 2002, p. 29). Since qualitative research seeks to understand the perspectives of the participants (Hatch, 2002), my report contains the perspectives and voices of those whom I have studied.

Validity

There are three main ways an educational critic can support the validity of his or her study. First structural corroboration, like the process of triangulation, is a means through which multiple types of data are related to each other to either support or contradict the validity of one’s findings (Eisner, 1998). These data comes from direct observations of the setting, interviews, and the analysis of artifacts. Educational critics seek the convergence of evidence that establishes credibility and allows the researcher to feel confident about their observations, interpretations, and conclusions.

Although structural corroboration allows the researcher to compare data from multiple sources in their study, one researcher might interpret the same
event differently from another. Therefore, consensual validation as Eisner (1998) explains “is not secured by seeking consensus among critics, but by considering the reason critics give the descriptions they provide, the cogency of their arguments, the incisiveness of their observations, the coherence of the case, and, undoubtedly, the elegance of the language” (p. 112). For this purpose, I shared my studio descriptions or stories with the teachers and administrators whose studios I studied as a way of securing member checking. Member checking is the process of taking the data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking them if the my descriptions are plausible—asking them to check what I had written about them and my observations.

Referential adequacy is the third method. Eisner (1998) explains, “an educational critic’s work is referentially adequate when readers are able to see what they would have missed without the critic’s observations” (p.114). Also, after reading an educational criticism, readers should be able to go into similar contexts and expect to see aspects of what the critic has portrayed.

**About the Researcher**

In this study I was the instrument of data collection and analysis. Since educational criticism is an evaluative and judgmental process, the question arises to whether or not I, the researcher, should state my own values in advance. Eisner (2002) presents arguments for both sides of the debate and I concur with his idea that the values I hold will permeate my writing and will become clear to the reader without explicitly stating them. My task as the researcher is to portray my
experiences in terms of what I have perceived and use multiple forms of data to support what I have found.

With this said, the reader may still find it beneficial to understand my background in order to have a better understanding of my subjectivity and motives behind my interpretations. Therefore, I will reveal several things about myself. My interest in the Reggio Emilia philosophy was sparked during my teacher education program at Butler University. A professor of mine, Dr. Ena Shelley, had traveled to the schools in Reggio Emilia and shared her experiences with her education students, myself one of them. During my undergraduate degree, I visited many Reggio-inspired programs and found myself immersed in the literature to learn more.

My interest has continued to grow over the past ten years, as I have attended numerous conferences around the country focused on the Reggio Emilia approach in attempts to deepen my understanding of the philosophy. I have presented both locally and nationally about the approach. My interest has also taken me to Reggio Emilia, Italy, to see the schools first hand.

My experience in the field includes teaching four and five-year-old children in a Reggio-inspired program. I have also directed a Reggio-inspired infant-toddler center, a Reggio-inspired preschool center and served as a Reggio Emilia Curriculum Coordinator for a public school district. These experiences have challenged me to implement the philosophy with children ages two-months to five-years-old. From the perspective of being a teacher, school director, and
curriculum coordinator, I have developed a much greater understanding of the role that art and aesthetics play in educating young children.

Even though I am an advocate for the Reggio Emilia philosophy, I consciously strived to reach as unbiased perspective as possible during this study. There is no benefit to the reader to receive falsified or inflated interpretations, criticisms or conclusions. The purpose of educational criticisms and this particular study is to improve education. The only way to improve education is by using evidence-based research and therefore the interpretations and conclusions derived in this study are rooted in the data collected.

I will state that one of my biases is that I believe that the arts and aesthetics play a significant role in the education of children and that it is every child’s right to have these types of experiences. As I do not believe there is one right way to do this, I do believe that certain approaches such as the Reggio Emilia philosophy provide great learning opportunities for educators and researchers. Ultimately, I am conducting this research so that others may learn and benefit from the results of my study.

Who May Benefit from this Study?

The worthiness of this study (Miles & Huberman, 1994) is exemplified in the large audience it reaches. Those who may benefit from this study include: children, early childhood educators and administrators, parents, teacher educators, museum educators, policymakers, and researchers. Educational criticism is an educational research method, meaning that it seeks to provide understanding for
educational improvement (Eisner, 1998). Implications and lessons learned from this study may become catalysts for or support current education reform initiatives. New (2007) discusses how change is possible when we put into practice ideas from the Reggio Emilia philosophy and describes it as “the sort of school reform that Dewey dreamed of, that Malaguzzi fought for, and that the 21st century desperately needs” (p. 12).
CHAPTER FOUR

Descriptions of Reggio-inspired Studios

Introduction

To portray what took place in two different Reggio-inspired studios that I observed, I have divided the following descriptions into four sections: La Finestra Aperta, La Dimensione Intenzione, La Dimensione Strutturale, and La Routine Giornaliera. The first section, La Finestra Aperta means “open window” and provides the reader with a contextual and descriptive introduction into each school and studio. The second section, La Dimensione Intenzionale or “intentional dimension” uses Eisner’s intentional dimension of schooling to help describe the purpose of the studio and studio teacher. The third section, La Dimensione Strutturale or “structural dimension” looks at the physical affordances of the studio that includes materials available to children, how time in the studio is managed, and how the work in the studio connects with the children’s primary classroom. The final section, La Routine Giornaliera meaning the “daily life” or “regular daily routine” utilizes the pedagogical, curricular, evaluative, and aesthetic dimensions of schooling. I use vignettes from each of the schools to illuminate the experiences of children within each setting.
The St. Michael School

*La Finestra Aperta: A Contextual and Descriptive Introduction*

In order to understand the context of the studios, first it is important to understand the school context. Following the introduction of the school, I provide a glimpse into the studio and a description of the studio teacher at each school.

I spent the first two weeks of November 2009 collecting my data at the St. Michael School. The St. Michael School is a private Episcopal school for children of all faiths in a suburb of St. Louis, Missouri. The exterior of the school exudes a royal feel, with its elegant stonework and metal gates. The St. Michael School lies in the middle of a well-to-do neighborhood, as large lavish two-story houses are lined up one after the other. The tree-lined streets and extravagant houses create a picturesque sight.

The St. Michael School is accredited through the Independent Schools Association of the Central States and operates a preschool and elementary program, grades Pre-K through 6th grade. The majority of students who attend The St. Michael School are Caucasian, whereas 26% of the student population is minority. Tuition per school year is approximately $12,000. The St. Michael School is a commuter school, as the student population is drawn from thirty zip codes in the St. Louis Metro area. One hundred and thirty children attend The St. Michael School with eighteen faculty members, who average sixteen years of teaching experience.
A leader in the field of education, The St. Michael School has been profiled on CNN as an example of effective innovation in educational practice. More than 4,500 educators from around the world have visited The St. Michael School in the last ten years. The school’s curricular approach has evolved from the educational philosophy of Reggio Emilia and strives to “educate children for life.” As stated on the school’s website and informational brochure, “The Archway Center student becomes: 1) a thinker who listens, 2) an inquirer who negotiates, 3) an inventor who collaborates, and 4) an individual who believes in himself or herself.”

Figure 1

Exterior of The St. Michael School

Tucked away in the basement of the church building, one would not expect to find such the oasis that exists at The St. Michael School. The preschool and kindergarten rooms are located on the basement level of the building.
entering the studio, one immediately notices the wall of windows that connect the Junior Kindergarten class to the studio. What would presumably be a dark and secluded room, the windows add a sense of transparency and light into the studio. One rectangle table and eight yellow chairs rest upon the gray tile floor. One’s eye travels around the room to notice shelves with clay sculptures, weavings, and wire sculptures made by the children. A documentation panel about investigating liquids and solids is posted above the light table.

A wire shelf houses paper, foil, tissue paper, ribbon, and wire that are organized for easy, accessible use by the children. Crayons, colored pencils, and markers of various sizes are sorted by color in small glass jars. A combination of baskets and clear glass jars display seashells, clay tools, leaves, dried flowers and three-dimensional cardboard shapes. A mobile hangs from the ceiling comprised of a CD, toothpaste box, plexi-glass, silver metal spoon, tin can lid, silver streamers, beads strung on a wire, mirror, computer parts and a plastic wind catcher. A paint cart with gallons of paint on the bottom and individual glass jars of paint on top is parked next to a wooden floor easel.

A small fountain, which the kids refer to as the pond, offers the children the opportunity to engage in water play in the studio. It is full of seashells and small plastic objects such as a scuba diver, octopus and fish. There is a wall-size chalkboard that extends from the floor up. Hanging from the ceiling is a white cloth screen, tied up on a wooden plank that can be untied and used for shadow play or light exploration. There is a jar of bulletin board borders cut up into
strips, a basket full of colored yarn, a basket of sticks, and multiple baskets and jars full of small squares of ribbon and paper.

I notice small pieces of paper, each with a letter of the alphabet, taped in various places around the studio. I make a note to ask about this later. Above the computer is a poster advertising the Hundred Language Exhibit, when it was in St. Louis in 2001. Near the door to the studio is a documentation panel that states:

Experiences with Materials in the Studio and Mini-Studio

Clay       Collage
Wire       Chalk and Charcoal
Paint      Drawing
Glue       Sewing

Also on this panel are tempera paintings, photos of process, chalk drawings, paint and chalk works, sewing works, and wire sculptures on display.
This photo shows the light table and an example of a documentation panel inside the studio
Figure 3

Display of materials inside the studio
In addition the main studio, there is a mini-studio inside of the Junior Kindergarten classroom. The mini-studio contains many of the same materials as found in the large, main studio. Karen, the Curriculum Coordinator explains to me that in Reggio, one of the things they decided to do was to make the mini-studio a parallel with the large studio.

During my interviews with the children, I asked them to draw a picture of the studio. Since the children I was interviewing ranged in age from three- to five-years-old and were still developing their verbal communication skills, I
wanted to offer them another way to express their thinking and ideas. Lewin-Benham (2008) explains that languages, such as drawing, are equally important as other forms of communication. Below are a few of the children’s drawings of the studio.

Figure 5

Figure 6
Figure 7
Mr. Chuck Schwall is the studio teacher for the three-, four- and five-year-old children and has worked at the St. Michael School for the past fifteen years. For this study, I have not given Mr. Schwall a pseudonym as I feel it would not be appropriate. Mr. Schwall has extensively studied the educational system in Reggio Emilia and has co-authored a book regarding the Reggio Emilia philosophy and studios. I am not alone in viewing him as an expert in the field of early childhood education and the Reggio Emilia philosophy, specifically pertaining to studios, and he should be recognized as such in this study. Mr. Schwall has given me permission to use his real name and I have chosen to refer to Mr. Chuck Schwall by his first name from this point forward, as that is how his students and co-workers reference him.
In my eyes, Chuck is a true rarity in the field of early childhood education. Chuck bridges two worlds, as he is a teacher by day and a painter by night. He received his M.F.A. from Washington University in 1991 and continues to pursue his artistic talents as a painter.

“Art has always been my thing. I knew from an early age I’d go to art school. I liked photography, but couldn’t leave painting,” Chuck tells me. His paintings have been showcased at the Contemporary Art Museum and Daum Museum of Contemporary Arts, just to name a few.

Figure 8

Child drawing of Chuck

Now, meet Chuck Schwall. Intelligent, enthusiastic, and vibrant are only a few words that describe Chuck. A man of casual attire, Chuck can typically be seen wearing blue jeans, black tennis shoes, a t-shirt with buttons at the top, glasses, and a blue and white striped apron. He has a very personable personality that he shares with all of whom he comes in contact with: children, teachers,
administrators and myself. His willingness to share his ideas and thinking is appreciated by all—I especially was thankful not only for purposes of this research study, but for my overall learning and understanding.

Chuck is married; to an artist I might add. He and his wife share a studio space downtown St. Louis which I had the pleasure to visit one Saturday afternoon. It was fascinating to get a glimpse into his world outside of school and see how art and creativity penetrate his professional and personal life. His personal studio is full of seashells from around the world and a collection of plants. Chuck tells me that the shapes of plant leaves and the shapes found inside of seashells inspires him with his painting. Chuck has one of his paintings on display in the studio at The St. Michael School.

Chuck is a creative thinker if I ever saw one. During an interview, Chuck described himself as a person who has a commitment to practicing creativity in his personal life and that he carries over his experiences as a creative person into his work with the children at The St. Michael School. I found him provocative in the manner in which his conversations got one’s wheels turning in their mind. I left each and every conversation with questions and the immediate urge to write down every word he said. His natural ability to bridge and connect ideas from many different disciplines was remarkable.
La Dimensione Intenzionale

The intentional dimension investigates the aims and goals of the educational endeavor. Near the entrance of the studio door, a documentation panel clearly describes the purpose of the studio. The intentions of the physical environment and of the studio teacher are stated as:

The studio (atelier) serves several purposes in the school. First, it is a place for the use and understanding of materials. It gives children opportunities to explore and become experts with materials in a place that is designated for this purpose. The atelier is a workshop for relationships among materials, experiences, ideas, theories, emotions, new understandings, and multiple ways of communication.

It is essential that the contents of the studio offer children many materials and languages with which to express and communicate. Everything that children carry inside themselves: their thoughts, knowledge, creativity, emotions, dreams, fantasies, wonderings,
and ideas, is all very precious and rich. Materials provide unique ways of expressing and communicating.

Children interact with the materials in their environment to communicate their ideas and feelings. They will have different sensitivities to various materials based on their individual personalities, attitudes, and knowledge. This is at the heart of the reason for an atelier. It causes us to reconsider the types, and quality of materials we offer children.

The studio is also a place of research and documentation. Teachers use the studio (as well as other parts of the school environment) to extensively research children’s learning processes. It provides one setting for teachers to actively participate in observation, documentation and interpretation. As a center for documentation tools and strategies, the studio promotes documentation as communication and facilitates an “attitude of research” throughout the school community.

This documentation panel clearly communicates the goals and aims of the studio, but I wanted to probe a bit further for additional information. During an interview with Karen, the Curriculum Coordinator, I asked her to tell me about important aspects of the studio. Karen explained that having good quality art materials are the key:

I think you could probably have this program without having an art studio, but I think that having rich grown-up materials for children to use, scissors that really cut, good quality colored pencils, good quality markers, lots of paper, good quality water colors—is really important.

I found it interesting that Karen said that such a program could probably exist without having a defined studio space. That led my thinking to the understanding that it is not only the materials that count, but also what is happening in the studio that is worth studying.
During an interview with Chuck, he told me that the studio has to connect; it cannot be isolated from the classroom and the daily life of the children and teachers. He described the role of the studio teacher as an active job, as you have to initiate, but that it is also receptive. Chuck explains:

You really have to start by listening and opening yourself up rather than an art curriculum that is completely closed. You have to open up to the teacher’s point of view and take that into what you are doing. And be open to that. I have to let a little bit go of my agenda knowing it will still be there in the new place. But letting go and letting those things come back in a new form that I couldn’t have previously seen.

**La Dimensione Strutturale**

The structural dimension looks at how time, space, roles and subject matter are used. This dimension considers how time in the studio is managed and how the work in the studio connects with the children’s primary classroom. I chose not to talk about the physical affordances of the art studio in this section, as I have elaborated about this in the previous section.

The preschool classroom at The St. Michael School is referred to as Junior Kindergarten, which encompasses children ages three- to five-years-old. Studio time in the Junior Kindergarten class usually begins in a small group, four children and Chuck, and as the children finish the group activity led by Chuck they then break out into their own individual
activities. The children go back and forth, coming together as a group and going their own way.

The grouping of children in the studio is pre-arranged. The classroom teachers and Chuck group children together by who they think might provoke one another’s thinking when introducing new materials or trying new things, not by ability or age. Chuck tells me that they are working on becoming more flexible, tailoring the group configurations to the children’s interests as the year goes on. Chuck introduces materials and lets the children run with them for about a week. According to Chuck, around November and December he reflects on the school year in regards to what kinds of experiences the children have had with materials. His goal is to have provided children with lots of experiences with materials by this point in the year.

There is a strong connection between the work done in the studio and the children’s main classroom. The wall between the studio and the Junior Kindergarten classroom is a glass wall, compiled of windows. This glass wall represents the transparency and connection between the work done in the classroom and studio. Karen, the Curriculum Coordinator, tells me during an interview:

I’m sad for kids who go to art class in a separate room and the art teacher never figures out what they are doing in their classroom that connects. And just like there is a glass wall here between the studio and the classroom, that kind of is a metaphor for the art and the rest of the classroom.
When I asked Chuck to tell me about how and if the studio connects to the children’s main classroom, he said:

I think the studio has to connect. That’s what it is about. The studio has to not be isolated. That’s the most important thing. Vea³ always talks about connectivity. And that’s what it’s about. The studio has to find ways to connect to the classroom and daily life and the kids and the teachers. It has to really, they have to feel it. They have to know it is pushing them along or helping them along. Or, enriching their lives.

This is an important point that Chuck raises. Many “art classrooms” in the U.S. operate in isolation. Most of the time, the work done in art class has nothing to do with what the children are working on in their main classroom. And that is, if preschool children even have the opportunity to attend an art class.

Collaboration between Chuck, Karen and the Junior Kindergarten teachers is quite strong. Chuck has planning time with the teachers one morning a week. In Reggio Emilia they have a pedagogista or pedagogical coordinator who serves as a consultant and offers support for teachers, which is similar to Karen’s role at the Archway Center.

In regards to Chuck’s role with the other teachers, Karen explains that:

He is the third person on the team when we plan. What is he going to do, what is the small group teacher going to do that week, what are we going to document, what are we going to do. He’s just not tied to the studio.

This is an important point, as many art teachers are not so closely involved in the children’s classroom—if they are at all.

³ Vea Vecchi is an atelierista at the Diana School in Reggio Emilia, Italy.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role at The St. Michael School</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chuck Schwall</td>
<td>Studio Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen Schneider</td>
<td>Curriculum Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kara Richards</td>
<td>Junior Kindergarten Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleen Begley</td>
<td>Junior Kindergarten Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amber, Ashley, Danika,</td>
<td>Children in the Junior Kindergarten Class, ages 3-5 years old.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer, Jimmy, Lacey,</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lincoln, Leo, Lesley,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louie, Luke, Ryan,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadhana (pseudonyms)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth Mosher</td>
<td>Headmaster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brenda Fyfe</td>
<td>Dean, College of Education Webser University</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
To describe what the children experience on a day-to-day basis, I utilized four dimensions of schooling: pedagogy, curriculum, evaluation and aesthetic. These dimensions are interconnected and influence the type of experiences children have. The curricular dimension refers to the purpose of the curriculum. The pedagogical dimension looks at how the content is mediated. The evaluative dimension refers to the multiple ways in which teachers assess the children’s learning. Finally, the aesthetic dimension considers the type of sensory experiences that the children have. These dimensions are woven throughout the following descriptions.

*Everything has a Smell*

The hallways and classrooms are full of documentation, showcasing the work of the children over the years. I spent many mornings wondering in the hallways, reading and learning about the history of the young children at The St. Michael School. I was struck by the creative, rich and meaningful projects that the children have been and are currently engaged in. What may seem like simple or nonsense learning is actually something much deeper. These in-depth, long-term projects tap into the children’s interests, provoke them to think in new ways and engage them in a joyful experience.

Projects supported by the studio, not typical of projects seen in other more traditional preschool centers, are not scripted and would not be likely to be found
in a curriculum guide book. Examples of topics and projects explored by these preschool children, as captured by documentation include:

- Playing in the Dirt
- The Joy of Playing in Water
- Building a Bridge: Inside and Out
- Painting Stories about Water: An Inspiration from the Pulitzer Foundation’s Water Exhibit
- Interpretations of Water
- What do Plants Need? Children’s Ideas and Theories

To illustrate this point further, walking down the hallway between the Junior Kindergarten and Kindergarten classrooms I came across a documentation panel entitled “Everything Has a Smell.” The compilation of panels on the wall documented a project about finding scents outdoors that the four- and five-year-old children had previously investigated. According to the panel, one winter the children invented a game of searching for different scents in the school environment. The teachers’ noticed the children’s excitement and enthusiasm, which led the teachers’ to hypothesize what would the children do if they extended their search for scents outdoors. Some of the teachers’ beginning questions included:

- How do children perceive scent?
- What are ways children can discover to communicate their perceptions of scent?
- What role does scent play for children in their understanding of the world around them?
What languages and materials can support children’s explorations of scents?

I would like to point out to the reader the meaningful questions the teachers brainstormed at the beginning of the project. During my visit to Reggio Emilia, Italy, Sergio Spaggiari stated that “learning begins with questions, problems, and difficulties. From questions, research and curiosity is born.” Spaggiari goes on to say, “but history is about schools giving answers. Schools give answers to those who don’t even ask.” As teachers, are we giving students the answers or are we nourishing their curiosity to find the answers themselves?

Next, the children went on walks outside and some of their observations included:

- The tree smells like a maple tree.
- This tree smells like butterscotch.
- It’s a potato tree.
- The green part (moss) smells different.
- It smells like mustard to me. (smelling wild onion)
- It smells like spring! (smelling grass)

Krechevsky & Stork (2000) point out that “creating or finding experiences that will stimulate excitement, curiosity and joy in children and adults is a fundamental part of teaching in the Reggio view” (p. 70). Not only are these children having fun, but they are also developing and practicing their language

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4 Sergio Spaggiari is the Director of Education in the Municipality of Reggio Emilia.
skills. These children are using similes to compare the smells of nature to things that they are familiar with.

Another example of an interesting project that I learned about from a documentation panel on the wall was entitled “Anything you want to be Blue can be Blue.” This panel describes a project the children did about “experiencing blue” while on walks and “through the languages of painting and drawing.” The teachers observed that a number of children were interested in the colors turquoise and blue. The teachers wondered if the children would like to explore these colors inside and outside of the school building. In small groups, the children searched for things that were blue and green by walking around the school building. Outside, the children found things that were blue such as: signs, bushes, shirts, trees, markers, maps, water, fish, dresses, light bulbs, flowers and leaves.

After searching for colors, the children had opportunities to paint at the easel with a variety of blue, green and purple paints and their choice of several colors of paper. As documented, several of the children told stories about their paintings. Some of their stories included:

- I drew a mountain, made a beach, and painted green water and fake grass.
- I am making something blue and brown and purple. It’s something inside my body. It’s something that helps you breathe.
- I made a house with a chimney. There was a mouse and it went into the house. There is a door so the mouse can get in.

This example shows the power that painting plays in children’s language and vocabulary develop. Would these children have been able to “tell these
stories” or share these hypotheses without the medium of paint? Maybe, maybe not. Lewin-Benham (2008) explains that when preschool-age children draw or paint an idea, it makes it easier for them to discuss. “When children transform observations into concrete form, they provide pictures of how they are thinking” (Lewin-Benham, 2008, p. 58). This then provides a basis for a conversation between children, teachers, and the painting.

