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Embracing the Reggio Emilia Approach to Early Childhood Education

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EMBRACING THE REGGIO EMILIA APPROACH

TO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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APPROVAL OF DISSERTATION

We, the faculty supervising the work of Tarabeth Brumfield Heineman, affirm that the dissertation *Embracing the Reggio Emilia Approach to Early Childhood Education*, meets the high academic standards for original scholarship and creative work established by the Curriculum and Instruction program and the College of Education and Professional Development. This work also conforms to the editorial standards of our discipline and the Graduate College of Marshall University. With our signatures, we approve the manuscript for publication.

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ABSTRACT

Each year, hundreds of early childhood educators from the many parts of the world travel to a small town in the northern part of Italy to study the arts-based, project focused, a child-initiated method known as the Reggio Emilia approach. This unique approach focuses on infant-toddler through preschool and primary education. While teachers are engaged in professional learning and growth, it is hard to determine how many early childhood programs and classrooms are truly influenced by the Reggio Emilia approach. The purpose of this study was to explore and examine the experiences of five teachers from West Virginia who have implemented the Reggio Emilia approach in early childhood. This study examined the question: How is the Reggio Emilia approach being implemented by educators in both the public and private school settings and what are the challenges and supports that occur during implementation? The study revealed educators value this type of experiential learning and project work for children. There are critical supports that need to be in place to ensure effective implementation such as administrative and collegial support. The data also show that barriers such as curriculum mandates and other regulations make this type of implementation difficult. Also, children show great learning leaps when experiencing this type of learning approach. Future research recommendations include studying children longitudinally who have experienced a Reggio-inspired classroom environment to determine long-lasting impacts.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Each year, hundreds of early childhood educators from many parts of the world travel to a small town in the northern part of Italy to study the arts-based, project focused, child-initiated method known as the Reggio Emilia approach. Frequently, known as the best preschool system in the world (Gardner, 2012; Hewett, 2001) the Reggio Emilia project is considered an exemplar of social constructivist pedagogy and built on the shoulders of the work of John Dewey. Many educators in the early childhood field credit Dewey with significant concepts such as play-based learning, hands-on learning experiences, and project-based curriculum. In his writings, Dewey's constructivists beliefs were clearly noted when he discussed the teacher as a researcher and co-constructor of learning in collaboration with children, within social and community settings (Lindsay, 2015). Within these concepts, he valued children as active agents in the social construction of knowledge and promoted child-initiated learning experiences (Lindsay, 2015).

This unique approach to early childhood education in Reggio Emilia, Italy, is deeply rooted in Dewey's teachings with a focus on infant-toddler through preschool and primary education. In the United States, professional organizations such as the North American Reggio Emilia Alliance (NAREA) also provide learning opportunities such as bi-annual conferences to spread the understanding of this dynamic approach. There are over thirty countries who are learning more about the Reggio Emilia approach and working to implement best practices.

While teachers are engaging in this professional learning and growth, it is difficult to determine how many early childhood programs and classrooms are truly influenced by the Reggio Emilia approach. This study examined how early childhood educators have come to know, understand, and implement the Reggio Emilia approach. Five teachers were interviewed

and observed during this study to determine common threads of understanding, support needed and barriers that exist for the successful implementation of the Reggio Emilia approach.