*Painting the World*

Back in the studio, Chuck is walking around getting supplies ready for today’s studio appointment. Chuck points out that he and the teachers collaboratively decided which materials to introduce to the children. This happens throughout the year, but is especially important during the beginning of the school year when children are learning new techniques and experimenting with materials. Today’s experience, watercolor paints. Watercolor paints were also available in the mini-studio in the children’s main classroom, so children do not only experience the materials in the studio.

Four children between the ages of three and five enter the studio. Sadhana, Ryan, Danika, and Jimmy sit down at the table. The kids talk about how they are feeling and are eager to tell Chuck about their weekend—since it is a Monday morning.

“Let me sit down and then I’ll listen,” Chuck tells the children. The children are all eagerly talking to Chuck and each other at the same time.
“I like to listen to all of the things you have to say,” Chuck says as the conversation has evolved from talking about the weekend to colors. I immediately sense that this is a caring environment and that the children like their teacher, Chuck. It is also apparent that Chuck genuinely cares about what the children are telling him, as he listens to each child and gives them a comment in return.

“I like the color pink, purple, and red,” Sadhana expresses. The children are all still talking and Chuck asks Jimmy if he would like to say something, as he has not have a chance to talk yet.

Jimmy says, “I like the color blue.”

Now that all of the children have had an opportunity to talk with Chuck, it is time to start the project Chuck has planned for today’s studio time. Chuck explains to the group that they are going to be using watercolor paints today.

“You can put anything you want on the painting. You can paint something you like… last month we did watercolor painting, but I want to remind you about it. Jimmy, I need your eyes over here,” Chuck tells them. All of the children listen attentively, with their eyes on Chuck.

“Sometimes children go too fast and don’t get enough paint. See how it’s going up into the bristles? Can you see the purple inside that brush? Now it’s going on the paper. Tickle the paper. Isn’t that nice?” Chuck says as he demonstrates with a paintbrush. Chuck puts water in each of the colors to get them wet. Each child gets a glass jar with a big, medium and small brush.
“I want you to rub the paint. You don’t have to push really hard. When you think you’ve got enough, you can move to the paper,” Chuck says. Sitting at the table with the children, Chuck demonstrates how to use the brushes and offers individual help where needed.

“You can make a fat line,” Chuck tells the children.

“A snake!” yells Sadhana.

“A fat snake!” exclaims Danika. Chuck agrees by nodding his head and then he paints a circle on his piece of paper.

“You can go back and get more paint. What should I do if I want to get red?” Chuck asks the group of children.

“Swish it in the water and put it in the red,” says Danika. Chuck agrees and shows the children how to do this.

“You can put colors inside of colors,” Chuck says as he offers the children some ideas of what they can do with the watercolor paints.

“Maybe you could put it in that space,” responds Ryan and points to a blank space on the paper.

“We could do a stripe,” Chuck offers.

“If you make a puddle of water, then you can put colors inside of the colors. It’s called ‘wet on wet.’ What does it look like?” Chuck asks the children in response to the paint on his paper. The children’s responses include dragon skin, a smiley face with lots of eyes, and an Easter egg. This exemplifies a statement from Lewin-Benham (2008), explaining that studio teachers understand how materials behave, by seeing unique relationships among color, shape, and
During this painting activity, Chuck was passing his knowledge of how watercolor paints behave onto his young students so that they would then be able to use the watercolor paints as a medium to express their ideas in a more effective way. Chuck was teaching the children the potential of watercolor paints.

“When you work with watercolors, it goes into places you don’t think and you go with it,” Chuck tells the children.

“Yours is so pretty!” Sadhana tells Chuck in reference to his painting.

“Yours will be pretty too,” Chuck tells her. The children start calling out different ideas of things to make such as an alien, snake, and fireworks. Chuck hands each child a piece of watercolor paper.

“Ryan, you might want to move into that seat so you can reach, but I’ll let you decide,” Chuck suggests. Sadhana comes over to me, looks in my notebook and tells me that she is four years old and that she is from India. I observe that Sadhana is very verbal and likes to share her ideas with her classmates and teachers.

The children begin exploring and painting with the watercolors.

“Let’s see what we can paint today,” Chuck says.

“I made a puddle of water,” Jimmy says referring to his painting.

“Can you put color in it?” Chuck asks.

“Mine is like fireworks,” Danika states.

“Mine too!” says Sadhana.

“Do you like my painting Chuck?” Danika asks.
“Yes, it is full of interesting things.” Danika is blowing the paints on her paper.

“Why are you blowing the paints?” Chuck asks.

“It gets bigger,” Danika replies.

“Does it work?” Chuck asks her. Danika responds that it does. The children are exploring and creating their own strategies for working with the watercolors. This studio session is an excellent example of how Krechevsky and Stork (2000) point out that teachers in Reggio Emilia are part of the learning group, working and learning right alongside the children.

I comment in my notes that the conversation is rich and this is a very social time for the children. I also note two common phrases that I repeatedly hear Chuck tell the children are “you think about it” and “I’ll let you decide.” I find this important to point out, because Chuck offers the children advice but he lets them make decisions for themselves.

Chuck asks the children to tell him a little bit about their painting.

“I made a dinosaur robot!” exclaims Jimmy.

“A horse, playground and a fence,” Danika remarks about her painting.

When children illustrate their own point of view through painting or drawing, they are providing a picture of how they are thinking (Lewin-Benham, 2008). The studio offers children many opportunities to make their thinking visible by not only drawing and painting, but through collage, clay, and a wealth of other materials.
“Ryan, tell me one thing about your painting that you know,” Chuck says.

Ryan is silent and keeps working.

“You think about it,” Chuck says after a minute or so.

Sadhana is using her fingers to make dots on her painting.

“Those look like planets,” Chuck tells Sadhana. Sadhana tells us that she is painting the world as she continues painting.

“Put your fingers in and try it,” Sadhana tells Chuck.

“Is it okay if I do?” Chuck asks her. He puts his fingers in the paint and tries it. Chuck now begins painting the world on his piece of paper.

“Hey Sadhana, that works pretty good. Wow, I like it!” Chuck remarks.

“You should do it outside, not inside,” Sadhana tells Chuck. Chuck was putting his finger dots inside of his world and her dots were outside of her world. Sadhana continues on to tell us about her painting.

“The blue one is the road. Furniture is the green. Blue is when you’re painting. All of the others is to make your picture pretty,” she says. Chuck is writing down Sadhana’s words. He missed part of what she said and asked what the green was.

“Yes, it is furniture. Black is grass. Orange is the sidewalk,” Sadhana says.
I comment in my notes how the children naturally collaborate and converse about their work; this seems to be part of the culture in the studio. They share their ideas and their perspectives regarding each other’s work. “Learning in groups enables individuals to construct new knowledge by creating new relationships using the learning strategies and outcomes of others” (Krechevksy & Stork, 2000, p. 62).

Two of the children start to put away their paintings.

“Keep working, we have plenty of time. No reason to rush,” Chuck tells them. Sadhana is playing with her paintbrushes.

“This is the sister brush. The momma brush. The daddy brush,” she says.

“Oh, a family of brushes,” Chuck replies. The children are discussing colors, trying to decide if one of the paints is blue or purple.
“I made a tattoo,” Danika says. She put pain on her hand and stamped it on her paper. While I am observing and taking notes, I hear a knock on the studio windows that connect to the Junior Kindergarten classroom. I look up from my notebook and a little girl waves at me. I wave back and smile at her. She smiles and goes back to the activity that she was working on in her classroom. I frequently notice this exchange between children on both sides of the glass windows.

Sadhana spells her name for me and wants me to “write it in my book.” Sadhana writes my name as I spell it to her.

“I made my one line. Two lines. For a railroad. It goes to a zoo. This is a parking lot to a zoo,” Ryan tells the group about his painting. Danika flings her paintbrush around above her paper, purple dots fly everywhere.

“Look at all those dots!” she exclaims.

“Look at how messy your table is!” Sadhana replies back to Danika.

“That happens when you paint sometimes,” Chuck responds. The same little girl as before comes back and knocks on the windows and waves at me—I again respond with a wave and a smile.

As the children finish their paintings, they choose something else in the studio to do. Ryan sits down at the light table where there is an array of blue and green glass gems and clear plastic tubes. He puts the glass gems into plastic rectangle containers. He continues to dump them out and put them back in.

“It’s going to be a fountain!” Ryan says as he puts the gems into a clear tube. Sadhana is working next to him at the light table.
“I made a cake!” Sadhana says referring to the gems she put in a plastic rectangle container. Jimmy is working on the floor, taping strips of purple and red paper together. He says that he likes making tape band-aids.

“Look how big my fountain is! It got bigger!” Ryan says after he added another tube to his fountain.

Danielle finishes her watercolor painting and says, “I have a great idea! Bring the button jar down and I can draw buttons.” In the meantime, Sadhana and Danika start rhyming words with my name. “Laura, Dora, Pora, Mora.” A girl walks up to the windows and watches the children working in the studio. As I described earlier, the transparency these windows offer between the studio and main classroom create a sense of reciprocity—everything is connected.

Sadhana yells, “There’s Julia!” Danika starts stringing the buttons on a piece of wire. The children worked on their watercolor paintings for thirty minutes before moving on to another activity.

While the children are busy working, Chuck tells me:

At the end of finishing a project (teacher-initiated), they have time to choose from any area of the studio. That’s very important to me. I like to watch them, their interests. They do things I don’t think about. The room is set up for a certain level of autonomy. Sometimes they come up with something or a technique and we show it to the whole class.

This illustrates the Reggio idea that the environment is the third teacher. Lewin-Benham (2008) states that “in playing they make use of whatever is in the environment to scaffold themselves” and continues that “it is our choice whether they support themselves with power rangers, karate chops, laser fights and TV
figures, or with open-ended materials that can be used in numerous ways” (p. 75). The children demonstrate self-regulation during this choice time, as they are able to guide their own physical, emotional and cognitive processes. They choose materials and activities from around the room to explore, with little guidance from Chuck.

Jimmy is now working at the large wooden easel with some Crayola oil pastels. “I’m making a robot,” he says. Ryan leaves the light table and moves to the other side of the easel, as he appears to be interested by Jimmy who is drawing on the other side of it.

Chuck brings him a chair and asks, “What could you draw?” Chuck sits down next to him and pulls out some charcoals. He starts organizing the charcoals, chalks, pastels and pencils in the easel by grouping them together.

“We painted all of September, switched it out with chalks, pastels and charcoal,” Chuck tells me in reference to the easel. When Jimmy finishes his drawing with chalks and charcoals, he decides to cut it out. This sparks Ryan to want to cut out his drawing too. Chuck tells me that at this time of the year, he gives the children long strips of paper to practice cutting.

“They love to cut, just for cutting, the young ones,” Chuck says. Chuck sits by Ryan and holds his paper so he can be successful at cutting. It is important to note, according to Lewin-Benham (2008) that “facility in languages also means using the tools that shape and attach materials—scissors, punch, hammer, chisel, ruler, stapler, tape, glue” (p. 74).
On another day after a small group of children finish their watercolor painting, the studio is alive with children in various areas of the studio.

“Amber, would you have this be your spot? I think you could reach better,” Chuck says. I note how respectful Chuck is with his language and tone, and that he is very patient. Three of the four children in the studio are cutting, Luke, Leo, and Amber. Amber and Leo are both three years old and Luke is four years old. Lesley, the other child in the studio, is still painting with watercolors.

“I know you guys love to tape,” Chuck tells the group as he offers them two dispensers of tape. Leo tapes a small strip of accordion paper onto a white 8x10 piece of paper. Chuck shows Amber how to use the tape dispenser. He pulls a piece of tape out and down towards the table to cut it off. Lesley tells the group that she needs a pencil.

Chuck replies, “Lesley, you choose it and get the one you need.” Luke and Amber, the three-year-olds in the group, collaborate and converse about their work. They share ideas and their own opinions about each other’s work. Quite amazing for children this young, I note in my journal. Krechevsky and Stork (2000) state that “while developing relationships with others may also be a goal, collaboration among young children typically refers to how children get along with one another in the social sense, e.g., how they take turns, share toys and negotiate conflicts,” and they continue, “rarely is collaboration mentioned as a
critical way to build intellectual understanding” (p. 62). I think this point is frequently overlooked by educators, especially by educators of children this age.

Leo rolls up orange strips of paper and tapes them into tubes; two of them. Chuck puts multiple jars of pencils on the table where the children are working.


“My room is bubble gum pink,” Lesley adds.

Leo stacks the orange rolls on top of each other and tapes them together. Chuck notices what Leo is doing and tells me about a slide that Amber made last week out of paper. He adds that he put it in her portfolio.

“Lesley, can you help her pull that tape off? Amber, watch her,” Chuck says.

Lesley struggles to tear the tape off from the dispenser, but keeps trying. She finally decides to use a pair of scissors to cut it. Chuck intervenes to help demonstrate how to use the new tape dispenser. He then gives Luke a small plastic container with glue and a paintbrush.

“I’m making a gigantic slide,” says Leo.

“I have a friend and I’m making a bracelet for her,” Lesley tells the group.

“This little circle if for your thumb. The big one is for your fingers,” Chuck explains as he helps Luke use the scissors. The children are all at different stages of abilities and I note how all of the children are having different experiences in the studio. With the current push for differentiated curriculum, the studio seems to naturally provide differentiated learning experiences for children
varying in age and ability. One child might be learning how to use the small muscles in his or her hands to squeeze the scissors while another child is expressing his or her conceptual understanding of the world through paint.

“I’m making a slide with steps,” Leo tells us.

“How do you spell ‘from’?” Lesley asks the group.

Chuck and Leo both help Lily sound it out. Lesley gets it and Leo walks around the table to see her writing. Lesley is writing a message on the bracelet she just made out of paper.

“How do you spell ‘Sara Clark’?” Lesley asks next.

Chuck again helps her sound it out and Lesley tells us that Sara Clark is her friend who lives in Atlanta.

“I’m going to make a different one with beads on it,” Lesley states.

Chuck suggests that she use buttons and Lesley concurs. She begins threading buttons on wire. A green shiny button catches her attention and she shows it to Chuck.

“I’m making her a necklace actually because her head is that big,” Lesley now decides.

Amber returns to the studio after spending some time in the main classroom. She goes over to the light table and finds a trinket that she says belongs to the light projector. I comment in my notebook how the materials stimulate the children’s vocabulary and dialogue. Amber is exploring the gems at the light table and comes over to show me an “Easter egg” she made out of two gems. She goes back to the light table and is talking to herself while exploring
the various materials. She looks up, waves her hands and makes funny faces in the mirror above the light table. She runs over to show Chuck her Easter egg, goes back to the mirror, smiles, and holds up the Easter egg to see it in the mirror.

“Leo, tell me something about your slide. Is it in a park?” Chuck asks Leo.

“I know what slides need,” Leo replies.

Leo takes two strips of paper and attempts to put sides on the slide he is making out of paper. He is unsuccessful.

“What were you doing with those? Trying to make sides? Did it work?” Chuck asks.

“No,” responds Leo slightly frustrated.

“I wonder why?” ponders Chuck. Instead of giving children the answers or solving the problem for them, Chuck guides them through the thinking.

“I don’t know,” Leo says with a hint of frustration.

“Do you want me to hold while you tape it?” Chuck offers.

Chuck and Leo work together to tape sides of the slide on. Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development suggests that teachers play a critical role in children’s learning, as I frequently observed in Chuck’s interactions with the children—extending the children’s thinking and work a bit further than what they could have done independently.

Leo uses a piece of orange paper to support the sides of the slide. Problem solving is a skill that is supported and encouraged in the art studio. Chuck encourages Leo to keep working on it. This illustrates Leo’s persistence, as he
continued working on the slide and finally was successful. Meanwhile, Luke and Lesley are drawing on the large chalkboard that extends up from the floor, on a portion of the wall.

“What does a six look like?” Lesley asks and she writes the numbers one, two, three, four, and five on the chalkboard.

“Is there anyone who can make a six for Lesley?” Chuck asks the children in the studio. Chuck encourages the children to work together, rather than relying on adults to find answers. Leo walks over and shows Lily how to draw a six.

“How do you make a twelve?” Lesley asks a few minutes later.

“I can Lesley. One and a one,” Leo says.

“That’s eleven,” Lesley responds.

“Oh,” Leo says a bit puzzled.

“One and one is eleven. So what would twelve be?” Chuck asks.

“One and two, twelve!” Lesley figures out.

Krechevsky and Stork (2000) explain, “in a group, we learn how to share and exchange knowledge and how to defend, negotiate and modify our ideas in the presence of others” (p. 63). Lesley continues to write numbers on the chalkboard, asking for help with each one. Each time, Leo walks over to the chalkboard and demonstrates for Lesley.

Meanwhile, Luke is looking for bumpy paper. Amber walks around the easel, looks in the mirror on the wall and yells “boo!” She then continues to play with gems at the light table. Leo is sitting at the table telling Chuck a story that he made up about Frosty and a frog. The studio, although focused on aesthetic
experiences, is full of conversations and story telling—a very important building block for preschool-aged children. This environment supports and encourages dialogue, which provides the children with lots of practice using language.

Lewin-Benham (2008) states:

Speaking precedes literacy. Conversation enlarges vocabulary by putting words in context. Context envelops words with meaning and prepares children to form new concepts. Expanding children’s ability to express their thoughts by enlarging their vocabulary is the most important school readiness skill preschool can provide. Engaging children in conversation and listening to them with total focus are the most effective ways to expand children’s language. (p. 49)

Lesley is now counting all of the numbers she wrote on the chalkboard out loud.

“That’s great Lesley!” Leo says as he walks over to look at Lesley’s numbers on the board. Holding something in her hand, Amber runs over to Chuck.

“I made a momma caterpillar!” Amber says as she shows Chuck some blue and clear gems she holds in her hands. Leo walks over to see it.

“Where is his head?” Chuck asks her. Amber points to the end where the caterpillar’s head is.

“Wow, he’s long!” Leo exclaims.

“It’s the momma,” Amber says again. She holds up the gems in the mirror on the wall and talks to them softly. She adds more gems to her caterpillar from the light table.
“Now how long is it?” Amber asks me. I tell her that it keeps growing as she adds more gems to it. I continue to observe Amber. She likes looking in the mirror at herself. She puts gems over her eyes in front of the mirror. Leo runs back over to see Amber’s caterpillar.

“Oh my gosh!” he states, looking at the caterpillar. Now Amber holds up clear plastic tubes to her eyes, looking through them at the mirror.

“It’s hard to see!” Amber expresses. Lesley and Leo are tracing their hands on the wall chalkboard, side by side. The studio session comes to an end and the children return to their classroom.

This vignette illustrated a typical studio session in which all of the children had differentiated experiences, in a social learning environment. The children’s interests, background knowledge and developmental abilities guided their engagements. “Children bring prior knowledge and their personal social worlds to the classroom and, as they are involved in the work of the classroom community, they learn through their interpersonal engagements and interactions with multimodal tools” (Crafton, Silvers, & Brennan, 2009, p. 34).

Collaboration in Planning

Chuck invited me to attend a planning meeting before school at 7:30 am with the Junior Kindergarten teachers. They meet once a week to do their planning together. Usually Karen, the Curriculum Coordinator, is in attendance, but she became a grandmother earlier in the morning and therefore is not present
for this meeting. Those in attendance include Chuck, the two Junior Kindergarten teachers Kara and Colleen and myself.

We met in the Junior Kindergarten classroom, sitting around a small round table. As the teachers gathered their notebooks and took a seat at the table, a little girl pops in the doorway and says, “Chuck, tomorrow I get to come to your studio!” The excitement and anticipation was very apparent in her voice and on her face.

Chuck, Colleen and Kara begin the meeting talking about some prospective students who visited their classroom yesterday. The three children who visited are all siblings who were adopted from Russia. The teachers discuss the needs of their current children, particularly one child who needs extra support, and the overall dynamic of their classroom. The discussion moves into discussing curriculum and what path to take next. Colleen suggests that the kids need more work with tracing, copying, and writing.

“Do you think it’s hand strength? What could we do for that?” Chuck asks. Colleen and Kara agree with Chuck that they need to offer the children more opportunities to strengthen the small muscles in their hands.

“Henry and Jake write the first two letters of their name and quit,” Kara states.

“Henry’s just not a studio kid. Yesterday he blatantly refused. You just have to climb that wall with him,” Chuck responds.

“We need to find a way to interest him more. Since he’s interested in blocks, what if we add blocks to the clay?” Kara suggests.
“Yes, that’ll probably help all of those boys,” Colleen adds.

The three teachers continue offering ideas of how to improve the children’s hand strength.

“What was good last year, when we traced for the water mural—that really helped them. We had to trace, cut and paint. That was good for them. And the birthday messages,” Kara says.

Everyone agrees and Chuck suggests that chalk would also be a good medium for the children to start using more. Kara nods her head in agreement with Chuck’s suggestion.

“We should put some chalk at ours,” Colleen adds referring to the easel in their classroom.

“Yes, let’s get that set up. It’s a nice break from paint,” Chuck responds.

The conversation continues, back and forth between all three teachers. Chuck also poses the idea of paper building as another way to help strengthen the children’s fine motor development. He tells the teachers he was working with Louise Cadwell and from looking at her slides, he got an idea. The children at her school did a project with roads and created a large black panel, like a map of a city.

“I know what we need to do! Kind of like those mats with a city on them, what if we made our own? We can cut out some butcher paper and put it on the

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5 Louise Boyd Cadwell is a studio teacher at a nearby school that is also in the St. Louis Reggio Collaborative. Cadwell has studied and written many books about the Reggio approach and is considered an expert in the field. Therefore, to use a pseudonym would be inappropriate.
Chuck offers.

“They’ve been wanting roads,” Kara adds.

“We don’t even need to tape them down. They might be a natural extension of what you’re doing, I’d say just pencils. Whatever motivates them. At the beginning we could just get into it. And maybe Henry would draw a parking lot,” Chuck continues.

“Henry’s been talking about a parking lot,” Kara says.

“Be really flexible. I’m envisioning we just play with it. Just try it. If you do that Colleen next week, that’ll compliment the studio work,” Chuck suggests.

This planning conversation illustrates how the curriculum emerges from the interests, needs, and motivations of the children and also from the ideas of the teachers. The planning is also flexible, not set in stone. There is room to adapt the curricular plans as they navigate the project. Krechevsky and Stork (2000) point out that in the U.S. teachers of preschool-aged children typically develop curricula by planning thematic units, while it is less common to see curricula developed by following children’s interests, questions and hypotheses.

“The city, community thing is really taking off!” Kara exerts.

“The conversations are so good. I think this kind of play with help them deepen their thinking. Right now they are naming things, it’ll be interesting to see how we move from that, from categorizing to active thinking,” Chuck offers.
The three teachers appear to have a plan in place and Chuck moves the conversation in a different direction. He begins to tell Colleen and Kara about his upcoming presentation he’ll be doing at a Reggio Emilia conference in Wisconsin about creativity. I find one of his comments quite interesting, as he explains that creativity is when two unrelated things come together in a new way—and compares human creativity to plant growth. As I do not want to interrupt the conversation, I make a note in my journal to ask Chuck about this at a later time.

The planning session lasted roughly an hour. It was impressive to witness the flow and exchange of ideas; the team considering both individual and group needs while planning the curriculum based on both the children’s needs and interests. Lewin-Benham (2008) explains that “teachers set the stage, expectant, predicting what might happen, brainstorming conditions necessary to support the predictions, hypothesizing what is most likely to happen, preparing the environment so it provokes the possible into the actual” (p. 57). This quote illustrates the type of the planning I observed.

As the teachers’ conversation came to an end, I took the opportunity to ask Chuck about how he assesses and monitors the children’s progress in the studio. In regards to monitoring progress, Chuck tells me that he relies on photography in addition to adding pieces of student work to the classroom portfolio. He begins to tell me about assessment strategies they use in Reggio Emilia, explaining that the educators there resist to bring it down to paper, but rather keep it with the experiences.
Rather than assessing everything like we do in America, Chuck tells me, educators in Reggio Emilia don’t like to be reductive. Chuck goes on to say that in Reggio they have “gorgeous boxes” that the kids put their work in, which allows for sculpture, wire and three-dimensional objects. In Reggio they also scan the children’s work and create a digital portfolio over three years for each child. “This is possible,” he tells me, “because teachers there are experts in child development and use this knowledge to create planning books that are so detailed.”

It is evident how Chuck has taken what he has learned from his colleagues in Reggio Emilia and put it into practice in his studio. He works as an integral part of the Junior Kindergarten team of teachers, as collaboration is an essential element of this philosophy.

**Paper Building**

Today in the studio the children are building with paper building. Before the children arrive, Chuck shows me a method of documenting the children’s thinking process. He takes a large, long sheet of paper and divides it into columns for each child. For this particular studio session, he divides the paper into five columns. He tells me that by documenting in this manner, “it shows we’re looking at thinking.” Chuck observed Giovianni, an *atelierista* in the schools of Reggio Emilia, doing this type of documentation. I provide an example in Figure 12.
“There’s something about building that lends itself to this,” Chuck explains.

A group of four children enter the studio and take a seat at the studio table: Lacey, Louie, Lincoln and Jennifer.

“How is everyone?” Chuck asks the group as he takes a seat. I notice that Chuck always begins his sessions with the children in the studio by asking them how they are doing. Each child eagerly starts talking to Chuck, their excitement for being in the art studio fills the air. He explains to the group that today they are going to be building with paper. He puts some baskets with paper strips and pre-made three-dimensional paper circles and squares on the table.

“Let me show you a few things. Some of the parents made us paper shapes. They made some that are not connected so you can have your own idea,” Chuck explains. He then puts a basket of small plastic animals and cars on the table. Over the course of my observations, it was quite apparent that the children have numerous opportunities to “have their own idea.”

“Louie loves paper strips, that’s his thing,” Chuck looks over and tells me.

The children’s faces are full of curiosity, as they look at the plastic animals and paper strips in front of them.

“Are we going to glue them?” Lacey asks.

“Trace them?” Jennifer wonders.

“What if you chose an animal or car, could you build a place for your animal to live?” Chuck poses to the group of children. Chuck takes a plastic car out of the basket.
“Think about where it would like to live. Where would a car go? Lacey, what kind of place would a car need? You think about it,” Chuck says as he offers some ideas to provoke their thinking.

“A garage,” Lacey says.

“I want to show you something,” Chuck tells the group as he takes a paper strip in his hand.

“I remember this,” Louie says.

“Show me your pinchers. I’m going to take my pinchers and count 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10. Pretty good, huh? When you glue something, you have to pinch,” Chuck says as he holds the paper together to make a triangle. Lincoln picks a sheep and Louie picks a duck. Mr. Hindsdale, the drama teacher, enters the studio and sits down at the table with the children. He tells us that he has some spare time before his next class.

“We have so many things to build with—paper squares, paper circles, paper strips. Think about what kind of place you could build,” Chuck explains. Lacey picks a horse from the basket.

“Look what I did!” Louie exclaims as he successfully glued a paper strip into a circle. Chuck adds a jar of pencils to the table and reminds the children to think about what animal or object they chose and what it needs.

“I want to make a door for him,” Lacey says as she has her horse inside a paper square. Chuck is documenting the children’s process and the studio is quite quiet as everyone is busy creating.
“Chuck’s studio is where the busy is,” Louie says as he builds with his paper strips. Louie’s comment made me smile.

“Mine really needs a roof,” Lacey says as she has been trying for the past few minutes to make a roof for her horse barn.

“Remember to pinch while it dries,” Chuck responds. Lesley holds the paper strip, counts to sixteen and smiles because the glue held and her roof is complete.

“Chuck’s studio is a place for all that is busy,” Mr. Hindsdale repeats the phrase Louie said a few minutes earlier. He seemed to enjoy this quote as well.

“Which one is mine?” Louie asks Chuck looking over his shoulder at Chuck’s words and drawings.

“You figured out what I’m doing?” Chuck says, a little caught off guard and explains to Louie that he is documenting their building and thinking on his piece of paper.
By documenting the children’s three-dimensional problem solving, one is able to see the process that led up to the final product. Dewey (1934) explains that expressive objects, like construction, are constructed of two meanings: the action and its result—and these two meanings cannot be separated.

Louie listened to Chuck’s earlier advice, he holds a paper strip together and counts to sixteen. Jennifer drives her truck up and down on the shapes on her paper. Chuck tells the group that Louie’s dad folded the paper shapes.

“Louie, tell me something about the parts,” Chuck says looking at Louie’s construction.
“The butterflies go through and go this way and through here,” Louie says as he shows Chuck. Louie originally chose a duck, but changed his mind and decided to make a house for butterflies.

“Do the butterflies fly through there?” Chuck asks.

“Yes, they go through here, through here, through here, and here,” Louie says as he points to various places on his butterfly house. Instead of building with paper, Lincoln has decided to cut up the strips of paper. Lacey has finished building a barn for her horse and is now building a garage for the man who works in the barn. Louie notices Chuck taking photos of them working and asks Chuck if it is video. Lacey is playing with her horse figure and telling a story about how the horse misses the man who works in the barn. Jennifer has made a city for her truck.

“Show me how your truck goes in the city,” Chuck says.

“Through tunnel, fire station, police station,” Jennifer responds.

“What is this up here?” Chuck asks.

“That is how it connects,” she says as she drives the truck around on it.

“One more question, what about this? It’s blue,” Chuck asks.

“That’s how you get off the highway,” Jennifer replies.

“This highway? This is a different highway?” Chuck asks her.

“This is how it gets lower down,” she tells him.
Lincoln continues to cut up paper and now he has a pile in front of him. I notice how the children are naturally verbalizing their thinking. It is not forced; they eagerly share their ideas without being prompted.

“My little guy goes here, slips down here. The barn, I’m connecting this to the roof. This is his ladder so he can get up here and slide down,” Lacey tells the group.

“He plays on it?” Chuck asks Lacey in regards to her horse.

“Yep. This is so he can crawl under,” Lacey replies.

Lincoln walks over to the shelf and is looking at the crayons and markers. He chooses a jar of colored pencils and brings them back to the table where he was working. He picks a green marker out of the jar. Lincoln is three years old and is from England, hence his British accent. His blonde hair almost reaches
down his forehead to his blue eyes. He is wearing a long sleeve striped blue shirt, with multi-colored polka dots on his black pants underneath blue shorts down to his knees. He has on brown tennis shoes with Velcro.

“Louie, that’s new. That wasn’t there before,” Chuck points out.

“That’s the up exit. That’s how they get off from here to there. Reach the top exits,” Louie responds.

“Is it a ramp?” Chuck asks him.

“The butterflies can get from there to there without going through all of it,” Louie says referring to the numerous tunnels he constructed. Louie has used up all the space on his paper base and so Chuck gives him another base to build on. Louie has made up an imaginary play scenario with his paper sculpture, as he is softly talking to himself.

“This is the mat for the horse. He can jump to the roof and slide down the slide,” Lacey announces as everyone is busily working on their own projects. Lincoln is trying out different pencils, consumed by what he is doing. Lacey continues moving her horse through her paper building and telling everyone about it. Chuck is watching Lincoln as he continues to cut paper into small pieces.

“Lincoln, tell me something about what you’re working on,” Chuck says after watching him for a few minutes.

“I’m still working on it,” Lincoln responds.

“Ok, I won’t bother you then,” Chuck replies with the utmost respect for Lincoln’s work. Jennifer has now created a water slide for her horse out of paper. Lincoln walks over to a nearby shelf, looking at the various items and selects a
single hole punch. He brings it back to his seat at the table and picks up a piece of paper he has been cutting.

“Look, a hole came out,” Lincoln says with a sense of awe in his voice. Since the hole punch is hard to squeeze, he asks if I will help him. With my help, he continues on to punch fifteen holes.

“They are eyes now!” Lincoln exclaims. He is finding such excitement and pleasure with the holes. The holes have fallen onto the floor. Lincoln sits down and picks them up one by one. He first sets them on the chair and then puts them in his pocket.

“I have a lot of holes, I like holes!” Lincoln exerts.

“This is the diving board for his pool. Weeee!” Lacey says as she is still playing with her horse. The children have now been working on their paper building for an hour and it’s time to return to their classroom. Those children who haven’t finished their paper building are told they can return to work on it some more tomorrow.

The Museum Exhibit

During the first few days of my observations, I noticed small square pieces of paper with various letters written on them taped around the studio, in seemingly random places. This caught my attention as I thought it was very interesting and I made a note of it in my journal, but went on with my observations. One morning before the children arrived, I decided to ask Chuck about these seemingly random pieces of paper. With a slight chuckle and a smile
on this face, Chuck explained that these pieces of paper indeed served a purpose and were placed there by the children. The kindergarten children from last year, who are now in first grade, wanted to make a museum in the art studio. In particular, they wanted to make a “science exhibit.”

“If you want a group tour, go line up at ‘Q,’” Chuck explains in reference to the letters taped around the studio. The children came up with the idea to place letters of the alphabet around the room, to use them as a way to line up groups and have tours. On a bookshelf, in front of a row of books, there is a display of small clear plastic containers (recycled fruit and pudding containers). These containers are filled with water and each has a little animal floating inside such as a starfish, walrus, octopus, and fish. Some are stacked on top of each other and I count seventeen containers in total. The children created an aquarium Chuck explains.

“Right now they own it. I stay out of the way, it’s theirs,” Chuck tells me as I ponder at the miniature aquariums on the bookshelf. He goes on to tell me how the children created tickets, an open/closed sign, a guide to the museum, and they put a line on the floor that you have to stand behind when viewing the exhibit. They also built a miniature café out of paper. Chuck explains that the children started it right when the school year ended, last year, and that he was curious to see if they would continue it when they returned this fall. Chuck typed up his thoughts about the big concepts regarding which direction this museum project could go. He shows me his notes with his ideas; some of them include:

- Creative practice, making work to be shown
- Curatorship
• Communication and considering an audience

• “Place” – specific area of the studio

We continue to talk about the museum and I share how fascinated I am with the children’s creative thinking. Chuck tells me that the children tell elaborate stories about the museum and that although the children all have different levels of investment in it, they all care about it.

I remember a comment Chuck made during the Junior Kindergarten planning meeting about creativity, stating that human creativity was like plant growth. I take this opportunity to ask him more about this idea. Chuck’s upcoming talk is entitled “Relational Creativity” which he will be speaking about at a Reggio Emilia conference in Wisconsin.

I think fundamental creativity, from my view, creativity is about things coming together in an unexpected or new way. Which is everywhere. Think of surrealist art, you know how you take two unseemingly unrelated things and they mesh together in a new way. Or you know… It relates to plants and plant growth, because that’s what plants do. They are open systems that take in the sun, take in water, they are vulnerable to the environment and they change that. They take that energy in and change that energy and then they grow and move forward.

Chuck continues to tell me how important it is for a school to be an organic, open system to allow for creativity.

A flower is an organic system, so the school is an organic system—it has to be able to be renewed by new people, new things, new ideas and many, many, many times schools are not open systems. They are on the track, the curriculum is going that direction no matter what. And I think that doesn’t allow for creativity very often. Not that it never could. But what you want is an open system where you don’t know what is going to happen necessarily, it doesn’t mean you don’t have goals, but you want
that… it’s uncertainty. You want to head into it with a little bit of uncertainty so you can get somewhere new.

** Feeling of Befuddlement  

During my interviews with the children, I asked them to tell me about the studio. I would like to highlight one child interview in particular. I interviewed Ashley, a young three-year-old, and asked her if she liked going to the studio. She responded that she did, and that she liked to do the paint. I asked her why, and she said because it was fun. The next segment of our interview I found quite interesting.

“How do you feel when you’re in the studio? Do you feel happy? Sad?” I asked her.

“Kinda confused,” Ashley replied.

“You feel confused?” I asked, as her answer caught me off guard.

“Just kinda confused,” Ashley said.

“What are you confused about?” I asked in return.

“Just all the weird stuff in there,” she said.

At first, one might think of her comment in a negative light—that she feels confused when she is in the studio. But I see the opposite. The studio is warehouse of a variety of novel materials—many of which these young children have not experienced before. In addition, these children are experiencing these materials in a new way. I observed how the studio, the materials and studio teacher challenge children to think in new and different ways. In my opinion, this
explains Ashley’s response that she feels “kinda confused” in the studio because she is being pushed to think outside of the box, as Beth Mohsher the Headmaster would describe it. From my point of view, Ashley is confused because she is constantly challenged to “think” and problem solve with the materials, tools and activities presented to her.

During an interview, Beth Mosher explained to me that children are never given answers in the studio. Children are encouraged to think outside of the box and ask lots of questions. Mrs. Mosher also told me that the studio is able to meet the needs of all children: a child who is gifted, a child who is struggling with math or reading, or a child who thinks beyond. Mrs. Moser goes on to explain that children who are struggling in their classrooms can be very successful in the studio, as the studio is able to make learning interesting and meaningful to them. “It comes alive for them,” Mrs. Moser states.

**The Seeds Were Planted in St. Louis**

Through conversations with the teachers at The St. Michael School, the name Brenda Fyfe kept coming up. I learned that she played an instrumental role in bringing the Reggio Emilia approach to not only St. Louis, but also the United States. Therefore, I decided that it would be beneficial to my study to visit her and hear her insights regarding my research—since she was only a few miles away.
Brenda Fyfe\(^6\) is currently the Dean of the College of Education at Webster University. Her interest in the Reggio Emilia philosophy developed thirty years ago. Webster is an international university and while Brenda was doing some teaching in Iceland in the 1980s, she learned about the Reggio Emilia philosophy. She visited three schools there (in Iceland) that had been studying the Reggio Emilia philosophy and became interested in learning more.

At that time, Brenda couldn’t find anything published in the United States about the Italian philosophy. In 1990 she went to Reggio Emilia and started her relationship with the educators there. In 1991, Brenda helped bring the Hundred Language Exhibit to St. Louis and then she organized a U.S. study tour to Reggio Emilia in 1992. Brenda continued her pursuit of the Reggio philosophy by getting funding through the Danforth grant, which provided a handful of schools in St. Louis with funding for three years regarding the Italian philosophy. She played an instrumental role in bringing Reggio to the United States and bringing U.S. educators to Reggio.

I contacted Brenda via email and asked her if I could come and speak with her regarding my research study. She agreed and I eagerly awaited our meeting. On a Wednesday afternoon, I met Brenda at her second floor office at Webster University. She was very welcoming and interested in my study.

To be conscious of her time, I delved right into my questions. I explained the purpose of my study and asked Brenda about her thoughts regarding the

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\(^6\) Brenda Fyfe is considered an expert in the field and it would not have been appropriate to use a pseudonym.
incorporation of studios in early childhood programs, based on her years of
experience with the Reggio Emilia philosophy. I asked her if and how she
thought Reggio-inspired studios could help support children who have special
learning needs. Brenda explained that the use of an atelier can support children
who have disabilities and she gave me an example. She talked about a little boy
who had autism and was involved in a painting activity. The boy didn’t want to
touch the paint, but through the thinking of the Reggio Emilia philosophy, the
teacher drew upon his strengths and interests and asked him to mix the colors. It
got him involved and connected. Brenda says, “We know it works because the
first children in Reggio Emilia to get accepted are children with disabilities. The
atelier is a place that engages children as it provides many ways to enter into
experiences.”

Another example Brenda shared with me was of a child who had Down
syndrome. Brenda explained that this boy’s teacher carefully documented the
process of supporting him. The teacher used probing questions and when he was
ready to quit the activity, the teacher provided tremendous scaffolding. “The
concept of scaffolding is very important when working with children who have
disabilities,” she notes.

Next, I asked Brenda if she thought the Reggio Emilia philosophy was a
good fit for gifted and talented children. “Definitely!” She goes on to tell me, “It
provides them with initiative, they can be curious, confident, take the lead, and be
creative. GT kids get turned off if they can’t get that.” Another reason that the
Reggio Emilia philosophy is a good fit for gifted and talented children, she tells
me, is because children are participants, not receivers in project work—they get to make decisions while teachers provide scaffolding and direction.

Our conversation took us to discussing English Language Learners. I asked Brenda how the studio and the hundred languages could help support children who are English Language Learners. She said this is currently an area that her and her colleagues are exploring in the local public schools. “The hundred languages brings them in, in a natural way, especially when English is the only language used,” Brenda says.

“Can you tell me your thoughts about when a material becomes a language?” I ask, as throughout my research this has become an intriguing question to me. Brenda answers that babies and toddlers are interacting with materials at a very young age through sensorimotor learning. “They are gaining physical knowledge which then turns into representational knowledge, as they move right into it (representational knowledge) with having the knowledge of the physical.” Brenda’s hypothesis is that they are able to move into representational when having physical facility and continued experiences with the Reggio Emilia philosophy. She believes that when children are able to “use” materials, it becomes a language.

In reference to Reggio Emilia, Brenda shares how they have an alphabet of clay, an alphabet of paint, etc. For example, for the alphabet of clay, they display photos of worms, circles, squares, and many different ways that clay can be formed and these photos hang on mobiles. This concept of an alphabet is a repertoire of ideas of how to use materials. In summary, Brenda tells me that a
material becomes a language when it starts to be used on a regular basis to express an idea, when it’s not just a sensorimotor activity.

To wrap up our conversation, we discuss that the studio helps make children’s intelligences more visible. “We help bring forth and support what is often hidden,” Brenda says. Based on what Brenda has shared and from my own experience in early childhood, the utilization of Reggio-inspired studios has implications for not only typically developing children, but for children who are English Language Learners, children with special learning needs or with disabilities, and children who are gifted and talented. These areas certainly offer room for further research.
Response from The St. Michael School

Response from Chuck Schwall

Hi Laura,

On Friday I read the portion of your thesis that you sent, and then I read it again this afternoon. It is so beautifully written, and describes in richness and depth the role of the art studio and the atelierista. I really like the four dimensions as a way to structure the piece, I think that approach works very effectively, and that you chose to put them in Italian is such a nice touch. Here are just a couple of thoughts I have to add; please read them, and then decide if you want make any edits:

1. The word “activity” is used to describe both the watercolor painting and the paper building. I would shy away from the term activity, not because it is inaccurate, but rather I think it suggests a contained experience. I remember when we first worked with Amelia Gambetti, she really coached us to think in terms of “experiences” rather than activities. Also, I think the word “activity” doesn’t imply an attitude of research, it suggests a more set way of doing things. So, I think you could just say “...finish their watercolor painting, the studio is alive...” I would suggest something like “Today in the studio the children will be building with paper.” In this way, painting or building with paper stand on their own as experiences, so to speak.

2. At the introduction of the watercolor painting, you could also mention that the teachers and I decide together which materials to introduce to the children. This happens all year long, but is particularly important in the first month of the school year when the children are learning new techniques and experimenting with materials. You could also mention that watercolors were available in the mini-studio in the classroom, if not on that particular day, but at that general time. So the children experience the materials not only in the studio. This would support the idea of connectivity, even though the narrative of the day takes place in the studio.

3. As you introduce the museum project with the first grade, I suggest that you say in an explicit way that the idea to place the letters of the alphabet around the room, and to use them as a way to line up groups and have tours was the students’ own idea. I think it’s implied in what you wrote, but it might be clearer to make that connection for the reader.

Thanks again, Laura, for sharing your work with me. I am so grateful to be able to contribute to your thesis. I would like your permission to share a copy of it.
with our head, Beth Mosher, and also the teachers. Let me know if that’s okay, or if you’d rather wait until the finished version. Also, at some point, if you could sent me the final title of your thesis, and the name of the program you are in at the University, that would be great.

I was also wondering if Brenda will get a chance to read it, and even if we should share it will people in Reggio at some point??

Anyway, I wrote more than I thought I would, but I was inspired by your work!

Take care,

Chuck
Boulder Journey School

La Finestra Aperta: A Contextual and Descriptive Introduction

In order to understand the context of the studios, it is important to first understand the school context. Following the introduction of the school, I provide a glimpse into the studio and a description of the studio teacher at each school.

I spent the first two weeks of December 2009 collecting my research data at the Boulder Journey School. The Boulder Journey School is located in a small city at the foothills of the Colorado Rocky Mountains. It is a full-day, year-round private school that welcomes over 200 children ages six weeks through six years. Tuition per school year is approximately $13,660 but varies with the age and schedule of the child. The physical layout of the school encompasses fourteen classrooms, a theater, front office, administration office, gallery, documentation room, kitchen, reflection room, art studio, and a teacher education room. To provide the reader with a visual understanding of the school’s layout, I have provided a map in Figure 14.
The administrative faculty consists of an executive director, two site directors, a business manager, an office manager, a technology manager, and an office assistant. The teaching faculty includes 17 full-time mentor teachers, who have a Master’s degree in education and a Colorado Teaching License, and 20
part-time intern teachers who have a Bachelor’s degree and are enrolled in the teacher education program.

The Boulder Journey School faculty has a strong connection with the educators in Reggio Emilia, Italy. Educators at the Boulder Journey School have been studying the Reggio Emilia philosophy since 1995 and have since engaged in ongoing collaboration with the educators in Reggio Emilia. This exchange not only involves engaging in dialogue, but by educators in both countries traveling between both Colorado and Italy. Faculty members also belong to the North American Reggio Emilia Alliance, a network of educators inspired by the Reggio Emilia philosophy.