Statement of the Problem

According to the North America Reggio Emilia Alliance, the Reggio Emilia approach is known around the world to be one of the most high-quality models in early childhood education, yet very few programs in the United States and especially in West Virginia are studying the approach or utilizing the philosophy (North American Reggio Emilia Alliance, 2020a). Much of the focus in education in the United States has been to push teacher driven lessons based around state and national standards culminating in high stakes annual assessments. Even the youngest students are facing pressure to perform, use technology effectively, and sit and get information through rote procedures. Following this type of approach results in an educational design where students have very little choice in the curriculum they are offered and, therefore, become disengaged and disinterested. Most frequently in the United States, curriculum is covered at a superficial level rather than around questions that are interesting to children (Wexler, 2004). The culture of education in the United States tends to lean toward sheltering and protecting children as opposed to providing them with space to explore, inquire, and experiment. The Reggio Emilia approach is the opposite of this trend and offers student choice, collaboration, and project-based learning around topics that are contextually inviting. The culture of the country must be considered as an integral part of the Reggio Emilia approach. Therefore, it is critical that one can translate the Reggio Emilia approach into their own cultural context for the approach to be successful.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore and examine the experience of five teachers from West Virginia who were on a journey to implement the Reggio Emilia approach in early childhood. This study explored how the Reggio Emilia approach was implemented by early childhood educators in both the public and private school settings in West Virginia and what were the challenges and supports that occurred during implementation?

Research Questions

The following research questions were explored in this study:

1. How is the Reggio Emilia approach being implemented in West Virginia by public/private early childhood educators who have studied the approach?
2. What do public/private early childhood teachers in West Virginia describe as the supports to their use of the Reggio Emilia approach?
3. What do public/private early childhood teachers in West Virginia describe as the obstacles to their use of the Reggio Emilia approach?

Rationale

This study will add to the growing body of research that focuses on implementing best practices found within the Reggio Emilia approach in the United States. Locally in West Virginia, study groups have been traveling to Reggio Emilia, Italy, for over two decades. Educators have participated in professional learning opportunities provided in the United States through the North American Reggio Emilia Alliance and other groups. There are currently pockets of educators and schools that are working diligently to attempt implementation of these practices. This research will help define what supports and barriers are in place as educators strive to work further in the "Reggio Way" and move to a more social-constructivist practice.

The end goal of this research would be to promote the Reggio Emilia approach as a potential way for redesigning early childhood classrooms in the state of West Virginia.

For the purposes of this study, a qualitative approach was utilized and provided the following advantages: (a) the findings can be transferable to another school setting, (b) implementation will be examined in detail and in depth, (c) interviews will not be restricted to specific questions and will be guided/redirected by the researcher in real time, (d) the research framework and direction can be quickly revised as new information emerges, (e) the data based on human experience that is obtained is powerful and sometimes more compelling than quantitative data.

Significance of the Study

In education systems today, there is great focus on standards and what is taught within the four walls of a classroom. Money is spent in the United States on instructional materials, prepackaged curricula, professional learning, and training to assist teachers with best practices for student growth and learning. The founder of the Reggio Emilia approach, Loris Malaguzzi asserted that what children learn does not automatically follow and result from what has been taught; instead, children learn in large part due to the children's own doing, as a consequence of their actions, activities and resources (Biermeier, 2015). As founder and director of the world-renowned municipal preschools in Reggio Emilia, he believed in a blend of theory and practice that challenges educators to see children as competent and capable learners in the context of group work (Fraser & Gestwicki, 2002).

The Reggio Emilia approach to learning shifts the focus of the classroom away from the teacher and onto the students, and views children as capable, creative, curious, and intelligent. This approach looks at the environment as the third teacher and encourages educators to take

great thought and care when designing learning spaces. This approach relies on teachers to become researchers and documentation experts of learning by making observations of interactions, ideas, and materials used in the classroom (Wood et. al., 2015). The thought behind this approach contrasts with traditional schools in the United States and the widely accepted Piagetian perspective that viewed child development as largely internal and occurring in stages (Mooney, 2013). This study explored the Reggio Emilia approach from the teacher's perspective and investigated barriers and supports that made implementation possible and/or challenging in the United States.

Definition of Terms

Key terms used in this dissertation study along with the definitions for these terms as set out in the literature are described below.