The Boulder Journey School has a national reputation for leadership and innovation in the field of early childhood education and for putting theory into practice. The faculty has published many articles regarding their work with young children. Numerous professional development opportunities are offered at the Boulder Journey School such as conferences, study tours and the teacher education program. In 2008, the Boulder Journey School was the host of the North American Reggio Emilia Alliance (NAREA) summer conference, which brought together educators from Reggio Emilia, Italy, and from around the U.S. In conjunction with this conference, it showcased the opening of the “The Wonder of Learning: The Hundred Languages of Children” exhibit that showcases the work of the children in Reggio Emilia, Italy.

Professional development for the teaching faculty is embedded into the fabric of the school. The documentation room has an official name, the Hawkins
Room, named for Frances and David Hawkins. This room serves as a place and provocation for teachers to try out and develop new skills. The Hawkins Room currently contains teachers’ work done on wheels, which is about to be put on display in the hallway to accompany the children’s work regarding wheels. Next, the teachers will be using this space to explore drawing and weaving in order to become familiar and comfortable with such media. This space provides teachers an opportunity to learn more about different media by engaging in meaningful, personal interactions. Groups of teachers, based on their interest, facilitate each other in these learning experiences and meet in this room for two hours a month. These personal learning experiences that these teachers have are then translated into their work with the children.

The study tour program at the Boulder Journey School provides educators with the opportunity to observe in the school and engage in conversations with the faculty. The teacher education program offers individuals who already have a Bachelor’s degree the opportunity to earn an early childhood license and a Master’s degree in either Educational Psychology or Early Childhood Education from a local state university by completing coursework and a twelve-month internship at the Boulder Journey School.

I was familiar with the Boulder Journey School before I began my research. I had visited the school a handful of times over the course of the past five years on their study tour program and from attending conferences. I had also met two of their teachers on a study tour in Reggio Emilia, in 2006, and had kept in touch with them over the years.
Upon entering the school, one cannot help but be struck by the stimulating powers of the hallways. The hallways are aesthetically and thoughtfully organized, displaying documentation panels, art works and school artifacts. A focal point near the front entrance is a large loom. Documentation accompanying the loom explains that the concept of weaving is symbolic, as it represents a “dedication to life-long learning as we constantly weave new ideas, ways of thinking and inspirations into our philosophy and daily life at school.”

Documentation is organized under the school’s values such as Beauty, Understanding, Experiences, and Inspirations, just to name a few. A large panel that encompasses a whole wall displays the “Charter of Rights.” This charter was written by a group of four-year-old children and is a charter on the rights of children.

The hallways are used not only for viewing displays, but also for interaction with. The walls are a provocation for all those who pass through them. There is a gravity wall with which children can investigate the forces of gravity by rolling balls through panels and mirrors, almost like the game of Plinko on the game show *The Price is Right.* Some of the panels are clear so infants low to the ground can see the ball fall and roll from panel to panel. At the top of a hallway, before it slants down, there is a bucket full of things that roll such as wheels and tubes. Over the course of my visits, I observed the rolling of objects down the slanted hallways to be an enjoyable activity for children of all ages. There is a knob wall, roughly three feet by three feet, that has an assortment of knobs.
connected by an array of cords, strings, and elastic that children are invited to strum like a guitar.

The studio is located at the end of a long hallway, passed the gravity wall and theater. Before entering the studio, it’s hard not to notice the intriguing wall documentation about different smells. I often observed children exploring the different scents captured in the display.

The studio is a narrow room that has windows on one wall looking out onto the garden and outdoor playground area. The studio is divided into two parts. The first half of the room consists of large, metal shelves that present an array of materials. Jennifer, the studio teacher, refers to this part of the studio as the shopping area. All of the materials are neatly organized, in an aesthetically pleasing manner. Clear trays organize many natural materials such as sticks, pinecones, rocks, shells, seeds, dried flower petals, and cornhusks. Also housed on these shelves are cupcake pans, a glass jar full of wine corks, a potato masher, spools of ribbon, baskets of yarn, small spools of colored wire, coffee filters, wheels, bicycle parts, Styrofoam pieces, tubes of varied sizes, amongst many other materials.

There are shelves designated to housing the children’s “work in progress.” A sign on these shelves states that “children use a variety of methods for identifying their work in progress in the studio such as: a picture of themselves, a picture of themselves engaged in the work, a sign with their name, a sign about their work, or a picture of their work taken by them.” Topal and Gandini (1999)
explain that a work-in-progress shelf “communicates respect for children’s work and for the process of thinking and taking time” (p. 46).

Walking past the shopping area, one enters the second half of the studio. There is a large wooden table that could comfortably seat six children accompanied by a smaller table that four children could sit at. Along the back wall of the studio one can find shelves displaying charcoal and oil pastels, stencils, sponge brushes, paintbrushes, tools for metal embossing, scissors, glue, wire cutters, tools for working with clay, sewing thread and a variety of sizes, textures and colors of paper. Large coils of plastic tubing, varying in color and diameter, are rolled up next to the shelves.

Resting on the windowsill are two of Andy Goldsworthy’s books, *A Collaboration with Nature* and *Wood*. Looking up at the ceiling, one notices that five of the ceiling panels have been painted by the children—an assortment of flowers, butterflies and rainbows. Hanging above the windows is a documentation panel entitled “Encounters with Paper.” A wooden shelf low to the ground houses a series of National Geographic magazines. On the wall in the back of the studio is a documentation panel entitled “Clay Narrations” and below that is a shelf that houses a variety of different types of clay: willow, chestnut, ash, red, kodiak. A clipboard accompanies the clay storage stating, “please list which type of clay you are taking.” There is a box for scrap paper which reads “good for practicing with scissors.”
Figure 15

Looking from the back of the studio toward the entrance

Figure 16

The “shopping area” of materials
Figure 17

Example of the materials and tools available—also wall documentation
Figure 18

Wire shelving housing a collection of glass jars

In addition to the main, large studio that I just described, each classroom has a mini-studio that serves as an extension of the larger studio. While conversing about the mini-studios, Jennifer, the studio teacher, shares a question that they have been pondering at the Mountain Center, “how can the mini-studio reflect the current investigation?” Meaning, how can the materials in the mini-studio support and extend the current investigation of the children and teachers in their classroom. Therefore, some mini-studios in the classrooms have a particular focus. For example, the mini-studio in Room Twelve has more evidence of sewing than other materials. The mini-studio in the infant room has more of a
focus on paper, as the children are exploring and interacting with paper. Another mini-studio focuses on clay and yet another on writing.

Figure 19

Mini-studio in one of the preschool classrooms

Figure 20

A mini-studio focused on the exploration of clay
Jennifer Selbitschka has been a member of the Boulder Journey School faculty for over 10 years, since 1999. Her first six years she spent teaching the toddlers and now has been the studio teacher for the past four years. She is not only the studio teacher but also assists in the Teacher Education Program, facilitating a weekly seminar that the intern teachers attend. During the time I spent observing Jennifer, she was in the process of writing her dissertation to complete her Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and Innovation. Jennifer described her dissertation as a provocation to think about other ways of doing things, in regards to education. This commonality created a nice connection between the two of us, as I felt that Jennifer could “really” understand and relate to the research I was doing. Although Jennifer does not have a formal education or experience in the arts, she explained to me that it was her own personal interests in photography and other arts that motivated her to take this position at the studio teacher.

Upon my arrival the first morning of my observations Jennifer warmly greeted me and gave me a tour of the school, introducing me to all of her fellow faculty members. I was struck by Jennifer’s welcoming and inquisitive nature, eager to ask me questions and hear more about my research. Jennifer is of average height, long brown hair and I’d say in her early to mid-thirties. She is married and lives in the local community. I consider her dress to be fashionable.

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7 Co-workers, parents and children refer to Mrs. Jennifer Selbitschka by her first name only. From this point forward, I will refer to Mrs. Selbitschka as Jennifer.
as Jennifer typically wore a pair of blue jeans, sweater, and a scarf. Jennifer has an inviting personality and I found her to be very friendly.

It was apparent within the first day or two that Jennifer had good relationships with parents, faculty and children. Just a quick stroll down the hallway and Jennifer was greeted by numerous parents and children alike.

Figure 21

Jennifer planning in the studio

La Dimensione Intenzionale

The identity of the studio at the Boulder Journey is still evolving, according to Jennifer. She feels as though they are still in the process of figuring it out and that “it is never going to be one thing.” Jennifer says that this year it is both a workspace and a place to house materials that are not designated to the
classrooms. Classroom teachers and children use the studio space for intimate group work. The studio is also viewed as a shopping area, which is its most frequent use by teachers and children in the school.

Near the entrance to the studio is a documentation panel “The Process of Developing an Identity for our Studio.” It states that there are three main functions of the studio: 1) a place for shopping, 2) a place for play, and 3) a place for continuation of classroom work. I question the use of the term ‘shopping area,’ as it conveys differing messages. The term “shopping area” could be perceived as a message of consumerism, while at the same time it could be perceived as a message of “shopping for ideas.”

In regards to the studio as a place for play, Jennifer tells me that she observes what children are doing with the materials and that she often observes that children like to play with the materials on the shelves. As a result, she puts materials next to each other on the shelves that can be played with together. “If they want to play, I learn just as much. I just sit back,” she tells me.

In regards to Jennifer’s role as the studio teacher, she states that it is to support both the children and teachers in their knowledge of working with the materials. A question that Jennifer has been thinking about in regards to working with the children is “how can we complicate their thinking and move forward, to get them to work outside of their comfort zone with materials?”

I step out of the studio and walk down the hallway. I note in my journal how the studio permeates the entire school. I notice a documentation panel
outside of the toddler room, under a panel with the heading “Beauty.” The documentation panel states:

At the Boulder Journey School, children and adults are engaged in ongoing research about materials, the properties of materials, and the potential of materials. When working with materials, children and adults pose questions such as:

- Where does this material come from?
- What does it look like?
- What is it made of?
- What does it remind us of?
- What could it be called?
- How does it feel, smell, sound?
- How might it be used in the school?
- How might it be combined with other materials?
- How might it be used to represent and communicate ideas?
- What opportunities does it offer for learning?
- How might it support relationships among children and adults?

In my opinion, these are authentic questions that are relevant to both the teachers and children. These questions came from the thinking minds of teachers and children, rather than a curriculum book. Lewin-Benham (2008) shares my perspective that “children’s own questions are far more profound than any in teachers’ guides” (p. 49).

*La Dimensione Strutturale*

The structural dimension looks at how time, space, roles and subject matter are used. This dimension considers how time in the studio is managed and how the work in the studio connects with the children’s primary classroom. I chose not to talk about the physical affordances of
the studio in this section, as I have elaborated about this in the previous section.

The studio is a place for the continuation and extension of classroom work. Teachers and children have the opportunity to sign up for appointments if they would like to work in the studio. Sometimes children bring work from their primary classroom down to the studio or sometimes their work evolves from the exploration of the studio environment. Normally studio appointments are scheduled from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm, allowing for three classrooms to visit the studio a day—each for about an hour. Jennifer tells me that in the past she used to schedule five studio appointments in that block of time and that it was too much.

Before scheduled studio appointments each morning, Jennifer talks with the children about their upcoming work in the studio. She also tells me that the work done in the studio is not less authentic because it is scheduled; due to the fact that they have fourteen classrooms, appointments must be made in order for the studio to function and meet the needs of all the classrooms. During the afternoons, Jennifer does not schedule studio appointments but instead works on documentation.

In addition to working in the studio, Jennifer also schedules appointments to work in the children’s classrooms. I frequently observed Jennifer packing up baskets of materials and transporting them down to the children’s classroom. For organizational purposes, Jennifer keeps a list of classrooms and the things they’ve talked about and ideas that she has. She tells me that she has a touch-base with
teachers once a week, conversing with them about what’s going on in their classroom and what the children are interested in.

A typical question that Jennifer asks the classroom teachers is, “what do you see being my support next week?” Examples of support may include helping with the visibility of work by creating documentation in the classroom, helping design or add materials to a specific area of the room, meeting to go over documentation for ideas to expand on, or setting up a provocation in the classroom. Jennifer adds that teachers often want support with the mini-studio in their classroom; for example using clay tools, using other art media and/or help working with the children.

The studio is a warehouse to a wealth of materials. The Boulder Journey School has two large school-wide material drives where families are invited to donate materials. At the end of the school year, a note is sent home to families asking them to collect materials over the summer to bring in at the beginning of the next school year in the fall. Children then bring these materials into their classrooms and discuss what to keep in the classroom and what to take to the studio.

The other school-wide drive is done mid-year in the winter, during the holiday season. Families are asked to collect wrapping paper and other decorative items. There are also two baskets by the front school entrance for families to drop off materials any time. In addition, every month, in the family newsletter, teachers can ask for specific stuff. Jennifer also pointed out that children are
involved in the sorting and organization of the materials in the studio, as this heightens their awareness of what kinds of materials are available to them to use.

Figure 22

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role at the Mountain Center</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer Selbitschka</td>
<td>Studio Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellen Hall</td>
<td>School Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren Shaffer</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher (Toddlers, ages 2-3 yrs old)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alan, Becca, Colleen, Chase, Eleanor, Ethan Finnegan, Gabi, Hailee, Howdy, Jeremiah, Jimmy, Jordan, Kendra, Lincoln, McKenzie, Meredith, Ramika, Sasha, Will (pseudonyms)</td>
<td>Children ages 2-5 years old</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

La Routine Giornaliera

To describe what the children experience on a day-to-day basis, I utilized four dimensions of schooling: pedagogy, curriculum, evaluation and aesthetic to guide my observations. These dimensions are interconnected and influence the type of experiences children have. The curricular dimension refers to the purpose
of the curriculum. The pedagogical dimension looks at how the content is mediated. The evaluative dimension refers to the multiple ways in which teachers assess the children’s learning. Finally, the aesthetic dimension considers the type of sensory experiences that the children have. These dimensions are woven throughout the following descriptions.

**The Pretty Project**

The “Pretty Project” developed from a group of four- and five-year-old girls who were interested in beads and jewelry making. The project centered on the question *what is pretty?* Jennifer and the girls’ classroom teacher wanted to learn more about this question and wondered how they could extend the children’s interest and investigation. When I first began my observations at the Boulder Journey School, this project was already underway. The girls were in the process of collecting materials to take back to their classroom to create a “pretty studio.”

Jennifer shared one of her observations with me that all of the “pretty” stuff that the girls had collected was human-made items. The question that she was pondering was, “do we have an ethical duty to expand their understanding of what is pretty?” I found this to be an interesting question, not typical for many early childhood educators to ask. Jennifer’s thinking behind this question was to expand the children’s idea of what is pretty beyond human-made materialistic objects to seeing, recognizing, and appreciating innate and natural beauty. Explaining her thinking further, “for example, if they had an appreciation for the
beauty of their natural environment, would they be more inclined to care for the environment and become advocates in the global warming debate?”

According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children’s (NAEYC) *Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement of Commitment*, educators do have ethical responsibilities to children. Within this position statement are principles that early childhood practitioners can reference when facing ethical dilemmas. Although there is not a specific principle regarding this situation, the NAEYC’s (2005) *Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement of Commitment* does state “our paramount responsibility is to provide care and education in settings that are safe, healthy, nurturing, and responsive for each child” (p. 2). At this age children are dependent on adults and I think it is our professional and ethical responsibility to make decisions based on each individual circumstance—in the best interest of the child.

Jennifer was also thinking about how they could bring the materials into all areas of the classroom, not just the mini-studio; for example put materials in the dress-up area to serve as jewelry or in the building area to make their buildings pretty.

Before the group of girls came down to the studio for their appointment, Jennifer shares her thinking with me, “What constitutes pretty? Sparkliness? Shininess? Swirly, shape and form? Tickly, texture?” I watch as Jennifer puts all of the chairs away and she explains that she does this to promote more fluidity and movement around the table and studio space.
“I often think, what am I doing and why?” Jennifer says, sharing her thinking with me again. I frequently observed Jennifer exercising her metacognition, thinking about her own thinking—and thinking a few steps ahead. Jennifer hypothesizes the many different directions her work with the children may go, rather than predicting. She tells me, “work with children rarely goes the way you predict.”

Jennifer puts out an assortment of materials on the small table; items that the girls collected from around the studio that they thought were pretty. Some of the items included ribbon, jewels, decorative paper, cupcake liners, pink note cards, Easter grass and paperclips. On the large wooden table in the center of the room, Jennifer sets out eight small clear boxes, eight small cardboard boxes and a larger wooden box with drawers intended for the children to use for sorting.

Three girls, ages four to five years old, enter the studio: Meredith, McKenzie and Kendra. The girls dive right into the materials displayed on the table.

“Ooooo!” gasps Meredith upon seeing all of the pretty materials.

“These would be great for my tiara!” Kendra shouts. Jennifer videotapes the children’s interactions with the materials.

“All of the sparkly things are going in here. I’m collecting the shiny,” remarks McKenzie. Jennifer tells me that she’s standing back to see what their process is. In her mind she is still trying to figure out how much to provoke and how much to stand back when observing. Jennifer encourages the children to converse between each other in this particular experience, because she feels that
her questioning interrupts their work. Instead of continually questioning the
children while they work, Jennifer later revisits the documentation (video in this
case) and then asks the children questions about their work. In her mind, Jennifer
questions whether or not she should be interrupting children while they’re
working. She explains this further:

As a teacher, you do not have to do everything or discover all the
information right there in the moment. There is the beauty of time
to go back and revisit your documentation of the experience, share
your thoughts about the experience with a colleague, and/or
process what happened a little bit longer. All these strategies will
help you become more informed and more knowledgeable so that
when you do go back to the child or children later to ask a
question, make a comment, or offer a provocation, you will be
more successful.

The girls continue to explore and put the materials into containers.

Meredith says, “maybe we can have a container of colors?”

In response McKenzie shouts, “these are rainbow colors!”

Across the table Kendra says, “Hey! I have an idea. We can put different
things in different containers.” Topal & Gandini (1999) state that when exploring
materials, “children’s main interest is in looking, feeling, comparing, describing,
contrasting, and exchanging observations with one another” (p. 14) which I
noticed during this “pretty” exploration.

“What would make us do that?” Jennifer asks Kendra.

“They might be kinda the same,” Kendra responds.

“Like what?” Jennifer asks.

“Sparkly,” Kendra says.

“What was pretty about those?” Jennifer asks Kendra.
“Sugary sparkle,” Kendra responds.

“McKenzie, what made you so excited about those?” Jennifer asks.

“I’ve never seen them before. They sparkle in the sun,” McKenzie replies in reference to multicolor Easter basket grass.

“What makes that pretty to you?” Jennifer asks.

“They are rainbow,” McKenzie states.

“What makes those pretty?” Jennifer asks again, trying to understand McKenzie’s thinking a bit more. Jennifer asked this question different times referring to different materials each time.

“They are all different colors,” McKenzie says.

The girls are now holding up materials in the sunlight streaming in through the windows. Jennifer turns to me and wonders, “does the position of the material make it pretty?”

“When we put it in the sun, it looks pink like ice cream,” McKenzie shares with us.

The girls continue in their dialogue back and forth while mixing the materials together.

“How are you girls going to use those in your classroom?” Jennifer asks the two girls.

“We’re just going to look at them,” McKenzie says as she is organizing the materials in small, clear plastic boxes.

Two boys and their teacher walk into the studio. They are looking through the shelves at the materials. Their teacher gets them a step stool so they can see
up on the higher shelves. They gather up some materials and head back to their classroom.

This morning’s studio session has come to an end. The appointment hour is flexible based on the children’s rhythm and interest. If the hour is coming to an end and the children are still deeply involved in the work, then the appointment is extended and the schedule for the day is readjusted. The girls return to the classroom. Jennifer shows me the planning web she created with the girls’ classroom teacher. The web consisted of materials, activities, ideas, and questions the teachers had. They brainstormed possible avenues the project could go including the incorporation of collage and drawing. They were interested in investigating “what is pretty” and the exploring the question “why is pretty important?” with the children.

The next afternoon, Jennifer watches the video footage she took of the girls during the Pretty Project. She writes notes as she watches the video. Next, Jennifer puts out the boxes of pretty materials that the girls had previously put together and the group of girls return to the studio. The girls sit at the table, looking at the boxes in front of them. Jennifer encourages them to share their ideas of why they put the materials together the way they did and what makes them pretty.

“Sometimes you look down and then see it is shining and it looks like a rainbow,” McKenzie shares.

“So do you think when some materials that aren’t pretty can become pretty when mixed together?” Jennifer asks. This idea that materials can become pretty
when placed with pretty materials originally came from Kendra and Jennifer has decided to offer her idea back to the group of children.

“Ya,” McKenzie says.

The girls continue to finger through the materials, looking at the jewels, decorative paper, cupcake liners, pink note cards, and Easter grass. Kendra tells the group that she wants to combine everyone’s materials. The other girls don’t want to.

“This is my special box. I collected it because it was shiny and sparkly,” Meredith tells the group.

Jennifer offers the idea of taking photos of the materials in the boxes so then the girls can go back and show their class. Everyone wants to except for Kendra. Kendra wants to show her classmates the real thing. Jennifer offers the idea to do both. The girls agree and Jennifer gives them a digital camera to take photos of the materials and the “qualities” of the materials.

Excitement is heightened amongst the girls as they use the digital camera. Jennifer sits back and gives them time to play with the materials and take photos. Through conversation, the group decides that materials can have more than one pretty property—and that they will need to create a system for organizing and labeling the boxes full of materials. They agree to create signs for each box, labeled with a word such as “shiny.”

As the children finish up their work, Jennifer feels that the studio appointment has come to a close and the girls return to their classroom. Jennifer talks with me about how children can influence other children’s ideas—and that
she thinks she will have them come down to the studio one by one, to come up with their own ideas first. Jennifer explains this further:

I think it is wonderful that children influence each other’s ideas and I use this strategy and rely on this strategy a number of times in my work with children. Sometimes when you ask the children a question as a group they offer the same answer. In other words, they will repeat the same answer that their classmate said before them. In such a case, it becomes useful to use this strategy of asking them individually so that their answers are more varied. Then you can bring all of their ideas back to the group and revisit the question for further expansion as a group.

As Jennifer is cleaning up the studio space, I take the opportunity to ask her about how her journey with the studio has evolved over the years. “Two years ago I wouldn’t have offered my own ideas,” Jennifer tells me. She goes on to explain that it is what Carlina Rinaldi refers to as “lending knowledge,” which is the offering of knowledge to children so they can build off of it. “Teachers often feel inhibited, thinking children won’t think for themselves… find the opposite,” Jennifer explains. Eleanor Duckworth (1996) speaks to the importance of having wonderful ideas, which relates to Rinaldi’s ideas of “lending knowledge.” Duckworth says that having wonderful ideas do not form out of nothing, but rather they build on a foundation of other ideas. Also according to Duckworth, there are two elements in providing occasions for wonderful ideas:

One is being willing to accept children’s ideas. The other is providing a setting that suggests wonderful ideas to children—different ideas to different children—as they are caught up in intellectual problems that are real to them. (p. 7)

Duckworth’s ideas connect to what I observed in the studio. Jennifer accepted the children’s ideas and asked questions to fully understand their
thinking. And two, the studio offers a rich environment that provokes the children’s imaginations and curiosity. It invites children to represent their ideas through multiple forms—requiring problem solving to figure out how to represent ideas through chalk, clay, wire, paint, etc.