1. Constructivism: A theory of learning based on Piaget's work, which views knowledge as developing through ever-evolving, internal processes as individuals create meaning from their interactions with their environment and construct knowledge as new information is perceived and compared with previous understanding (Bodrova & Leong, 2007).
2. Social Constructivism: A sociological theory of knowledge according to which human development is socially situated and knowledge is constructed through interaction with others.
3. Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP): Refers to applying knowledge of child development in making appropriate and responsive decisions for and about young children. Decisions about teaching and learning are based upon understanding children's age and level of development as well as sensitivity to their unique social, cultural, and

historic contexts (Gestwicki, 2007). DAP is a framework rather than a set of practices. And it is a philosophical approach to working with young children (Bredekamp, 1993).

4. Implementation: To use or include information about the Reggio Emilia approach or some aspect of it in the classroom. Some teachers will find it easy to implement but others may have roadblocks to implementation.
5. Curriculum: Totality of student experiences that occur in the educational process. The term often refers specifically to a planned sequence of instruction.
6. Documentation: Typically includes samples of the children's work, photographs of the children engaged in the project work, and comments and transcripts of conversations. Examples of the children's work and reflections on processes can be displayed in the classrooms. The documents highlight how the children planned, carried out, and completed their work.
7. Progettazione: Project curriculum constructed with pedagogical documentation (Rinaldi, 2021). Projected curriculum may involve projects, but this term is not interchangeable with "project curriculum." The use of projects to engage children.
8. Pedagogista: An educational adviser who works with the community and with the schools, spending most of the time at schools with the teachers and children, and working also with parents. In this role, the pedagogista is responsible for working with educators on constructivist practice. Also, they will work closely with educators regarding a wide range of educational issues and where the goal is to promote an educator's autonomy and collaborate with rather than solve the problem for the educator.
9. Atelier: A workshop or a studio used in the Reggio Emilia early childhood classrooms as an extra space for learning where projects can be developed and completed.

10. Atelierista: This teacher is an artist not an art teacher and knows the potential in many media materials. The Atelierista is a special teacher that welcomes children's ideas and ongoing projects. At the Atelier, children try to figure out and explore many ways to do things through art expression. In the Reggio Emilia early childhood classrooms, this person is present to plan projects with the educators in the school.
11. Content Standards: The knowledge and skills that students should attain. What students should know and be able to do.
12. High-stakes testing: Any test used to make important decisions about students, educators, schools, or districts, most commonly for the purpose of accountability. In high stakes testing, scores are used to determine punishments (such as sanctions, penalties, funding reductions, negative publicity), accolades (awards, public celebration, positive publicity), advancement (grade promotion or graduation for students), or compensation (salary increases or bonuses for administrators and teachers).
13. NAREA (North America Reggio Emilia Alliance): Exists to connect early childhood educators and advocates together in discovering, interpreting, and promoting Reggio Emilia inspired education.
14. Reggio Children: An international center for the defense and promotion of children's rights and potentials. It was created with the intention of safeguarding the experience of Reggio Emilia's Municipal Infant-Toddler Centres and Preschools, known in Italy and throughout the world as the Reggio Emilia approach.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

The value of a qualitative study is heavily dependent on the individual skill of the researcher. With the support of the research committee and the experiences that each bring to the table, the

hope is to maintain, assess and demonstrate rigor through this process. Some of the limitations of this study included: (a) the amount of time that was devoted to individual observations in each classroom of the participating educators, (b) answers to interview questions may or may not be how the educator genuinely felt or acted, (c) the amount of professional learning that each educator had experienced up to this point, (d) this study was conducted during the continued outbreak of the coronavirus. This made it difficult to conduct observations and interviews. Delimitations of this study included, (a) the number of participating educators was limited to five educators for West Virginia, (b) data was collected from a few individuals so findings were more difficult to generalized to a larger population, (c) the amount of focus given to each participating educator (observations and interviews).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the research used to inform and support this dissertation. With a focus on the Reggio Emilia approach, this literature review provides a framework for understanding the context of this study. The review of literature is organized into three main topics. First, an overview of the Reggio Emilia approach is provided which describes the history, philosophy and origins of implementation. Next, a description of the theoretical basis will be discussed which includes social constructivist ideas and influences. Finally, a discussion on the implementation process of this approach will be outlined with a focus on supports and barriers that influence dissemination of the approach.

Overview of the Reggio Emilia Approach

Background information. Reggio Emilia has become the subject of world-wide attention and an international phenomenon in early childhood education. Tens of thousands of intrigued educators have traveled to the northern Italian city or attended the traveling exhibit called "The Hundred Languages of Children" (Reggio Children, 2020) to learn more about these schools and the approach to early learning. Much attention was brought to the Reggio Emilia schools after a 1991 Newsweek article acknowledged the schools to be the most advanced in the world for early childhood education. However, many years before the 1990's, social and political movements emerged to allow for Reggio Emilia schools to develop (Kantrowitz, & Wingert, 1991).

The history of Reggio Emilia's municipal infant-toddler centre and preschool programs is extensive and courageous. The Reggio Emilia approach can be traced back to the beginning of the 1900's and to a socialist administration that was led by Mayor Luigi Roversi. In 1913, the first preschool in the municipality of Reggio Emilia opened in Villa Gaida. Luigi Roversi was

quoted in 1912 stating, “An administration like ours with modern ideas has planned an extremely modern kind of school using the method with a specially qualified teacher and healthy meals provided free of charge” (Reggio Children, 2015). After this initial beginning, two world wars and a Fascist dictatorship squelched the idea of public early childhood education.

In 1945, the most pressing problem for the Italians who had just come out of a war was that of rebuilding all things materially, socially, and morally (Reggio Children, 2015). Aside from the need to restore buildings and infrastructures, the Italian people also felt the need to overcome the ideological divisions that had lasted for two decades. Above all, the people felt the need to see that their children would never experience anything as terrible as the war had been for themselves. Early childhood education would be a critical component of rebuilding this new world for their children (Reggio Children, 2015).

After World War II, an organization called Unione Donne Italiane (UID), which was an Italian Woman’s union, self-managed eight preschools in Reggio Emilia (Wurm, 2005). Around this time, the Italian government gave each *provincial,* or town, a small amount of money to help restore and build back the community that was lost during WWII. Each town had the right to choose what the funds would be spent on to build back their community. Some towns decided to build community centers or theaters for people to gather; however, in a small area outside of Reggio Emilia called Villa Cella they used the money for a school. The first school was named Scuola XXV Aprile, or April 25th School, after the day of liberation from the Nazis (Wurm, 2005).

Loris Malaguzzi, one of the great educationalists of the last century, heard about what was developing in the Reggio Emilia region (Moss, 2016). He traveled to Villa Cella and realized that the rumors were true and the citizens were building a school brick by brick. He

began to support the local people in building and creating a system of municipal schools in his home city of Reggio Emilia. This resulted in Loris Malaguzzi being known as the father of the Reggio Emilia approach (Moss, 2016).

One of the greatest developments of the municipal preschools in Reggio Emilia came in the 1970s when a young acting Mayor named Renzo Bonazzi added infant-toddler centres to the city (Reggio Children, 2015). The municipality opened new infant-toddler centres by adapting old buildings to create learning spaces and built new preschools. In 1972, after many stakeholders and community members debated, the Reggio Emilia city council approved the "Regolamento" or rulebook for the preschools in the municipality. This rulebook publication presented the features of the Reggio Emilia approach which included: professional development for all staff, the organization of deeply collegial and relational work with the establishment of a pedagogical coordinating team and co-teaching model, the importance of the environment, the presence of the atelier (studio) and Atelierista (artist in residence), priority of access for children with special rights (disabilities), the introduction of male staff, and the critical aspect of co-participation in management by families and community members (Reggio Children, 2015).