As Jennifer continued to clean up the studio, I asked her what advice she had for others who are interested in creating a studio space. Her advice is as follows:

- Start slow.
- How you define the space will depend on the context created in the school—and this space changes all of the time with new children and teachers come new ideas.
- Have a skeleton, experimenting with different set-ups. Find what works for your space, children and teachers.
- Every studio space is different—just start trying and get feedback.

**Beadless Mobile**

Jennifer is in the studio preparing for her next studio appointment that involves making a mobile. The mobile is going to be for Alan’s little baby brother, Johnny, who just started attending the Boulder Journey School in the infant room. Jennifer tells me that siblings welcome their infant siblings to the school by making them a mobile for their crib. She sets out the materials the children have already collected for the project on the table, which includes colored plastic beads, brass metal triangles, bolts,
black plastic washers, beaded necklaces and a few small buttons. Jennifer tells me that she has to focus and think, as she looks through the shelves of materials. I could immediately tell that Jennifer was concentrating and deeply thinking about what materials to select from the shelves and offer during her studio appointment today.

“Let’s go in a totally different direction with them,” she tells me. Jennifer thinks out loud telling me that she is trying to think of how to take them one step further. Jennifer continues looking through the shelves, considering each material and what it has to offer. Pulling out some colorful paper scraps and colored cellophane she says, “What else could we string? First thing we go for is beads.” Jennifer later explains that she was trying to provoke the children’s thinking around other materials that could be used to string with wire, as children always go for beads and nothing else. Jennifer wanted to open their thinking to other possibilities that exist as well as how to “string” materials that don’t have holes.

Jennifer wants to push them beyond just stringing beads by offering them materials other than beads. She plans to work alongside of them to offer them ideas—which in turn might spark them to have wonderful ideas. She wants to offer them other ways of working with the materials.

Two girls and two boys enter to the studio. Together they look at the materials and decide to take them back to their classroom’s mini-studio to work on the mobile. The four children and Jennifer have a seat
at the table in their classroom’s mini studio. They put out all of the materials they brought with them from the large studio on the table.

Jennifer works with a little boy, Alan, and shows him how to use the wire cutters and other wire tools. The children all watch attentively while touching and holding various materials. Jennifer shows the group of children how to use a wire tool to bend and twist wire. Each of them tries manipulating the wire, each with varying degrees of ability. Next, Jennifer holds up a piece of transparent paper to the light streaming in from the nearby window.

“Do you see what’s special about it? What do you notice?” The children all stare at the piece of paper with curiosity. Jennifer folds the piece of paper, uses a hole punch and tells the children it’s now like a bead to string on wire. The children all seem a bit puzzled. She invites a little girl to try it. Meanwhile, Jennifer notices that two of the children are unsuccessful in trying to cut the wire.

“These tools are to shape wire, not to cut wire,” Jennifer explains as the children were using the wrong wire tools, trying to cut the wire.

“I did it by myself! It’s shaped like a marble,” a little boy Marvin shouts. The two girls, Sasha and Ramika, are working on stringing the thin translucent paper on wire. Alan gets some blue masking tape and attaches it to a piece of wire. Sasha is still having difficulty cutting her piece of wire.
“You know who is really good at cutting wire, Alan. Ask him to help you,” Jennifer suggests. Howdy, a child who is not interested in the group activity is on the floor exploring a piece of wire; unraveling it and seeing how it holds its form.

“Howdy, still sitting on the floor exploring materials, unravels a spool of wire. Jennifer motions to Judith, the classroom teacher, to look at Howdy. Judith acknowledges that she has been watching him. The teachers were fascinated by how he chose to engage with the materials, they explain to me; they were not watching him because they weren’t accepting his actions. Howdy, approximately three feet from the group working at the table, throws rolls of cellophane around on the floor. He picks up a cardboard tube with green cellophane, about two feet long, and holds it up to his eye and looks through it. Next, he pulls the cardboard tube out of the orange cellophane.

Howdy continues to do the same with clear and blue cellophane, taking the cellophane off of the central cardboard tubes. He puts two cardboard tubes up to his eyes and looks around in a circular fashion. Howdy is talking to the cellophane, tubes and wire while smiling and covering himself in cellophane. The
materials appear to have provoked Howdy’s imagination, which Dewey (1990) notes, “the imagination is the medium in which the child lives” (p. 60). Tangled and covered in cellophane, he crawls over to where I am sitting, smiles at me, and then crawls back to his pile of materials.

It is obvious that he is finding pleasure in this experience. Hyson (2008) states “adults have the responsibility to ensure that childhood is joyful, wondrous, and rewarding in itself, not just as preparation for a successful future” (p. 22). It was apparent that Howdy’s exploration of the materials was joyful and rewarding in itself.

Ramika walks over to me and asks me to help her poke a hole in her piece of paper with wire cutters. The paper rips in half. She tries this four more times as I hold the paper and she pokes. She was finally successful and smiles. Across the table, Sasha holds up a piece of white wire and looks at Jennifer.

“What do you want me to notice?” Jennifer asks. Jennifer explains to me that she chose to ask that question because sometimes when children show her their work she is unsure what they would like her to notice. Jennifer explains further:

I feel that giving blanket statements such as “I like what you have done” or “that is really beautiful” does not have meaning for the child nor is it authentic. I feel like there is a reason that the child shows me his or her work, something in particular they want to direct my attention to.

Sasha does not have a response and returns to stringing paper on wire. Jennifer tells the children that now it’s their job to show the other children how to use the materials, wire and how to punch holes.
Jennifer senses from the children that it is time to wrap up the studio appointment. As Jennifer prepares to head back to the main studio, she encourages the children to keep working on their mobile if they please and leaves the children to work with their classroom teacher in their mini-studio.

**Not Found in a Curriculum Book**

The types of projects the children experience at the Boulder Journey School is quite noteworthy. I found myself captured, overtaken by curiosity, when I came across a panel entitled *Tape and Paint: Exploring the Concept of Negative Space*. My first thought was, you definitely wouldn’t find this type of project in a preschool curriculum book. The documentation panel explained:

Recently the children in Classroom Four have been investigating possibilities for creating negative space. To further provoke this investigation, the teachers offered the children pieces of plexi-glass, covered with strips of tape for the children to paint over.

This was a project in the toddler room, children one to two years old—exploring “negative space!” I have run an infant/toddler center and have visited many others and never have I heard of toddlers exploring the concept of negative space with tape, paint and plexi-glass.

As I continued walking down the hallway, I came across another documentation panel entitled “Authentic Literacy and Mathematical Experiences Supported through the Need to Communicate.” With my interest sparked, I stopped to learn more.
During morning meeting, Bryant announced that he had lost his beloved stuffed dog, Rufus. As teachers we are always looking for opportunities for young children to use the written word as a form of communication. With the children, we decided to create signs to announce our search for Rufus and solicit help from the school community. The children reflected on how their individual talents could contribute to the group’s cause.

I include these examples to share with the reader for many reasons. First, documentation is a powerful way to communicate the experiences of the children and teachers in the school. I was able to learn and gather valuable information from reading these panels that I would have otherwise never known. It also creates a history of the school.

Second, the studio at the Boulder Journey School infiltrates the entire school, so I wanted to give the reader an idea of the types of projects that occur school-wide. The types of projects done with these young children are avant-garde—taking early childhood curriculum where it hasn’t gone before. The curriculum is created by the teachers at the Boulder Journey School rather than found in a teacher’s guide. It is authentic and rich, rather than scripted and artificial. William Ayers (2001) compares curriculum found in textbooks or curriculum guides to fast food: “it was available and a little addictive, filling, but in a disappointing kind of way, and you were hungry again soon after you finished” and continues that “the curriculum had the same general relationship to knowledge or understanding as McDonald’s has to nutrition” (p. 85).

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8 William Ayers (2001) defines curriculum as everything that goes on within the school walls, not limited to the books, materials, units, plans, and guides.
Third, my focus for this research looks at how children are communicating through many different symbolic languages and this last example of Rufus shows how the written word is not overlooked.

**Saturn 5**

As one walks down the hallway towards the kindergarten classrooms, it’s hard not to notice that the walls are painted black—not something very typical for an early childhood program. On the wall in this dark section of the hallway is a panel that explains the “space documentation,” a project about outer space that started in the fall of 2002 and is still continuing. I found it remarkable that this project started over seven years ago. A focal point in this section of the hallway is a large, floor to ceiling construction of a rocket ship called *Saturn 5*. The rocket ship is built out of a variety of materials including computer parts, metal pieces, metal tubing, a Christmas tree stand, calculator parts, wood pieces, tubing, electrical circuits and chains amongst other items. This rocket ship definitely catches the attention and curiosity of anyone who encounters it—including myself.

The documentation panels on the wall describe the creation and history of this magnificent construction. The panel includes comments from the children who helped build it. The following commentary is from two five-year-old children in reference to sorting and collecting materials that could be used to play with in outer space:
The materials are in the big studio. We are bringing different materials in. We are testing them out to see if we want them anymore and we’ve been playing with them to see what we think they should be.

Saturn 5 is a fantastic example of children using recycled materials to bring an idea to life from their imaginations, aided by the studio. Saturn 5 was a group effort, combining multiple perspectives and theories of children, parents and teachers. The building of this rocket ship exemplifies children using their creative thinking and problem solving skills in deciding how to connect and use the various materials.

Figure 23

This is the rocketship Saturn 5
This particular studio appointment was for a small group of four five-year-old boys. Room Fifteen’s teacher Angela was struggling with one of boys in her class, Lincoln. Angela was having difficulty supporting Lincoln in collaborative work and wanted to encourage him to share his ideas and listen to the ideas of others.

One of Jennifer’s foci during this studio appointment is working with Lincoln on his collaboration and sharing of perspectives. I note in my journal that sharing and appreciating others’ perspectives is a common learning goal for children this age. Most children do this naturally and others struggle with this concept a bit. The undertaking for today’s studio appointment is an extension of a classroom project, involving the construction of blocks. This group of boys had previously built a large block construction in their classroom. Jennifer took photos of the block construction, which is still standing in the classroom, and today they are going to work on building more onto it.

The boys eagerly enter the studio, touching many of the materials on the shelves as they walk over to the table. Jennifer explains that today we are working in teams, and pairs the boys up. They take a seat and Jennifer gives each pair of boys an 8x10 color photo of the block construction with a clear plastic sheet taped on top. Jennifer talks with the boys about their ideas of how to they can build onto their previous construction and what kinds of materials they can
add. She explains that they are going to talk about their ideas first and then draw them on top of the photo.

“Look at your photos. What can you add to the block construction?” Jennifer asks the group.

The boys immediately start yelling out ideas such as lasers, a radio, guns, more blocks, and a bridge. Lincoln does not like any of these ideas and repeatedly says “no” to all of the suggestions. Jennifer steps back from the table and begins videotaping the boys. Finnegnan and Chase draw a bridge, ship, people and a gun on their photo. Lincoln and Jeremiah draw an antenna that they explain sends messages to a radioactive gun—if it sees bad people. Jeremiah then draws a trampoline, explaining, “so they can jump and land on eagles.”

“I want to add windows so they can see the bad guys,” Lincoln tells his partner Jeremiah.

After about ten minutes the four boys take their photos and drawing over to the shelves to browse for materials—materials to use to build what they included in their drawings.

“If we can’t find a gun, we can make a gun,” Lincoln tells the group.

“What shapes are you looking for? Maybe you could find more than one, two materials and put them together to make a gun?” Jennifer suggests.

“Hey Lincoln! We can use this to be a shield, or we can have square windows,” Jeremiah shouts. The boys use a wooden step stool to look through the materials on the top shelf and put the materials they selected in a basket: bike parts, metal parts, colored plastic tubes. Topal and Gandini (1999) explain that
exploring materials can be an evocative experience, as it stimulates the imagination and invites children to tell stories. This was illustrated in Jeremiah’s last comment, as the material he found inspired him and gave him an idea of what he could do with it—use it as a shield or square windows.

“Hey Lincoln, this is our old chain!” shouts Jeremiah as the excitement continues between the boys. It is important to point out that the children, families and teachers all play a part in collecting and donating materials to the studio. As a result, the studio is warehouse to an abundance of provocative materials.

“Where did you find those balls?” Finnegan asks.

“We might need some rubber bands,” adds Chase.

“The arrows could shoot out of here Lincoln,” says Jeremiah.

I note how this seems to be a positive experience for Lincoln, once he got engaged in the activity. At first he did not like anyone else’s ideas, but then he began to open up as his interest was sparked by the project. He collaboratively works with his partner and other boys, offering and accepting ideas. “It [learning in groups] encourages children and adults to confront and accept points of view different from their own” (Krechevsky & Stork, 2000, p. 62). From my perspective, Lincoln’s enthusiasm and interest was sparked by the activity and he quickly realized that he needed to work with his partner in order to partake in the project.

Jennifer brings the boys back together after they’ve had about ten minutes to collect materials and they sit in a circle on the floor. Jennifer tells the boys to “use [their] drawing to come up with what else [they] need.” The boys decide
they have what they need and pack up the materials they collected (for their block structure) and travel back to their classroom.

Now standing in front of the block structure and looking at their drawing, the boys think about how to use the materials. I notice a strip of paper taped on the block structure with the message “DSOPKEMNSF.” Chase uses a long rectangular block as a pattern to cut a rectangle out of red plastic cellophane. Jeremiah decides that he wants to start by building a slide. Jennifer encourages them to use materials other than the blocks. Jeremiah doesn’t want to, he wants to use the blocks.

“Can I show you an idea? If you don’t like it, you can take it down” Jennifer adds as she picks up some of the materials they collected. She offers Jeremiah some ideas of how to use some of the materials to build a slide. He watches but doesn’t seem interested in her ideas. Instead, he has decided he wants to make a flag. He tapes a piece of blue cellophane on a wood block and shows Jennifer how you can blow it. Jennifer suggests that we get a fan, to create wind. Jeremiah likes this idea and Jennifer leaves the room to go get a fan. Jennifer went alone instead of with the boys as they were so engaged in their work. She felt that if she stopped their work to go get the fan, it could be disruptive.

When Jennifer decides that it is a good time for her to leave, she encourages the boys to keep working on their block construction and that she’ll come by later to see what they decided to add.
Rainbows in the Rocks

As Jennifer prepares the studio for her next appointment, she gives me the background on this project. Lauren’s class has been taking walks outside in the community and they have noticed that the majority of the houses surrounding the school have a fenced-in yard, with rocks in front of the fence by the street and sidewalk. The children have been interested in the rocks and have been bringing them back to the classroom where they have been exploring them. Jennifer and Lauren, the toddler teacher, have been discussing how the studio can better reflect the experiences the children are having in their classroom to provide more continuity—versus isolated experiences. Jennifer has been thinking about how the children can experience the rocks in numerous, different ways. What kinds of materials can represent rocks? Drawing, clay, paint?

The children have already drawn pictures of the rocks they collected. The teachers decided to use paint because it was a medium that they had become comfortable with and had much recent experience with; more experience than with other materials. Jennifer and Lauren felt that paint would be the best medium to support the children’s work, rather than offering a medium that the children had not had ample experience with and which deserved more time devoted to open play and exploration. Jennifer is preparing the studio space, putting out the children’s drawings, displaying rocks on the table, setting out small glass jars of paint and long paint brushes. Jennifer puts a large sheet of plexi-glass over the top of the rock drawings on the table. She tells me that the
children have already chosen the colors of paint to be used based on the colors they saw emerge when the rocks were wet: various shades of green, tan, yellow, red, light pink, and black.

Lauren, the children’s classroom teacher, will be joining the small group in the studio today. She comes in and gets the rocks wet, explaining that the children noticed that when the rocks were wet, they were more colorful. This illustrates the importance of listening to children’s ideas, accepting and giving value to them. Five children, two boys and three girls ages two-and-a-half to three-years-old enter with Lauren, get a paint smock on and take a seat at the table. You can tell by the look on their faces that they seem eager to start interacting with the paint.

The children start painting on the plexi-glass and on the rocks that are placed on the table. One little girl, Gabi, paints her hand. She then uses her hand to rub the paint around on the plexi-glass. The colors change as paints mix together and she is delighted to discover the color pink. Colleen mixes tan paint into the green paint jar and says, “look what’s happening!” Then Colleen puts her paintbrush in her mouth to taste the paint. She says that it tastes good.

Colleen is painting her lips with red paint. Sitting next to her, Hailee puts her hand in the jar and squeezing the paint in her hands. Across the table, Jordan looks up at the ceiling and says that the painted ceiling tiles are beautiful. Jennifer is sitting at the table, taking notes on a clipboard and not interacting with the children very much. Hailee puts her hand from jar to jar, squeezing the paint between her fingers. Jimmy is painting with a paintbrush in each hand.
comment in my journal that each child is having a different experience and some children are taking the activity in an unexpected direction—which Jennifer and Lauren are okay with.

Jennifer and Lauren decide the children’s work has come to a culminating point for the session and talk to the children about cleaning up. The children carry the glass paint jars over to the sink, stand on step stools to reach the sink, and wash out the jars.

The next morning, Jennifer prepares the studio space for the group of children to return. Jennifer explains to me that she keeps working with the same class on a consistent basis and then moves to another group when she feels that the previous classroom she was working with is in a place where they can continue the work without her for a period of time. She tapes all of the children’s drawings of rocks together, fifteen drawings in all, and sets them on the table. Jennifer places rocks directly on top of the paper drawings, no plexi-glass this time. Jennifer and Lauren are conversing and Jennifer explains her reasoning for not using the plexi-glass. She explains that painting on paper offers a much different experience and surface than painting on plexi-glass. Also, instead of using a variety of colors of paint, they are just going to use black paint.

The children return to the studio and once again the children put on their paint smocks and take a seat at the table. Jennifer gives a few, simple suggestions and the children immediately put their paintbrushes to work.

“Crocodile, I’m painting a crocodile!” Jimmy tells the group.
Ethan is painting black dots on a rock when Ellen Hall, the school director, brings in a study tour of five adults. The children don’t seem to notice and continue their painting activity. Ellen (and myself) noticed how interested the guests were in all the materials displayed on the shelves around the studio by the looks on their faces.

“I made this rock all black,” Colleen tells the group.

“I made a bumble bee,” says Gabi.

Hailee paints her hands black, as she did with the paint the previous day.

“I made a dog,” Jimmy adds.

Lauren suggests to Jennifer to put out new papers of their rock drawings. Jennifer cuts out the rocks, photocopies of the children’s original rock drawings, and offers them to the children. She cuts out each individual rock this time to give them more of a rock form. Colleen scoops paint out of the jar and puts a big pile of paint on the table.

The teachers observe the children and decide that the painting experience has reached a stopping point. The children help clean up by washing out the paint jars and paint brushes at the sink and using wash clothes to clean up paint off the floor.

After the children return to their classroom, I asked Jennifer to compare the children’s experience with the rocks yesterday with today. She said that overall, it was different. “In the first experience, the children didn’t refer to their work as anything. There was more paint on the plexi than on the paper. Jimmy was focused last time on strokes and today he traced the rock and painted dots.
inside. Hailee had the same process, paint on her hands. Colleen painted the rocks, but became absorbed in the paint again like last time."

I was also curious as to why Jennifer chose to only offer the children black paint. She explained to me that color can take away from the focus of a new idea and therefore she chose to offer the experience without color. Her intent was for the children to focus more on the shapes, contour, and lines in the drawings.

Jennifer explains this further:

The idea is that sometimes when color is an element, it becomes the experience. When the element of color is removed, then the focus shifts. As a way to provoke the children’s thinking about how the form and relationship of their strokes could represent the form of an object, such as a rock, we decided to use one color of paint.

“We usually do this with drawing, offering black pens instead of markers displaying a full range of colors when we would like children to communicate their ideas through drawing,” Jennifer says. Her question now is, “how does this same idea transfer to paint?”

Jennifer explains that they are going to try to take this rock and paint experience one step further. She plans to cut their drawings out, to once again give them more rock form. Jennifer also wants to invert the color on the copy machine, making their rocks solid black. And she also wants to offer the rock drawings vertically up on the wall, not horizontally on the table.

The next morning, the group of children returns to the studio to continue their work with the rocks. Jennifer is sitting on the floor, in front of a large piece of white butcher paper with the black rock cutouts lying on top. Jennifer invites
the children to arrange the rocks on the paper. After the children place the rocks where they want them, Jennifer tapes them down. Lauren again joins the group in the studio and helps Jennifer tack the butcher paper up on the wall.

Jennifer asks McKenzie, “McKenzie, who loves you?”

“Lauren,” McKenzie says referring to her teacher. Jennifer explains to me that Lauren has been this group of children’s teacher since they were infants. Now they are two-and-a-half-years-old and she knows them so well.

Jennifer invites the children to use the paint to add more details or new ideas. The children line up in front of the paper on the wall and start to paint, this time with white paint on the black rocks. Some of the children pull real rocks out of the box and paint them white. After a few minutes, Lauren offers the group black paint in addition to their jars of white.

“I see rainbows,” Jimmy says as he holds up his paintbrush and stares at it. What an interesting comment I note in my journal.

Lauren and Jennifer put down another piece of white butcher paper on the floor, accompanied by a box of rocks. Gabi is painting the rocks with the gray paint she has mixed. Ethan is making swirls on the paper with his paintbrush. Jennifer asks Jimmy what colors he notices in the rock he is holding.

“Rainbows, blue and black,” he responds.

Ethan continues to paint swirls on the paper and says, “I’m making a wheel, a wheel on a truck.”

“It’s a rainbow,” Colleen says referring to the paint on her paintbrush.

“Black and blue, Lauren!” Jimmy says.
Black paint has spilled all over the floor. Without concern, Lauren wipes it up with a wet towel. Gabi and Hailee help her dry the floor. The teachers converse and decide to bring this studio session to an end.

Lauren turns to Jennifer and says, “I think it would work better if we took less children.”

Jennifer seems to agree and adds, “I think we should have pictures of real rocks. Makes more sense to me. Otherwise it’s like a collage.”

“Should we mix pictures in with the drawings of the rocks?” Lauren wonders.

“Yes, I like that a lot,” Jennifer replies.

Jennifer thinks out loud, as I notice she often does. She wonders if black took away from the experience—but then decides that black gave it form.

“Before it was just lines and contour,” she says. Jennifer continues to tell me that she thinks the idea of a pile of rocks was way beyond their zone of proximal development. She thinks that by bringing in photos of real rocks it might help them see it as a whole. Jennifer then starts to think about how the paint resembled a rainbow to the children, appearing to be a bit puzzled.