In 1981 a traveling exhibition, first called '*L'occhio se salta il muro*' (If the Eye Leaps over the Wall), was an important part of spreading the story of the Reggio schools and reaching educators beyond the borders of Italy (Vecchi, 2010). Drawing on some of the most significant project work from the municipal schools, Malaguzzi described this as an exhibition of the possible (Vecchi). By 1987, the exhibit, now renamed The Hundred Languages of Children, traveled to the United States. The purpose of the traveling exhibit was to show a visual representation of the Reggio Emilia philosophy. The exhibit provided an opportunity for the public to participant in dialogue with educators, families, children and the community. Present

day, NAREA continues to partner with a community collaborator in cities around North America to bring the exhibit to a wide audience and showcase the work from the Reggio Emilia children and educators.

When the 1990's began in Reggio Emilia, more than 1,000 people from all over the world participated in an international conference titled "Who Am I Then? Knowledges in Dialogue to Guarantee Citizenship." Loris Malaguzzi was quoted in 1990, "The world is changing, a world no longer made up of islands, of intervals and spaces, of oceans and mountains, but a world made of networks" (Reggio Children, 2015). International recognition of the Reggio preschools exploded in 1991, when a panel of experts commissioned by Newsweek magazine identified the preschools of Reggio Emilia as one of the best top ten schools in the world. In 1994, Loris Malaguzzi died unexpectedly. Although his loss was immeasurable, the call for requests to exchange ideas and professional development continued to expand even after Malaguzzi's untimely death. In response to this demand, the municipality founded Reggio Children, International Centre for the Defense and Promotion of Rights and Potential of All Children. The development of this organization was a dream of Loris Malaguzzi's and became a reality after his death (Reggio Children, 2015).

As the Reggio Emilia approach continued to increase in notoriety throughout the turn of the century, The Hundred Languages of Children was updated and digitized and was shown in the United States, Japan, Hong Kong, Australia, Chile, and Luxembourg (Reggio Children, 2015). In 2004 the "Crossing Boundaries" international conference was held in Reggio Emilia with the purpose of connecting teachers, academics and researchers. The topic of the symposium was to confront "ideas on the subject of children's rights in the world, identity, and memory in Reggio Emilia education, and the idea of knowledge as a multi-disciplinary process" (Reggio

Children, 2015). After international relations increased the Reggio Children International Network was developed in 2006. This growing network began an exchange and dialogue that has expanded the "Reggio" influence around the world.

To continue Loris Malaguzzi's legacy and in the spirit of continuous research, the Loris Malaguzzi International Centre was created. This centre which houses the work and history of the Reggio phenomenon, is a place where educators from all over the world come to learn and study about the approach. The building, which was formally a parmesan cheese warehouse, was purchased by the Municipality in 1998 and underwent a large renovation project and opened in 2006 (Reggio Children, 2015). The Centre houses: Reggio Children, the Documentation and Educational research Centre, Reggio Children – Loris Malaguzzi Centre Foundation, the Annamaria and Marco Gerra Auditorium, the Marco Gerra Exhibition Hall and other exhibition spaces which include the Ray of Light Atelier and the City Ateliers, the Gianni Rodari Theatre Laboratory, the Pause-Atelier of Tastes project with restaurant and cafeteria (Reggio Children, 2015).

Philosophy. In 1968 Italian law declared preschool as a right for three to five-year-old children and described these preschool environments as "laboratories for teachers" (New, 2007). In many ways this was due to the fact that in Italy at the time, no pre-service teacher education programs were available. Malaguzzi spearheaded this collegial approach for teachers and believed that traditional early childhood education in Italy did not support children's social and intellectual competencies. He believed that teachers needed to learn more about children to better group them which resulted in a pedagogical approach to curriculum that includes teacher's curiosities as well as those expressed by children within the context of long-term, open-ended projects (New, 2007). Key components of the Reggio Emilia Approach include:

1. **The image of the child:** The Reggio Emilia approach is designed to view young children as capable learners who can contribute to knowledge building. The Reggio Emilia philosophy believes that children are protagonists in their own learning and development. Educators who follow this approach also believe children are capable of building his or her learning (relationships, abilities, competencies, knowledge) and are innately creative (Reggio Children, 2017).
2. **Rights vs. needs**: The Reggio Emilia approach considers young children to have rights rather than needs. As Hendrick (1997a) explained, Reggio Emilia advocates that "children have the right to the best societies can offer" (p. 17), including "the right to high-quality care and education that support the development of their potentials" (Hendrick, 1997a). Priority is given to children with special rights and to children with families who are having serious difficulty in providing care and education (Reggio Children, 2017).
3. **The learning environment known as the "third teacher:"** The way Reggio Emilia approach accomplishes a high-quality learning is by considering the environment as the third teacher. The Reggio Emilia approach is built on a socio-constructivist model that views knowledge as constructed through interactions with both people and the environment (Dodd-Nufrio, 2011). In Reggio-inspired schools, the physical environment holds great importance because it reveals a lot about how children are regarded as well as the value assigned to the process of teaching and learning (New, 1998). Callaghan (2013) states that children are "capable of empathy, whimsy, sensitivity and joy" and the classroom should

reflect this through “thoughtfully organized, aesthetically rich, open-ended materials that invite children to communicate their ideas in many ways.”

4. **Documentation:** The Reggio Emilia approach requires teachers to carefully study children’s conversations, photographs of their activities and representations of their thinking and learning (Wurm, 2005). The purpose of this documentation has several purposes. According to Gandini (2008), the most important one among them is to be tools for making hypotheses about the directions in which the work and experiences with the children will go. Once these documents are organized and displayed, they also help families be aware of the child’s experiences and learning. This documentation makes it possible for teachers to understand the children better and to evaluate their own work as teachers – promoting professional growth and learning. Documentation makes children aware that their effort and work is valued. Documentation is an instrument for working with the children to revisit their learning experiences (Reggio Children, 2017).
5. **One-hundred languages of children:** The Reggio Emilia approach believes children express their ideas in various ways. A few examples of direct or representational expression include the use of songs, movement, role playing, dancing, sculpting, and writing. It is important for the teachers and support staff to provide experiences for children that include many languages for expression. Malaguzzi proposed children had 100 different languages or ways to express their knowledge and understanding of the world and adults had 100 different ways to listen (Edwards et. al., 2012).

6. **The role of teacher:** An important aspect for the teacher is to be able to create rich opportunities and environments for children and their learning. Teachers will focus on creating experiences that are open ended and include critical thinking rather than of crafting preset objectives for children (Moss, 2016). Teachers observe and listen closely to the children. They ask questions to discover the children's ideas, hypotheses, and theories. Teachers consider themselves to be partners in learning and construct plans for research together with the children. The role of the teacher is a position of continual research and learning process, working in coordination with the children (Hendrick, 1997a).
7. **The Atelier and Atelierista:** The Reggio Emilia approach promotes the arts, which is seen to develop critical and scientific thinking through artistic work, stimulating values and encouraging children to express their feelings, promoting the development of communication and social skills, and motivating cooperative work and discussion as key elements in a free and democratic society (New, 2007). Every school will include the presence of a space called the atelier where this type of work can be developed, created, and sustained. The main educator in this space is called an Atelierista, who oversees the atelier. The role of the Atelierista is to generate situations that promote experimentation and research so they can be conducted (Santín & Torruella, 2017).
8. **The role of parents/families:** In Reggio Emilia schools, parents and family members are seen as critical part of the educational process. Family participation is seen as essential to both the families and to the school (Wurm, 2005). Participation in the program is an opportunity offered to all parents. There is

constant interaction between three main groups: children, teachers, and parents (Reggio Children, 2017). Parents participate in many ways in the Reggio Emilia schools which includes serving on school advisory committees to guide the decisions made at the school level. Parents and families are also asked to support children's project work and participate in school activities (Gandini, 2002).