A School for the Bears

Two four-year-old children enter the studio, Becca and Will. They had previously made flowers out of clay. It appears that the children had built their clay sculptures on wooden boards, which I presume to make the travel and storage of the pieces much easier. Topal and Gandini (1999) explain that children have
different rhythms when it comes to working on projects and “having the possibility to return to what they were doing respects children’s different ways of working” (p. 47). These clay sculptures had been stored on the “works in progress” shelf.

Jennifer has their sculptures on the table next to small glass jars, paintbrushes and an assortment of acrylic paint for them to paint with. Photos of flowers printed from the internet rest on the table next to the clay flowers. Jennifer gives them plastic paint palettes.

“Becca, can you tell me about your clay?” Jennifer asks.

“This is a kitty flower that is kinda wobbly,” Becca replies.

“What color are you going to paint it?” Jennifer asks her.

“Actually, I don’t know. These are all kitty flowers. I wanted to have a lot of kitty flowers,” she responds.

“Will, can you tell me about yours?” Jennifer asks.

“A kitty flower…. A live flower and a dead flower,” Will says.

“How did it die?” Jennifer asks.

“I don’t know. Well, I made it die,” Will replies.

In through the door comes Eleanor, a four-year-old and she joins her classmates at the table. Beca and Will are more or less exploring the paint; Becca is painting her plastic palette while Will is putting paint in various glass jars. Eleanor has a slab of clay and a box of wire tools and wire next to her on the table.

“What are you making with clay?” Becca asks Eleanor.
“I’m making a vase,” Eleanor replies.

“I want to work with clay now, not paint. I would like to make with clay, clay hair,” Becca tells Jennifer.

“Maybe you should make a clay fox,” Eleanor tells her.

Jennifer tells me that she didn’t expect them to want to use clay, as they were really into painting last time. Jennifer sits at the table the three children and takes some clay in her hands.

“Do you remember how to use the slip?”

“Yes,” Becca says.

“What two things do you have to remember?” Jennifer asks the group.

“Don’t forget the slip!” Will says.

“Eleanor, can I show you an idea? You can use these if you want to make shapes,” Jennifer says as she sits down next to Eleanor and shows her how to use different clay tools.

“Wavy designs… drawing tools… You can use this to smooth and your fingers are also good tools,” Jennifer tells Eleanor and the whole group as she demonstrates. Eleanor eagerly starts using the tools, just as Jennifer has showed her. Looking through the box of wire next to her, Eleanor decides to combine wire with her clay vase—poking and weaving it through the clay. She wraps the wire around the outside of the vase and uses the wire as a tool.

Jennifer grabs a slab of clay, slices off a piece and demonstrates attaching two small clay balls together, scoring and using slip to attach the pieces together. She then shows the group how to smooth it together and suggests that they use
their fingers for this. With all eyes on her, Jennifer poses the question, “Why do we use slip with two pieces?”

“It sticks them together and makes one piece,” Will replies.

“And it makes it stronger,” Jennifer adds.

“Otherwise it would break,” Becca comments as she molds and shapes her piece of clay.

“I’m making a bear school,” Becca tells the group.

Jennifer is busy helping the others in the group, so I take the opportunity to ask Becca a question. “Where bears go to school?”

“Yes,” Becca replies.

“What do they learn there?” I ask her.

“They learn how to make little pointy things that deer use to help them trot,” Becca tells me.

“Are they antlers?” Eleanor asks in response to Becca’s comment.

“No, their hooves!” Becca replies.

Lewin-Benham (2008) explains that because most preschoolers cannot yet read or write, they use materials as modes of expression. Becca is expressing her understanding of what she knows about bears and her understanding of school.

“This is Tom and Jerry music,” Will says in regards to the jazz music on the radio.
“Eleanor, you don’t know what a bear school is but I do,” Becca tells her.

Jennifer readily gives the children more clay to work with.

“If the bears don’t like water…. This is a cave and this makes the water slide off (slanted roof). And then they play in the water,” Becca says.

Continuing to form the clay of her bear school, Becca goes on to say, “this is a baby bear school, silly.”

“They actually hibernate now… This is a momma bear school,” Eleanor says in reference to her clay creation. She has now also decided to make a bear school.

“So they can learn more things,” Becca chimes in to Eleanor’s last comment.

“When this dries it’s going to be awesome!” Will tells the group.
“Mine is going to be awesome too,” Becca replies.

“Your bear school and Becca’s bear school is very different… Did you notice that?” Jennifer asks. The girls, still working, nod their heads in agreement.

“Laugh at my bear school, isn’t it funny? Its sape,” Becca asks the group.

“Sape? Shape,” Jennifer offers.

“Yes, shape,” Becca says.

“What shape does it look like?” Jennifer asks her.

“Square,” Eleanor replies.

“I’ll call it a bear head,” Becca says.

“It almost looks like a turtle from here,” Jennifer adds. Becca walks around the table to take a look and agrees.

“Where did you get that idea (in regards to making a bear school)?” Jennifer asks her.

“It came from my mind, that made me want to make a bear school,” Becca answers. Topal and Gandini (1999) make the case that “the studio space is not an isolated place where artistic things happen,” but rather “it is a place to see that thinking can be expressed through materials” (p. 24). Topal and Gandini take it one step further by describing the studio as a “laboratory for thinking.”

In regards to representing their ideas of a bear school, something that obviously doesn’t exist, the children are exercising their imaginations. Efland (2002) explains that “imagination is the act or power of forming mental images of what is not actually present to the senses or what has not actually been
experienced” and that “it is also the act or power of creating new ideas or images through the combination and reorganization of previous experiences” (p. 133).

Jennifer explains that clay artists get their hands wet and slimy, which makes working with clay much easier.

“I’m doing something with my work but I don’t know what,” Becca says as she is rubbing the clay.

This studio session has lasted longer than usual, an hour and twenty minutes. This is an example of how the appointment time is flexible, as the children were deeply involved in their work and Jennifer provided the children with time to keep working. The children have been engaged and interested in their work the entire time, which is quite impressive for children this age.

“You try something and it’s not what you expected,” Jennifer tells me as today’s studio session wraps up. She had expected to work with the group on painting their clay flowers, but instead they took it in a different direction.

**Collaboration with the Italians**

While in the studio one day I came across a binder on display entitled *Our Work with Carlina Rinaldi*. Carlina Rinaldi is the President of Reggio Children. The Reggio Children Website defines itself as a company that manages the exchange initiatives between the schools in Reggio Emilia and the teachers and researchers from around the world (http://zerosei.comune.re.it/). Rinaldi is also the Director of the Loris Malaguzzi International Center and a professor at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, both in Italy. Rinaldi worked alongside
Loris Malaguzzi from 1970 until his death in 1994 and was the first pedagogical coordinator in the schools. Rinaldi is well known for her lectures regarding the work in Reggio Emilia and has published many articles, chapters, and books (Edwards & Rinaldi, 2009).

Jennifer invites me to read through the binder, which is a collection of notes, observations and advice that was documented from a time that Carlina Rinaldi came to work with the staff at the Boulder Journey School in 2002.

The first piece of advice that I found relevant and noteworthy:

About the clay experience—Take pictures of development or different phases of the clay creation. Take notes of the child’s words as they create it. The piece needs to be shown as a narration, each element is important because of what it represents. Give value to the children’s work—qualify it by asking questions and taking pictures.

Next, in regards to working with materials:

Collect an “alphabet” or vocabulary of clay, how many signs of clay can they make—coil, ball, small pieces, large slab. Reinforce the vocabulary they have and use and then they will use it again and again to create a code for communicating. Elements alone tell something individually and together they tell a story. Focus on the concept of communication and how the children communicate with or during art creation. How can each alphabet or vocabulary support one another? Wire and string? Paper and cloth?

From a meeting during Rinaldi’s visit, the suggestion was mentioned to play with materials in terms of discovering their properties. I thought this was worth mentioning as well, because all too often early childhood teachers expect children to produce a product. But in order for children to create something of meaning, children need to understand the properties of materials—what each
material is capable of expressing. Therefore, children need time to play with or explore the potentials that each material encompasses.

Another idea from this binder that I would like to mention is the use of light as media and using light as a way of drawing. Some of the specific notes include:

- When the room is dark enough, the feeling of the classroom is different and the light becomes the protagonist.
- Find the joy in playing with light. Offer opportunity to play with the light and shadow.

In reference to the children’s work, suggestions were given about how to talk with children and how to find out more information about their work. The notes included:

How often do you ask the children “what is it?”

- In doing this you can destroy the possibility of metaphor and take focus off of the meaning of what the child is doing.
- Do not want to encourage the child to think figuratively.
- Want to find a perfect combination of what and why.

I think we are all guilty of this, asking children the question “what is it?”

During my observations, I often heard the following statement “tell me about your (drawing, building, painting, etc.)” rather than asking a child to say what it was.

By questioning in this fashion, you get much more information than a single word response (a car, a boat, a rainbow).
Response from the Boulder Journey School

Response from Jennifer Siemenski Selbitschka

Hi Laura –

I am sending you my suggestions. Most of them are an attempt to clarify or elaborate on some things that without additional context could be misinterpreted. The major one that I noted throughout is the way the studio appointments come to an end. The way it is communicated right now it sounds as if the appointment is run by the clock - please read the suggestions I make in the track changes and let me know if they make sense or if you need further suggestions. I thought it looked great! I really thank you for the opportunity to look it over for feedback. The last thing I want to do is let my suggestions interfere with what you feel is your conclusion on what you observed - I was more just trying to offer further clarification. Let me know if you have ANY questions!

Ellen said that it is OK to use the school name. Also she was wondering if we could see the images you are including that have children in them so that we can give the families of those children a head's up. Thanks so much! You're SOOOOO close!!!

Jennifer Siemenski Selbitschka
Studio Teacher

Response from Ellen Hall

Hi Laura,

I finally found some time to comment on your dissertation. It's very interesting and I enjoyed reading it immensely. I am attaching the document that Jen sent you with my comments and suggested edits in blue. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions. Best of luck!

Dr. Ellen Hall
Executive Director
Boulder Journey School

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9 All edits suggested by Jennifer Siemenski Selbitschka were made in Chapter Four.
10 All edits suggested by Dr. Ellen Hall were made in Chapter Four.
Summary

The previous descriptions were meant to capture my observations and the daily experiences of children in two different Reggio-inspired studios. The descriptions were separated into four sections. The first section, *La Finestra Aperta*, provided the reader with a contextual and descriptive introduction into each school and studio. The second section, *La Dimensione Intenzionale*, used Eisner’s intentional dimension of schooling to help describe the purpose of the studio and studio teacher. The third section, *La Dimensione Strutturale*, looked at the structural dimension; the physical affordances of the studio which included how time in the studio was managed and how the work in the studio connected with the children’s primary classroom. The final section, *La Routine Giornaliera*, utilized the pedagogical, curricular, evaluative, and aesthetic dimensions of schooling. I used vignettes from each of the schools to illuminate the experiences of children within each setting.

Next, in Chapter Five I will discuss the similarities and differences between the two studios. I will present themes that emerged throughout my descriptions and will answer my research questions. I also present the reader with implications for education in general and ideas for further research.
CHAPTER FIVE

Thematics, Evaluations, and Implications

Overview of Study

The purpose of this study is to describe and analyze how the implementation of studios, as utilized in the schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy, can contribute to improved early childhood programs in the United States for young children. This study seeks to understand the experiences of the children in Reggio-inspired studios and determine what can be learned from such pedagogical practices. By describing, interpreting, and appraising the intentions and operations of two Reggio-inspired studios, I hope to shed new light on an alternative approach to educating young children and the importance of art in the field of early childhood education.

As discussed in Chapters One and Two, the arts and aesthetics are basic to the total curriculum, just as reading or mathematics, but do not receive such importance in American schools (Jalongo & Stamp, 1997). The current trend in early childhood is a back-to-basics approach where the arts are being cut from the curriculum so more time can be spent on the fundamentals (Schiller, 2000). The educational significance of math or reading is rarely questioned, while the arts
often require substantial justification (Eglington, 2003). When the arts are not ignored in school settings, they are often used to make other subject matter more appealing (Brittain, 1979).

There is a considerable difference between the way many American educators view the role of art in early childhood and the conception held by educators in Reggio Emilia. In the United States many educators do not believe that the arts and aesthetics are significant types of learning, while in Reggio Emilia they hold quite the opposite view (Jalongo & Stamp, 1997). In American classrooms, creativity and the arts are often considered an extra and are only allowed if there is extra time (Jalongo & Stamp, 1997). Eglinton (2003) explains that because many educators have a “narrow view of what art in early childhood could potentially offer, many educators fail to understand the importance of art in the early years, and possess, at best, only a vague notion of how to support the artistic learning of young children” (p. 3). Educators in Reggio Emilia believe that art should be the right of every child because it is an essential element of human thinking (Rinaldi, 2006). Thompson (2006) points out that there is a growing area of interest in this area as preschool programs are being developed in public schools and the role of the atelierista in Reggio Emilia is providing examples for educators around the world.

After reviewing the literature, I created four research questions: 1) What is the role of a studio in a Reggio-inspired school? 2) What is happening in the studio? 3) What are children learning in this environment? and 4) How does the studio cultivate children’s hundred languages?
As previously mentioned, I chose educational connoisseurship and criticism for my research method in order to understand, describe and analyze the pedagogical practices of Reggio-inspired studios. I chose two different Reggio-inspired schools that employ studios to study. I spent two weeks observing and interviewing teachers, children and administrators at each site.

Educational connoisseurship and criticism is a form of qualitative research that was developed by Elliot Eisner. The intent of this research method is to improve educational practices by critically using the information and/or data collected. The researcher helps the reader understand the data collected and apply the knowledge gained to other educational practices.

This method is a type of qualitative educational evaluation that has two parts, connoisseurship and creating criticisms. Connoisseurship is the art of appreciating qualities and relies heavily on perceptivity, which Eisner (1998) describes as the ability to experience and differentiate qualitative relationships. Criticism is the art of disclosure as it gives the data a public audience and it is dependent on the material made available through connoisseurship. Eisner makes it clear that criticism is not negative in nature, but rather is the illumination of qualities or relationships so that a judgment of its value can be made.

There are many schools and early childhood programs in the United States inspired by the Reggio Emilia philosophy but the degree of implementation varies. In some programs, the influence is strong when educators have studied the philosophy and adapted the ideas to use in their context. In other cases, the influence is more partial when only a few of the educators within a program
embrace the philosophy and focus on only a few elements. For this study, I chose two school sites based on a set of criteria, as it was important to find school sites that fully embrace the Reggio Emilia philosophy in order to study contexts in which my research questions could be best answered. One site was studied in Colorado, the Boulder Journey School, and the other site in Missouri, The St. Michael School. Both school sites are private and have Reggio-inspired studios that serve preschool-aged children.

The data collected in this study includes observations, formal and informal interviews and artifacts. My primary function was to observe and record the experiences of the children in the studio and their interactions with their studio teacher. My observations not only attended to the practices of the studio teacher and their interaction with children, but the physical environment as well. I conducted both informal and formal interviews in person, at the school sites. Formal and informal interviews were conducted with the studio teachers, classroom teachers, children and administrators at both school sites to understand their experiences with the studio. I also collected materials from each school such as brochures, lesson planning documents, informational booklets, newsletters, photocopies of the children’s artwork, and other items that I deemed beneficial.

I used my conceptual framework of the six dimensions of schooling to help with my data analysis. The six dimensions of schooling include the intentional, structural, curricular, pedagogical, evaluative (Eisner, 1998) and aesthetic (Uhrmacher, 1991). However, when analyzing my data, I was open to
data that did not fit within this framework to ensure that I did not miss anything of potential significance.

In Chapter Four, I provided the reader a detailed illustration of each Reggio-inspired studio. The application of related literature to my data collection drove my interpretation, woven throughout my descriptions. The stories of the two studios I illustrated are only two examples of how programs in the United States are implementing the Reggio philosophy, in regards to studios specifically. However, I believe these studio stories offer a multitude of ideas for the way in which we think about early childhood education and young children’s learning. My goal is that these stories will provoke the reader’s thinking.

**Differences and Commonalities**

I had slightly different experiences and observations at each school site. One reason being that each studio functions within its school context and is constructed to suit the children, families, and educators at each site. Therefore, I expect that Reggio-inspired studios function differently at sites across the United States. The purpose of this research study is not to compare, rather the purpose is to learn from the experiences of each studio, to answer the research questions, and shed light on such practices.

Overall the studios both embrace the Reggio Emilia philosophy in their environments, curriculum, and pedagogy. One main difference between the studios is a result of the structure of sites. The Boulder Journey School studio serves fourteen classrooms and The St. Michael School serves two classrooms,
the Junior Kindergarten and Kindergarten. In addition, the Boulder Journey School studio serves children from infants through age six, whereas The St. Michael School studio serves children ages three to six years old. Both schools have mini-studios in the main classrooms, but the Boulder Journey School offers more mini-studios due to the fact that the school has more classrooms. Some mini-studios in the classrooms at the Boulder Journey School have a particular focus. For example, the mini-studio in Room Twelve has more evidence of sewing than other materials. The mini-studio in the infant room has more of a focus on paper, as the children were exploring and interacting with paper. Another mini-studio focuses on clay and yet another on writing. The mini-studio in the Junior Kindergarten classroom at The St. Michael School did not have a particular focus.

Another difference between the studios is that the Boulder Journey School placed a larger emphasis on the collection and use of recycled materials. About a half of the studio space at the Boulder Journey School was designated to storage of the recyclables (bike tires, tubes, metal parts, glass jars, etc.), which invited teachers and children to “shop” for materials. Other differences, if applicable, will be noted as I answer the following research questions.

Discussion of Themes and Response to Research Questions

My data collection was based on six dimensions of schooling: intentional, structural, curricular, pedagogical, evaluative (Eisner, 1998) and aesthetic (Urhmacher, 1991). These dimensions were not all inclusive, meaning I allowed
for other observations or themes to emerge. The themes that emerged from this study will be discussed in the response to the research questions that follow. The terms I use, stated as themes, are terms that I have coined to encapsulate what I have observed, even though these terms are not foreign to insiders familiar with the Reggio Emilia philosophy.

**Question #1: What is the role of a studio in a Reggio-inspired school?**

More specifically, what does the studio teacher hope to accomplish in the studio? This research question is focused on the goals and aims of the studio teacher, as the teacher is a determining factor in how a classroom (in this case a studio) operates and impacts children. Also, what distinguishes a Reggio-inspired studio from a traditional art classroom?

The studio played a slightly different role at each site, which is explored in depth in the *La Dimensione Intentionale* sections pertaining to each school in Chapter Four. Since the intentions or roles of the studios are slightly different, I will first review each site independently.

Near the entrance of the studio door at The St. Michael School, a documentation panel clearly describes the purpose of the studio. The intentions of the physical environment and of the studio teacher are stated as:

- It is a place for the use and understanding of materials. It gives children opportunities to explore and become experts with materials in a place that is designated for this purpose.
• The *atelier* is a workshop for relationships among materials, experiences, ideas, theories, emotions, new understandings, and multiple ways of communication.

• It is essential that the contents of the studio offer children many materials and languages with which to express and communicate. They will have different sensitivities to various materials based on their individual personalities, attitudes, and knowledge. This is at the heart of the reason for an *atelier*. It causes us to reconsider the types, and quality of materials we offer children.

• The studio is also a place of research and documentation.

This documentation panel clearly communicates the goals and aims of the studio at The St. Michael School, but I probed a bit further for additional information. During an interview with Chuck he explained that the studio has to connect; it cannot be isolated from the classroom and the daily life of the children and teachers. He also described the role of the studio teacher as an active job, as you have to initiate, but that it is also receptive. Chuck explains:

You really have to start by listening and opening yourself up rather than an art curriculum that is completely closed. You have to open up to the teacher’s point of view and take that into what you are doing. And be open to that. I have to let a little bit go of my agenda knowing it will still be there in the new place. But letting go and letting those things come back in a new form that I couldn’t have previously seen.

The identity of the studio at the Boulder Journey School is still evolving, according to Jennifer. She feels that they are still in the process of figuring it out and that “it is never going to be one thing.” Jennifer says that this year it is both a workspace and a place to house materials that are not designated to the
classrooms. Classroom teachers and children use the studio space for intimate group work. The studio is also viewed as a shopping area for materials and ideas, which is its most frequent use by teachers and children in the school.

Near the entrance to the studio is a documentation panel “The Process of Developing and Identity for our Studio.” It states that there are three main functions of the studio: 1) a place for shopping, 2) a place for play, and 3) a place for continuation of classroom work.

In regards to the studio as a place for play, Jennifer tells me that she observes what children are doing with the materials and that she often observes that children like to play with the materials on the shelves. As a result, she puts materials next to each other on the shelves that can be played with together. “If they want to play, I learn just as much. I just sit back,” she tells me.

In regards to Jennifer’s role as the studio teacher, she states that it is to support both the children and teachers in their knowledge of working with the materials. A question that Jennifer has been thinking about in regards to working with the children is “how can we complicate their thinking and move forward, to get them to work outside of their comfort zone with materials?”

Ultimately, the common goals/aims of both studios studied include: 1) a place to explore materials, 2) a space that supports learning and trying out new and different artistic techniques and skills, 3) a place that promotes expression through multiple languages, and 4) an environment that helps integrate the curriculum, connecting it to the work being done in the classroom.
Looking at these commonalities a bit further, the studio serves as a house or storage of materials. This role was larger at the Boulder Journey School particularly in terms of collected reusable/recyclable materials. Large wire shelves housed an abundance of materials. Children and teachers at the Boulder Journey School used this space to “shop” for interesting materials, to either use in the studio or to take back to their classroom. But overall, both studios offer children a multitude of materials of which to explore and investigate.

The studio also serves as a space to support learning and trying out new and different artistic techniques and skills. A variety of tools were available to support the development of artistic techniques and skills such as wire cutting/bending tools, paintbrushes of different sizes, clay tools, adhesives, and reference books for the studio teachers.

The studio provides children with an environment that promotes expression through multiple languages. A wealth of materials and media were available for children to use to communicate such as paint, clay, wire, yarn, paper, chalk, and charcoals, amongst others. This variety and wealth of materials is important as Lewin-Benham (2008) explains:

Each child’s relationship with materials is unique – drawn strongly to some and barely to others. Yet every child has a romance with some type of material and some form of expression. The more varied the materials, the more intense the romance and the richer the experience. (p. 74)

All of these aims and goals are distinguishing elements of Reggio-inspired studios and set them apart from traditional art classrooms. Taking the role of the
studio one step further, during an interview with Chuck, he referenced Loris Malaguzzi in saying:

Loris Malaguzzi made a statement about the studio that is in The Hundred Languages of Children\(^1\) and he said that the studio is meant to be an interruption in the school. And he had this little trickster part of his personality, he liked to play jokes… so what he is saying is… schools plowing along, we all have goals, we all have objectives, sometimes those things can get really regimented and really predictable and really prescriptive… and the studio’s job is to interrupt that, to cause… and he said it in a very strong way… it’s like throwing a wrench in a machine. But he’s saying, it needs to happen. The studio needs to interrupt that prescriptiveness and so it can head somewhere new.

Therefore, Malaguzzi (the founder of the Reggio Emilia philosophy) intended for the studio to be a provocation; to be a stimulus, to incite new ways of thinking. With new ways of thinking, come new ways of doing things—as the role of the studio is continually evolving and changing.

**Question #2: What is happening in the studio?**

There are many things happening in the studio simultaneously, worthy of attention. What is the studio teacher doing? What are the children experiencing? What symbolic languages are the children using to express their learning? What types of activities are the children partaking in?

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\(^1\) *The Hundred Languages of Children* is a book published in 1998 by editors Carolyn Edwards, Lella Gandini, and George Forman.
First, let’s take a look at what the studio teacher is doing. What the studio teaching is doing also relates to what the children are experiencing. The studio teachers are preparing the environment, projects and provocations that promote creative thinking, social interactions, and skill/technique building.

From my perspective, all of the vignettes in Chapter Four involving children illustrate how the studio teachers prepared the environment and activities to promote social interactions, as documented by the dialogue and conversations. A particular example of intentionally promoting social interactions includes the vignette *Think Outside the Blocks*, at the Boulder Journey School, in which a small group of four boys was required to use teamwork, working in pairs on their construction project. An example in which social interactions naturally occurred was the vignette *A Pasticcio of Experiences* at The St. Michael School, when two children, Lesley and Leo, worked together to sound out words and figured out how to write numbers on the chalkboard. Again, these are only two specific examples of social interactions, as each studio observation was booming with conversations and interpersonal exchange.

Early childhood classrooms play an important role in children’s social development. As seen in the context of the studios studied here, children are given opportunities to establish and engage in peer relationships, practice social skills such as turn-taking, conversation and collaboration, experience the reactions of others, and learn new ways to interact with others. According to Ladd, Herald, and Andrews (20026), some classrooms provide a better context for children’s social development than others. Two elements of a classroom environment that
have shown to support children’s social interactions include the opportunity to engage in creative activities and teacher involvement (Kontos, Burchinal, Howes, Wisseh, & Galinksy, 2002). The Reggio-inspired studios studied provided children with numerous opportunities to engage in creative activities (e.g., painting with water colors, building with paper, creating with clay, drawing with charcoals, building with recycled materials). Also both of the studio teachers, Chuck and Jennifer, were involved in the children’s studio experiences by scaffolding their work, asking questions, offering ideas and demonstrating techniques.

Ladd, Herald, and Andrews (2006) also point out that over the past 25 years parents have continued to join the workforce and, therefore, childcare contexts are being used to promote the socialization of children. This adds an added weight on the shoulders of early childhood educators, an often under-realized responsibility. The studios studied here provide examples of how the studio teachers prepared the environment, projects and provocations that naturally (and intentionally) encouraged social interactions amongst the children.

Again, the studio observations were full of activities that promoted children’s skill and technique building. At this stage of their development, children ages three and four years old are continually improving their fine motor development in their hands and also eye-hand coordination, which allows them to manipulate tools and materials with more control. With this developed control, preschoolers are able to work more purposefully and represent recognizable
figures for their ideas. Practice and opportunity to manipulate small tools such as scissors, tape dispensers, paintbrushes, and drawing utensils (pencils, markers, chalk) support this motor development.

With this motor development, children have the capability to advance their representational abilities by learning advanced techniques with various tools. The studio teachers provide children with the opportunity to advance the sophistication and expressibility of their artwork by teaching them how to use various tools and techniques particular to various media or languages. In particular, the vignette *Painting the World*, at The St. Michael School, provides an excellent example of the children learning techniques in watercolor painting. Another example of an activity that promoted skill and technique building was the vignette *A School for the Bears*, at the Boulder Journey School, in which children learned how to use clay, specifically how to use slip to make clay pieces stick together. Yet another example from the Boulder Journey School is the vignette *Beadless Mobile* in which the children learned how to use wire tools. Thompson (2006) acknowledges the importance of adult scaffolding of young children’s artistic learning, as the studio teachers played a critical role in the children’s learning of these skills. Lewin-Benham (2008) points out, "each material requires different coordination of brain, eye and hand" (p. 48) and therefore it is important that children have these varied experiences.

Jennifer described this exchange of technique and skill building as "lending knowledge" to the children. In addition to lending knowledge in terms
of skill and technique building, Jennifer also referred to the lending of ideas. “Two years ago I wouldn’t have offered my own ideas,” Jennifer tells me. She continues to explain that it is what Carlina Rinaldi refers to as “lending knowledge,” which is the offering of knowledge to children. “Teachers often feel inhibited, thinking children won’t think for themselves… find the opposite,” Jennifer explains.

Eleanor Duckworth (1996) speaks to the importance of having wonderful ideas, which relates to Rinaldi’s idea of “lending knowledge.” Duckworth says that having wonderful ideas do not form out of nothing, but rather they build on a foundation of other ideas. Also according to Duckworth, there are two elements in providing occasions for wonderful ideas:

One is being willing to accept children’s ideas. The other is providing a setting that suggests wonderful ideas to children—different ideas to different children—as they are caught up in intellectual problems that are real to them. (p. 7)

Duckworth’s ideas connect to what I observed in both studios. The studio teachers accepted the children’s ideas, asked them questions to fully understand their thinking, and sometimes offered them different ideas. Also, the studio offers a rich environment that provokes the children’s imaginations and curiosity. It invites children to represent their ideas through multiple forms—requiring problem solving to figure out how to represent ideas through chalk, clay, wire, paint, etc.

The children are also experiencing activities and projects that require them to think creatively. One perspective of creativity in children is defined as
“behavior which is original, spontaneous, and self-expressive” (Runco, 2006, p. 128). Studio experiences that I observed which promoted creative thinking include the vignettes of *Painting the World* and *Paper Building*, at The St. Michael School, and also the vignettes *Beadless Mobile, Saturn 5, Think Outside the Blocks*, and *A School for the Bears*, at the Boulder Journey School. For example in the vignette *Painting the World*, at The St. Michael School, Sadhana conveyed her understanding of the world through watercolor paints. Her conception of the world included furniture, grass, roads and sidewalks as depicted in her painting. Another example is illustrated at the Boulder Journey School, in the vignette *A School for the Bears*, as the children came up with an imaginary idea of a bear school and then had to think about how to represent their ideas through clay.

In turn, the studio teacher is making the children’s thinking visible by documenting the process. A terrific example is the vignette *Paper Building*, at The St. Michael School, in which Chuck documents the construction of the children’s paper building by drawing small diagrams, as illustrated in Figure 12. This type of documentation shows the children’s thinking throughout the process of the building with the paper, balancing the importance of process and product. Another example is the *Pretty Project*, at the Boulder Journey School, in which Jennifer uses a video camera to document the children’s process.
Question #3: What are children learning in this environment?

This question seeks to understand the received curriculum. What are students learning as a result of the activities occurring in the studio? The children are learning a multitude of knowledge such as the social skills of collaboration and teamwork, problem-solving, and early literacy and math skills, amongst many other things. For the purposes of this study, I focus on the major themes that emerged in regards to children’s learning. As a result of the activities, environment and instruction of the studio teacher in the studio, the children are learning: 1) positive approaches to learning, 2) an ecological perspective and creative thinking, 3) theory building, and 4) how to communicate through many symbolic languages. I will further explore each of these areas.

But first, Krechevsky and Stork (200) offer the following statement that has implications for this research question. They state:

Most of us think of assessment as evaluating learning as a product, not a process (‘what did the students learn? not ‘how are the students learning?’) But assessment is as much about how children learn and make meaning as it is about the products and outcomes of that learning. (p. 61)

In regards to my research question asking what are children learning, this statement brings to light the importance of the how students are learning. Therefore, I explore not only what children are learning but also how they are learning.
Positive Approaches to Learning

Reggio-inspired studios help to develop positive approaches to learning in young children through the pedagogical practices, curricular approach and environmental conditions employed. Hyson (2008) created an approaches-to-learning framework, consisting of two primary dimensions: enthusiasm and engagement. Enthusiasm is considered an emotional/motivational dimension, whereas engagement is described as an action/behavioral dimension. Each dimension contains a number of specific components. Under the dimension of enthusiasm for learning, Hyson (2008) includes interest, pleasure and motivation to learn. Attention, persistence, flexibility and self-regulation fall under the dimension of engagement in learning.

The first component of the enthusiasm dimension is interest. Hyson (2008) points out that “feelings of interest are important in stimulating children’s attention, exploration, and persistent behavior” (p. 16). It was apparent throughout my observations that children were interested and curious about the activities and provocations in the studio. Children’s facial expressions, such as wide eyes eagerly observing the studio teacher’s demonstration or intense looks while observing a new technique, communicated that the children were interested. For example, during the Paper Building vignette in Chapter Four, I note “the children’s faces are full of curiosity, as they look at the plastic animals and paper strips in front of them.” During the Pretty Project vignette, in Chapter Four, Meredith (a child) gasps “Oooooo!” upon seeing all of the pretty materials. “McKenzie, what made you so excited about those?” Jennifer asks. “I’ve never
seen them before. They sparkle in the sun,” McKenzie replies in reference to the multicolor Easter basket grass. Another example is illustrated during the Thinking Outside the Blocks vignette, in Chapter Four, when I note “from my perspective, Lincoln’s enthusiasm and interest was sparked by the activity and he quickly realized that he needed to work with his partner in order to partake in the project.”

The curriculum in Reggio-inspired studios is molded around children’s interest. In Chapter Four, during the Rainbow in the Rocks vignette, Jennifer tells me that the children have been interested in the rocks and have been bringing them back to the classroom where they have been exploring them. The children’s interests are a guiding factor in the construction of curriculum.

The second component of the enthusiasm dimension is pleasure. Hyson (2008) states that “children are likely to become deeply involved in activities that bring them pleasure” (p.16) which isn’t a new concept, but an important one for educators to remember. Children’s experiences in the studio were overall pleasurable. I came to this conclusion based on my observations; the numerous smiles and laughter exhibited by children in the studio. For example, during the vignette A Pasticcio of Experiences in Chapter Four, Amber was exploring the gems at the light table while making funny faces and smiling in the mirror on the wall. During the Paper Building vignette, in Chapter Four, I note “each child eagerly starts talking to Chuck as they enter the studio; their excitement for being in the art studio fills the air.” And during the same vignette, Chuck states “Louie loves paper strips, that’s his thing.”
Another example that illustrates the children’s pleasure stemming from the studio is captured in an interview with a three-year-old child, Ashley. Ashley tells me that she likes going to the studio, as she likes to do the paint because it is fun. Also in Chapter Four, during the *Beadless Mobile* vignette, I note “it was apparent that Howdy’s exploration of the materials was joyful and rewarding in itself and also that it is obvious that he is finding pleasure in this experience.”

Another example, in Chapter Four, during *A School for the Bears* vignette, Will tells the group, “When this dries it’s going to be awesome!” In response, another child, Becca, says, “Mine is going to be awesome too!” Overall, the studio at both sites was a highly sought after place to be; a place where children wanted to spend their time.

The last component of the enthusiasm dimension is motivation to learn. “From infancy, children seem motivated to find out more about their world, to seek and master new challenges, and to become competent” (Hyson, 2008, p. 17). I observed children engaged in activities not rewarded or encouraged by others to continue with the challenging task at hand, but rather they were motivated and wanted to partake in the activity. The children were not “required” to participate in any activities in the studio. They always had the choice to return to their classroom if they wanted to. Throughout the course of my observations, I only observed one child at the Boulder Journey School decide to return to her classroom because she didn’t want to participate. Rather, the children’s participation was motivated by their desire to explore, control, and have effects on the materials and environment as can be seen throughout the vignettes. The
children were motivated by their desire to master a new challenge, as the studio teachers only provided minimal scaffolding support to keep them engaged. Rewards were not given to the children for their learning, rather they were intrinsically charged.

Engagement in learning is the action-oriented component of the framework. One of the main ingredients of engagement is attention. I observed children working attentively for sustained periods of time. In Chapter Four, during the *Painting the World* vignette, Chuck was demonstrating how to use watercolor paints and I noted, “all the children listen attentively, with their eyes on Chuck.” In Chapter Four during the *Paper Building* vignette, I noted, “the studio is quite quiet as everyone is busy creating.” Also during this vignette, the children worked for an hour in the studio before returning to their classroom. This is a substantially long period of time for children this age to be engaged and working. In Chapter Four during the *Beadless Mobile* vignette, I noted, “the children all watch attentively while touching and holding various materials as Jennifer demonstrates how to use wire cutters and other wire tools.”

The second component of the engagement dimension is persistence. Persistence not only requires children to focus their attention, but to keep trying when the task is difficult and sometimes frustrating. When faced with a challenging task, children portrayed persistence to work through it. For example in Chapter Four, during the *Pasticcio of Experiences* vignette, Leo tries to make sides for his slide out of paper and tape. He keeps at it, a few attempts fail, and finally, with the help of Chuck, he is successful. During the *Beadless Mobile*
vignette, in Chapter Four, Ramika pokes a hole in her piece of paper with wire cutters and the paper rips in half. She tries four more times, finally was successful at poking a hole and expresses her satisfaction with a smile.

The third component of the engagement dimension is flexibility. Without flexibility, children can hit a roadblock if they are only using one strategy in their pursuits or thinking. An example can be found in Chapter Four during the *Pasticcio of Experiences* vignette. A child, Lesley, struggles to tear tape from the tape dispenser, but keeps trying. She finally decides to use a pair of scissors to cut it off. Another example from Chapter Four, during *A School for the Bears* vignette, Eleanor first makes a vase out of clay and did not seem satisfied and then decides to make a bear school like her classmates. She was able to be flexible with her clay creation, changing directions when she was unsatisfied.

The fourth and final component of the engagement dimension is self-regulation. “Children who have developed appropriate self-regulation are able to guide their own physical actions, emotional expressions, and cognitive processes” (Hyson, 2008, p. 18). In Chapter Four during the *Painting the World* vignette, after finishing their paintings, the children had time to choose materials and activities from around the room to explore. The children exhibited control in their behavior and activities throughout my observations.

Why are these positive approaches to learning important? Hyson (2008) explains that not all approaches to learning produce good outcomes. For example children could learn to approach activities distracted, disengaged, discouraged or avoid activities all together, rather than wanting to try new challenges. These are
not behaviors that early childhood educators would hope to build or strengthen. Rather, Hyson (2008) explains, “children with positive approaches to learning also have developed flexible, innovative, and creative ways of handling challenges” (p.17). Positive approaches to learning such as enthusiasm and engagement are exactly the types of dispositions we want to develop in our young children.

*Ecological Perspective and Creative Thinking*

Reggio-inspired studios promote ecological awareness in children. Children learn to reuse and recycle materials that they would have otherwise thrown away by giving that object a new life. The studios I observed housed a variety of materials from tubes, pots and pans, cardboard, bubble wrap, wine corks, to Styrofoam. Again, this was implemented more at the Boulder Journey School but was still a viable aspect of The St. Michael School as well.

Other materials that I observed housed in the studios were natural materials such as seashells, pinecones, cornhusks, nuts, seeds, sticks and rocks. Instead of using consumable materials, these natural materials can be easily collected—free of cost, providing another alternative to commercially bought, consumable materials.

Nel Noddings (1992) suggests that education should be organized around ethics of care, two of which being caring for the earth and caring for the human-made world. “When we are careless with things or become obsessed with gross acquisition, we use far more than our share of the world’s resources, so our behavior with objects has moral implications” (Noddings, 1992, p. 139).
Teaching our children to use our planet’s resources wisely is an important mindset to develop at an early age. By reusing unwanted materials to bring ideas to life, children not only develop creative thinking and problem solving skills but are at the same time learning to respect our world’s resources.

Developing ecological awareness should begin with our youngest children. Cohen (1992) explains “one central issue, common to both children and adults, is the need to affect changes in attitude and behavior directed toward better conservation of our limited, natural resources” (p. 259). By teaching our three-, four- and five-year-old children to reuse and recycle materials by giving them a new life, we are steering them away from developing a wasteful mindset.

Taking this one step further, there is a lack of attention and research regarding the field of education for sustainability and early childhood education as Davis (2009) points out, “in general, early childhood education researchers have not engaged with environmental/sustainability issues and environmental education researchers have not focused their attention on very young children and their educational settings” (p. 229). With the lack of research in this area (early childhood education and educating for sustainability), the work being done in Reggio-inspired studios, the recycling and reusing of materials, may provide to be one avenue to help preserve our planet’s resources—and instilling this value in young children.

Developing an ecological perspective and creative thinking go hand in hand in these Reggio-inspired studios. By reusing materials and giving them a new purpose, the child is naturally required to think creatively and to use
problem-solving skills. For example in the vignette *Saturn 5*, at the Boulder Journey School, making a spaceship out of old computer parts, wires, tubes, and pipes challenges the child to consider how to represent his or her ideas and how to functionally connect all of those materials.

Another example that illustrates using recycled materials and creative thinking is the vignette from the Boulder Journey School *Think Outside the Blocks*. In this project the children “shopped” in the studio, collecting materials to build a bridge, ship, people and a trampoline. Materials that the boys selected included bike parts, metal parts and colored plastic tubes.

Creative thinking blossoms in these Reggio-inspired studios because the studio teachers enable creativity to do so. Some early childhood classrooms are not conducive to creative thinking. Edwards and Springate (1995) explain that early childhood teachers can build classrooms that support children’s creativity by creating an environment that inspires children, providing children with a collection of materials (bought, found, or recycled), and by offering children an atmosphere that reflects the teachers’ encouragement and acceptance of mistakes, risk-taking, freedom, and innovation. The physical environment may also have an influence on children’s development of creative thinking (Runco, 2006). The Reggio-inspired studios I observed provided a physical environment that was aesthetically beautiful, full of interesting materials, offered children a variety of tools, and displayed artwork created by children and teachers. From my perspective, as the researcher, the physical environment of the studios provoked
children to explore, question, touch, imagine, try, hypothesize, and create—all behaviors favorable for creative thinking.

With this said, creativity in young children is a complex concept. Runco (2006) explains that children’s creativity is unlike creativity of adults, as it may not produce a product but may rather “take the form of imaginary play, self-expression, or a new understanding of the world” (p. 121). One perspective of creativity in children is defined as “behavior which is original, spontaneous, and self-expressive” and that “may not result in a tangible product but is instead manifested in a process, again, the process of self-expression” (Runco, 2006, p. 128). The part of this definition that closely connects to the work being done in the Reggio-inspired studios studied is the idea that creativity manifests in the process of self-expression. The thinking behind the theory of a hundred languages (which is supported in both studios observed) is the belief that children use many different languages or modes of representation to express their ideas, thinking, emotions, questions—self-expression. This can be seen as children express themselves using materials such as clay, paint, paper, etc. Therefore, from my perspective, the Reggio-inspired studios and studio teachers studied here provide an example of promoting creative thinking in young children.

Chuck Schwall, studied in this dissertation, edited the book *In the Spirit of the Studio* along with Lella Gandini, Lynn Hill, and Louise Cadwell. At the end of the book Gandini, Hill, Cadwell, and Schwall (2005) reflect on creativity, stating:
• Creativity seems to express itself through cognitive, affective, and imaginative processes. These come together and support the skills for predicting and arriving at unexpected solutions.

• Creativity seems to be favored or disfavored according to expectations of teachers, schools, families, and communities as well as society at large, according to the ways children perceive expectations.

• Creativity requires that the school of knowing finds connections with the school of expressing, opening the doors (this is our slogan) to the hundred languages of children. (p. 195)

Creative thinking is important to develop in young children and should be a priority for early childhood educators. Runco (2006) states “creativity is vital to children’s development in much the same way that variation is vital for societal progress and biological evolution” (p. 121). Smilan (2007) also makes the point that as globalization takes effect and societies become more knowledge-based, there is an increasing need for creative thinking. Reggio-inspired studios can be a context to stimulate creative thinking in young children, by offering them a wealth of materials (recycled, bought and natural) and opportunities to think outside the box. Smilan also states that by using “repeat after me methodology, teachers mislead students to believe that there is only one correct answer to a question” (p. 242). The pedagogy I witnessed in the studios allowed children to think for themselves, to build their own theories (even if they were not correct), and to try out different solutions to problems.
Theory Building

Theory building, the application and connection of ideas, was integrated into the children’s experiences in the studios. Children expressed their theories verbally, through drawing, and through other materials. Lewin-Benham (2008) explains, “theorizing draws on prior experience, prediction, understanding cause and effect and analysis—all higher level thinking skills that will be required in school” and goes on to say that “transformation, turning words into drawings and drawings into three dimensions, is also a high-level skill” (p. 52). Karen, the Curriculum Coordinator at The St. Michael School explained:

Oftentimes we have children draw their theories: why do leaves fall off trees, why does it rain, where does rain come from. To draw it and then to explain it to you. And keep pushing and pushing and pushing them to really explain, explain, explain. Not to get the right answer, just to really get the thought process going.

This illustrates the importance of formulating ideas, regardless if they are right or wrong. A documentation panel entitled Children’s Theories (2000) at The St. Michael School exemplifies this quite well. This panel explained that children are constantly developing theories about how the world works, but that they are rarely asked to express their thoughts about how and why things happen. When children are asked they will explain their ideas, expand their ideas, support their theory with their peers, draw their theories and modify them as needed. This panel also explains, “while these theories may not be scientifically correct, they
do illustrate children’s complex thinking (hypothesizing, synthesizing, evaluating) when they are challenged to make their ideas clear to others.”

An example provided on this documentation panel explained how, in the fall, the children noticed that the leaves used to be green and changed to yellow, brown or red. The teachers posed the following question to a small group of children: “how do leaves change color in the fall?” The teacher’s observations, as stated on the documentation panel, are as following:

- The children’s theories became more understandable and defined as they explained them to others.
- The theories changed when they illustrated then explained them.
- The idea of one child might be picked up by another child in his or her theory later in the conversation.
- The drawings served as a schematic rather than a representation of what was happening.
- There was a variance in ability to express ideas verbally and through drawing.

As a result, the children are learning to build theories about how the world works—and that their ideas are valued. This requires the encouragement and support of the teachers, by providing scaffolding.

Miller and Church (2003) explain, “preschoolers at the preoperational stage of development use their perceptions of the environment, along with bits of information gathered during their past experiences, to understand their world” and
also that “they need to go through many illogical thinking processes before they can even begin to make logical sense of their world” (p. 32).

In addition, Lewin-Benham (2008) explains that prediction (that occurs when constructing a theory) causes children to think about multiple possibilities. This is an important skill for children to develop, in regards to problem-solving abilities. When faced with a problem, the ability to think of multiple possibilities is quite an asset. “The field of education is increasingly falling prey to didactic methodologies which train a nation of competent test takers, foregoing the opportunity to educate students to find problems and develop multiple solutions (Smilan, 2007, p. 242).”

*Communication Through Many Symbolic Languages*

During my observations, I witnessed the children expressing ideas through many symbolic languages including paint, chalk, charcoal, drawing, paper, clay, and light. A documentation panel in The St. Michael studio states:

John Dewey summarizes it in his book *Art as Experience* (1934):

Because objects of art are expressive, they are a language. Rather, they are many languages. For each art has its own medium and that medium is especially fitted for one kind of communication. Each medium says something that cannot be uttered as well or completely in another tongue. The needs of daily life have given superior practical importance to one mode of communication, that of speech. This fact has unfortunately given rise to the popular impression that the meanings expressed in architecture, sculpture, painting and music can translate into words with little if any loss. In fact, each art speaks an idiom that conveys what cannot be said in another language and yet remains the same.
Here, Dewey articulates the ideas that each medium has its own unique values, possibilities, and ultimately individualized communication. He also suggests that the languages of art, materials which communicate through the senses, are often devalued in relation to spoken and written forms of communication. The atelier can restore value to the languages that are based on the senses.

The studio offers many different modes of communication for children to choose from. By using multiple languages to communicate, children learn that they have strengths by finding success with certain materials. Lewin-Benham (2008) explains that children receive a feeling of power when they have the ability to use different languages as “those who lack competence in one area have alternative means of expression” (p. 75). During an interview with Karen, the curriculum coordinator at The St. Michael School, explained:

I think when you work with children you really start to see where each one is strong in some, one, two, three, more of the hundred languages. And, I think because we are seeing eight intelligences as Howard Gardner, the hundred languages…. So you see where each child has strengths. And because they are kind of on the same playing field, you say well he can’t do this but he can do this, and I’m sure we’ll keep supporting him in areas where he is weak. And I think you can save some of the kids who are really struggling in one area if you can use their strength, and they most always have one, to help them in areas that they are less able to do.
These children conveyed their understanding and knowledge about flowers through clay

**Question #4: How does the studio cultivate children’s 100 languages?**

Educators in Reggio Emilia use the term hundred languages as a metaphor for the multiple ways in which children learn and communicate their thinking, ideas, questions and feelings. Many early childhood programs across the U.S. utilize only two languages, verbal and written forms of communication. What can the theory of a hundred languages offer children who cannot communicate verbally or on paper? What languages can a studio offer or open up to children?

A topic that sparked my interest early in the study was the idea that a material can become a language. This concept was first introduced to me during a conversation at The St. Michael School with Karen, their curriculum coordinator. Throughout the remainder of my observations at The St. Michael School and the Boulder Journey School, I also pursued the question: *When and how does a material become a language?*
This idea becomes the simple answer to this research question, that the studio and studio teacher cultivates children’s hundred languages by teaching children how to use materials as languages. After considering all of the viewpoints and data I collected, I developed the following theory. In the studio children learn that there are many ways to express their thinking, questions, feelings and ideas by having access to wealth of materials, the time to explore the materials, and the support to develop skills and techniques. As a result, children learn to use a material as a language to convey their thoughts, ideas, questions and feelings. As children learn to use materials as languages, they create their own toolbox or repertoire of communication strategies that they carry with them. This can be illustrated in Figure 26. During an interview with Jennifer at the Boulder Journey School, she explained:

In thinking about materials as a language, a material is a suggestion. What is it suggesting to you? Each child develops a unique idea of what a material suggests because of their unique background, but it is what it is. It has universal properties.
Most preschool-aged children are just learning to communicate both verbally and on paper. They are learning new words, building a vocabulary and exploring visual symbol systems. These two modes of communication or languages were present in both studios that I studied. In addition, the studio offered children the languages of clay, watercolor paint, acrylic paint, tempera paint, wire, paper, chalk, charcoal, light, sound, and many many more. The studios were full of materials, offering many possibilities of languages. Smilan (2007) offers the idea that the arts help children say what can’t be said verbally or on paper, which is what the studios offer children. During a conversation with Chuck he explained to me:

There are things that happen with materials that can go beyond what spoken language can do, or can be more like poetry and not always just descriptive language. The kids take it past that. That’s where materials can go into the unknown or express things that aren’t just simple sign signifiers, object relation; they can do more with that. They can do it like an artist would.
During an interview with Karen, the Curriculum Coordinator at The St. Michael School, she discussed the cultivation of a hundred languages.

We integrate, seeing art and the different art media as some of the hundred languages that are equal to the other hundred languages of building, expression, talking. I think we’ve put it on an equal plane. Using the arts, the visual, graphic arts as another way for children to express themselves. It’s very connected to what we’re doing in project work. At the beginning of the year, we’re introducing those art materials because our hope is that we are going to make the material into a language. Amelia would say, when does a material become a language? When does collage become a way for children to express what they know? When does painting become a way for children to express what they know? Because we’ve got that painting in there, Lily painted the world, on her own initiative, not because we asked her to make a map or anything. They were just talking about the world and she painted. So she was expressing what she knew through art. And with the little guys, that’s the whole ball of wax. We’re trying to really get them, we know there is so much inside of them, and that we want them to be able to express what they know in a lot of different ways.

“You can’t have a language without a person interacting with it; who is working with it, reading it, it’s the reciprocity of the person with the material,” Jennifer told me during an interview. Children create their own language with the material based upon their background and interests. Trepanier-Street (2000) supports the notion that by offering children multiple forms of representation or multiple languages to choose from, children are able to select the form or language that best fits their thinking and learning style. This demonstrates how the arts serve as an essential factor in children’s ability to learn about the world around them.
Implications for Education in General

The previously stated answers to the research questions address the significance of the study relating to Reggio-inspired early childhood centers, but this study may also provide information for education in general. The studio practices studied here provide an example that contradicts the industrial mode of schooling—that focuses on constriction, control, and a limited body of knowledge. With the current educational climate moving in this direction, the Reggio Emilia philosophy offers another mode of thinking or an alternative way of doing things. In contrast to the current pressure and emphasis on standardized, scripted curriculum packages, Reggio-inspired programs shed light on the practice of negotiated learning and contextual curriculum. It also reminds us of the importance of setting up conditions and environments favorable to creativity. And lastly, the two schools studied also provide an example of social constructivism in action.

The experiences of children in these two Reggio-inspired studios illustrate that art is a cognitive activity. Whitfield (2009) justifies, “to omit the arts from young children’s learning experiences deprives them of the opportunity to transmediate, (i.e., develop a repertoire of strategies to use across symbol systems) (p. 156). Efland (2002) states:

If it were possible to convey everything that humans wanted to express with one or two forms (forms of representation), the others would be unnecessary or redundant. But since each of the arts offers unique ways of presenting ideas and feelings, which cannot
be matched by other systems of representation, their presence can be justified in terms of the cognitive abilities they nurture (p. 157).

Finally, with the current push for universal preschool and the requirement to have teachers certified in early childhood education, the need for development of teacher education programs at the college/university level will likely grow. The Reggio Emilia philosophy and the concept of studios have much to offer early childhood curricular, pedagogical and environmental practices, which justifies the consideration of such practices within teacher education programs.

Limitations

With all studies, there are potential limitations. First and foremost, there is limited cultural and socio-economic diversity among the population of children and teachers whom I studied. Regardless of the homogeneity of the participants, the purpose of my study is to shed light into the pedagogical practices of Reggio-inspired studios—ideas and practices that I believe could be useful with any group of young children. Readers, whether they are teachers, administrators or policy makers can pick and chose ideas that they think are applicable for their line of work or context.

The Reggio Emilia philosophy is a complicated integration of a multitude of theories that have developed over the past forty years (and is continually evolving) into what we call the Reggio Emilia philosophy. My understanding of the philosophy is still growing, as is that of the teachers and administrators with
whom I studied. There are many facets of the philosophy that I am still trying to fully understand.

Interviewing young children (ages three to five years old) provided the following difficulties: 1) children were reluctant to talk to me, and 2) young children have a limited vocabulary. I was unable to get as much information from the child interviews as I had hoped. This was partially due to the fact that I was an outsider in these children’s environments and some of them were reluctant to talk to me. I also wanted to maintain my presence as an observer, not to interrupt the flow of the classroom. Therefore, I wasn’t able to build the rapport with the children as I had expected. Even though I was only able to interview children at one school site, the documentation proved to be a very important source of information.

From the child interviews that I did conduct at The St. Michael School, the conversations were limited. I conducted the interviews with children in pairs and their interest was more in conversing with each other than with me, the researcher. Also, I encouraged the children to draw on their “understanding of the studio,” which was a more successful mode for the children to communicate rather than verbally. This may connect to the theory of a hundred languages, as the children preferred to use the language of drawing rather than words. Further research may attempt to interview young children to gain their perspective on the studio and also may include more access to different languages such as clay, paint, etc.
Further Research

The themes that emerged from this study hold significance for early childhood education and education in general. Educators, policymakers, parents and others involved with educational matters might benefit from reading about the two Reggio-inspired studios examined in this study. However, there are still many more areas to study.

With that said, in the future I would like to extend this research to include a wider diversity of children. For example with the influx of English Language Learners attending early childhood programs across the country, it would be worthwhile to know more about how the theory of a hundred languages could effect their learning. The hundred languages offer all children multiple ways to express their thinking and learning and could potentially be beneficial for this group of students who are learning to communicate—when they haven’t fully mastered communicating verbally or with spoken word in English.

Along the same lines, it would be interesting to study the effects of the hundred languages on supporting children who have special learning needs and who may be receiving special education services express their thinking and learning through different avenues. “There is much to be gained by considering Reggio’s approach to inclusive education and how it can be translated into our practices here in North America” (Gilman, 2007, p. 24). Children who have special learning needs in Reggio Emilia are the first to be accepted into the schools. They provide a wonderful model of how to include these children in the
regular classroom and this provides a wonderful learning opportunity for educators in the United States.

Exploring the connection between the Reggio Emilia philosophy and gifted education provides ground for further research. Some work has been done in this area, but there is much more to explore and understand. For example the effects of Reggio-inspired studios with gifted children, specifically children who may be creatively gifted.

There is also little research available about the implementation of this philosophy in Head Start programs. “Pressure from federal policy has pushed assessment-driven, academic instruction for the youngest children: most federal and state-funded programs use standardized, scripted curriculum packages that emphasize literacy and numeracy at the cost of open time for play, and administer a barrage of tests to the four and five year-old children enrolled in their programs” (Pelo, 2008, p. x). Since Head Start is a federally funded program, not many choose to adapt the Reggio Emilia philosophy. Although there are some, there are not many. All children, including those who are considered at-risk and from low-income families, should have the arts in their early education. It would be interesting to see whether or not Reggio-inspired studios provide any effects with children in Head Start programs.

**Closing Comments**

No matter where the Reggio Emilia philosophy is implemented it never looks identical because it is not a prescribed curriculum; rather it is a philosophy.
Its interpretation and implementation vary by context. However, my research study tells the story of two highly reputable Reggio-inspired studios— that are different, but also have many similarities. My study offers the reader two examples of how Reggio-inspired studios may function, with the understanding that implementation does vary by context.

As the Universal Preschool Movement continues to spread across the United States, it is essential that early childhood educators, families, and policy makers be sufficiently informed about best practices regarding young children’s learning. The Reggio Emilia philosophy, specifically the utilization of studios, has much to offer the field. As experts in the field continue to shape the expansion of preschool programs across the United States, we need to consider practices that turn children on to learning early in life and provide them with a foundation of exploration, curiosity, and creative thinking. Our world has an increasing need for creative thinking, to approach problems in new ways. Our world also has a need to preserve its natural resources, by instilling ecological awareness in its youngest inhabitants. And as Loris Malaguzzi would say, our children have the right to communicate through many different languages.
References


Uhrmacher, P. B. (1993). Coming to know the world through Waldorf education. *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision, 9*(1), 87-104.


Appendix A

Interview Guide: Studio Teacher

The following interview guide will serve as an outline of possible topics for conversation during my first formal interview with the studio teacher.

1. Describe your role as the studio teacher. (GENERAL)
   a. How long have you been the studio teacher?
   b. What is your background experience in the visual arts?
   c. How did you get placed in this position?
   d. Do you like being the studio teacher?
   e. What is your experience with the schools and educators in Reggio Emilia, Italy?

2. What are some current projects the children are working on in the studio? (CURRICULAR)
   a. Are the children working on these projects individually or with other children?
   b. Reggio educators speak of the hundred languages of children. Could you tell me something about that?

3. The studio is a very distinct space in the school. Could you talk about its physical layout? (STRUCTURAL)
   a. What kinds of materials are available for the children to use in the studio?
   b. How much time do the four and five year-olds spend in the studio during the week?
   c. What is the connection between the work being done in the studio and the children’s primary classroom?
   d. How much contact and communication do you have with parents?

4. How is the curriculum created for the children in the studio? (CURRICULAR)
   a. Who creates the curriculum?
   b. Do you collaborate with the classroom teachers regarding the curriculum? Please explain.
c. Are the students involved in creating the curriculum? If so, how?

5. Reggio educators talk about the teacher as a partner, nurturer and a guide. Could you talk about this? (PEDAGOGICAL)
   a. When the children are working on a project, how much support or guidance do you give them?
   b. How do you, as the studio teacher, help to cultivate the hundred languages of children?

6. What are your thoughts on evaluation and how are children evaluated in the studio? (EVALUATIVE)
   a. What skills or in what areas are children evaluated?
   b. How is the children’s progress monitored?
   c. Who decides what to evaluate?
   d. Are there certain goals children should attain by the end of the year?

7. What is the purpose of having a studio? (INTENTIONAL)
   a. How is it different than a traditional art classroom?
   b. What kinds of things do you think the children should be learning in the studio?
   c. What goals do you have for the children in the studio?

8. The physical environment of the studio is very beautiful. Could you talk about the environment? (AESTHETIC)
   a. What types of things do you consider when preparing the space?
   b. I notice a lot of natural materials and recycled materials. Can you talk about that?

9. Reggio educators talk about the image of the child. What is your image of the child? (GENERAL)

10. What have been the three most successful aspects of the studio? (GENERAL)
   a. What challenges have you faced in the implementation of the studio?
   b. What advice or suggestions do you have for others in the field of early childhood who are interested in developing a Reggio-inspired studio?
Appendix B

Interview Guide: School Director/Administrator

The following interview guide will serve as an outline of possible topics for conversation during my first formal interview with the school director.

1. Describe your role as the school director. (GENERAL)
   a. How long have you been the school director?
   b. How did you get placed in this position?
   c. Do you like being the director?

2. What backgrounds do most of the students at this school come from? (GENERAL)
   a. SES
   b. Ethnic
   c. Religious

3. Describe your experience with the schools and educators in Reggio Emilia, Italy. (GENERAL)
   a. How long has your school had a studio?
   b. Describe the process of its design and creation.

4. Why was the studio incorporated in your school? (INTENTIONAL)
   a. What purpose does the studio serve?
   b. What kinds of things do you think the children should be learning in the studio?
   c. What goals do you have for the children in the studio?
   d. How is it different than a traditional art classroom?

5. What are some current projects the children are working on in the studio? (CURRICULAR)
   a. Do the children working on these projects individually or with other children?
   b. Reggio educators speak of the hundred languages of children. Could you tell me something about that?
6. The art studio is a very distinct space in the school. Could you talk about its physical layout? (STRUCTURAL)
   a. What kinds of materials are available for the children to use in the studio?
   b. How much time do the four and five year-olds spend in the studio during the week?
   c. What is the connection between the work being done in the studio and the children’s primary classroom?

7. How is the curriculum created for the children in the studio? (CURRICULAR)
   a. Who creates the curriculum?
   b. Do you collaborate with the classroom teachers regarding the curriculum? Please explain.
   c. Are the students involved in creating the curriculum? If so, how?

8. Reggio educators talk about the teacher as a partner, nurturer and a guide. Could you talk about this? (PEDAGOGICAL)
   a. When the children are working on a project, how much support or guidance does the studio teacher give them?
   b. How do the studio teacher and the studio space help to cultivate the hundred languages of children?

9. What are your thoughts on evaluation and how are children evaluated in the studio? (EVALUATIVE)
   a. What skills or in what areas are children evaluated?
   b. How is the children’s progress monitored?
   c. Who decides what to evaluate?
   d. Are there certain goals children should attain by the end of the year?

10. The physical environment of the studio is very beautiful. Could you talk about the environment? (AESTHETIC)
    a. What types of things of considerations are made when preparing the space?
    b. I notice a lot of natural materials and recycled materials. Can you talk about that?
11. Reggio educators talk about the image of the child. What is your image of the child? (GENERAL)

12. What have been the three most successful aspects of the studio? (GENERAL)
   a. What challenges have you faced in the implementation of the studio?
   b. What advice or suggestions do you have for others in the field of early childhood who are interested in developing a Reggio-inspired studio?
Appendix C

Interview Guide: Child

The following interview guide will serve as an outline of possible topics for conversation during my interviews with the children.

1. Tell me about the studio.

2. Do you like coming to the studio? Why or why not?

3. What are your some of your favorite things to do in the studio?

4. What kinds of things do you learn in the studio?

5. Tell me about what you did in the studio today?
   a. What kinds of materials did you use?
   b. Why did you use those materials?
   c. Can you tell me about the process (what did you do 1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc.)

6. Tell me about some other projects you’ve done in the studio.
   a. What kinds of materials did you use?
   b. Why did you use those materials?
   c. Can you tell me about the process (what did you do 1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc.)

7. How do you come up with ideas for your projects?
Appendix D

Informed Consent Form

I, ________________________________, have been invited to participate in a study of Reggio-inspired studios in U.S. contexts. I understand that information I provide Laura Ganus will be used in her dissertation research and that this study will be supervised by Dr. Bruce Uhrmacher, Morgridge College of Education, The University of Denver, (303) 871-2483. My participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and I am free to withdraw my consent and participation at any time. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty. Also, my name or personal identity will not be revealed in any written documents or oral presentations. Every effort will be made to ensure that the information that I share will remain confidential. My name will not be used in the dissertation and all identifying information will be deleted or changed in order to protect my identity. By signing this form, I acknowledge that I understand that there are two exceptions to the promise of confidentiality. Any information I reveal concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse and neglect is required by law to be reported to the proper authorities. In addition, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena. For further information, I may call Laura Ganus at (303) 229-5271. If I become dissatisfied with any aspect of this study, I may report grievances anonymously to the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at the University of Denver by calling (303) 871-2121.

The benefits of participating in this study include the opportunity to contribute insight into what it is like to participate in a Reggio-inspired studio. This information will be help educators, policy makers, and researchers searching for new insight into how Reggio-inspired studios contribute to the educational experiences of young children.

I have read and understood the foregoing descriptions of the study called The Pedagogical Role of Reggio-inspired Studios in Early Childhood Education. I have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to participate in this study, and I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time. I have received a copy of this consent form.
☐ I agree to be audio recorded
☐ I do not agree to be audio recorded

Participant signature ___________________________ Date ___________________________

☐ I agree to have my photo taken
☐ I do not agree to have my photo taken

Participant signature ___________________________ Date ___________________________
Appendix E

Parental/Guardian Informed Consent Form (*for children under 18*)

Your child is invited to participate in a research study examining the experiences of four and five year-old children in Reggio-inspired studios. The study is being conducted to fulfill the dissertation requirements for a doctorate in Education at the University of Denver. For this research study, I would like your child to participate in a short interview or dialogue with myself, the researcher, regarding his or her experience in the studio at your school. Your child’s participation will involve responding to a few open-ended questions about his/her experience which should last approximately 10-15 minutes.

Your child’s involvement is completely voluntary. Your child may choose to not answer any question during the interview without having to provide a reason for doing so. Your child may, at any time terminate the session or withdraw from the study. If at any time your child feels uncomfortable or anxious or displays such behaviors, the interview session will be ended.

Every effort will be made to ensure that the information that your child shares with me will remain confidential. Your child’s name will not be used in my dissertation and all identifying information will be deleted or changed in order to protect your child’s identity.

By signing this form, you acknowledge that you understand that there are two exceptions to the promise of confidentiality. Any information your child reveals concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse and neglect is required by law to be reported to the proper authorities. In addition, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena.

The benefits of participating in this study include that your child will have the opportunity to contribute his or her insight into what it was like to participate in a Reggio-inspired studio. Your child may also enjoy the opportunity to provide information about his or her own school experiences. In sharing his or her experiences, your child will be helping educators, policy makers, and researchers searching for new insight into how Reggio-inspired studios contribute to the educational experiences of young children.
If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact me at (303) 229-5271. In addition, Dr. Bruce Uhrmacher, my dissertation advisor, can be reached at (303) 871-2483. Also, if you become dissatisfied with any aspect of this study, you may report grievances anonymously to the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at the University of Denver by calling (303) 871-2121 or by writing to the University of Denver, Office of Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd, Denver, CO 80208.

Please sign below if you understand and agree to have your child participate in this study.

Thank you so much for your interest in this study.

Laura Ganus, MA

__________________________________________________________________

I have read and understood the foregoing descriptions of the study called *The Pedagogical Role of Reggio-inspired Studios in Early Childhood Education*. I have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to have my child participate in this study, and I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time. I have received a copy of the consent form.

☐ I grant consent for my child to be audio recorded
☐ I do not grant consent for my child to be audio recorded
☐ I grant consent for my child’s photo to be taken
☐ I do not grant consent for my child’s photo to be taken

__________________________________________________________________

Child’s Name

__________________________________________________________________

Parent or Guardian Name (please print)

__________________________________________________________________

Parent or Guardian Signature                  Date

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The child
is made of one hundred.
The child has
a hundred languages
a hundred hands
a hundred thoughts
a hundred ways of thinking
of playing, of speaking.
A hundred always a hundred
ways of listening
of marvelling, of loving
a hundred joys
for singing and understanding
a hundred worlds
to discover
a hundred worlds
to invent
a hundred worlds
to dream.
The child has
a hundred languages
(and a hundred hundred hundred more)
but they steal ninety-nine.
The school and the culture
separate the head from the body.
They tell the child:
to think without hands
to do without head
to listen and not to speak
to understand without joy
to love and to marvel
only at Easter and at Christmas.
They tell the child:
to discover the world already there
and of the hundred
they steal ninety-nine.
They tell the child:
that work and play
reality and fantasy
science and imagination
sky and earth
reason and dream
are things
that do not belong together.

And thus they tell the child
that the hundred is not there.
The child says:
No way. The hundred is there.

Loris Malaguzzi
(translated by Lella Gandini)