9. **Progettazione / project work:** In Reggio Emilia schools the core of the curriculum is developed from the interests and questions of the teachers and students. These projects are ways of doing work with children that in effect simulate real life (Wurm, 2005). Loris Malaguzzi worked to construct a pedagogy designed for children: a pedagogy of relations, listening and liberation. The curriculum would incorporate children and adults working together to construct knowledge (and values and identities) – meaning-making through processes of building, sharing, testing, and revising theories, always in dialogic relationship with others, working in particular through the medium of open-ended project work. It is a pedagogy that builds on the interests of children and welcomes the unexpected and the unpredicted, that values wonder and surprise (Moss, 2016).
10. **Interactions among participants:** Communication, interactions and relationships are considered keys components to building knowledge in Reggio Emilia classrooms (Hendrick, 1997a). Grounded in social constructivism, the Reggio Emilia approach creates an environment where interactions between children and children and adults allows knowledge to be constructed rather than being transmitted from the teacher to the student. Due to this principal belief, teachers and students are a part of a democracy in which both individuals are equally

> important to the learning process. In the Reggio Emilia approach, strong relationships are built among teachers, children, families, and communities. Teachers learn about each child's uniqueness because children will stay with the same peer group for multiple years. In some cases, the same group will stay together for a 3-year cycle (Hendrick, 1997a).

Theoretical Basis

In the development of the Reggio Emilia schools, teachers did not have access to formal higher education teacher education programs. As the program evolved, many teachers focused on professional development as a part of their process and explored ideas of American philosophers like Dewey and Hawkins, as they contributed to a pedagogy of collaborative inquiry involving both children and adults (New, 2007).

John Dewey, born in 1859, was a notable education reformist whose ideas still impact our educational landscape today. Many educators in the early childhood field would give credit to Dewey with significant concepts such as play-based learning, hands-on learning experiences, and project-based curriculum. In his writings, Dewey's constructivist beliefs were clearly noted when he discussed "the teacher as a researcher and co-constructor of learning in partnership with children, within social and community contexts" (Lindsay, 2015). Within these concepts, he valued children as "active agents" in the social construction of knowledge and promoted child-initiated learning experiences.

Tanner (1991) wrote *The Meaning of Curriculum in Dewey's Laboratory School,* which provided the background, planning and implementation of John Dewey's lab school in Chicago from 1896 - 1904. Tanner explained that in Dewey's laboratory school educational ideas were tested and called "working hypothesis." In this school, Dewey designed the curriculum in two

dimensions. The daily experiences would include 1) child-initiated activities and 2) teacher-led content. In the plan for the school, constructive activities such as cooking and carpentry would be the context for learning content such as physics, arithmetic, and history.

In what would be considered in today's world as a progressive educational approach, it is interesting that Dewey's laboratory school was founded at the turn of the 20th century. The concepts or working hypotheses that Dewey and colleagues were exploring in 1896 have recently resurfaced as "best practices" with new names like PBL (Project Based Learning) or student-led project work. Dewey stressed that children needed to be engaged in their own learning. Children also needed to be the researcher of content inspired through their own inquiry (Dodd-Nufrio, 2011).

In *Young Investigators: The Project Approach in the Early Years,* Lillian Katz recommends the project approach in teaching because "projects provide contexts in which children's curiosity can be expressed purposefully, and that enable them to experience the joy of self-motivated learning" (Katz & Helm, 2016). This same practice of contextual learning was utilized in the Dewey laboratory school in the late 1800s and still very relevant in our classrooms today.

Even more current, Noddings (2016) wrote *The Common Core Standards* which provided recommendations for improving high school education. She focused on what high schools could do to create a student with a "full range of human talents." She promoted a learning environment where teachers collaborate in interdisciplinary teams to contextually connect the disciplines and relate the curriculum to the life of students. She also believed that good schools focused on the social and moral development of students. Noddings promoted "project-based learning" in that

students needed context for learning and the best way to accomplish that task was through real life scenarios or themes. Dewey's philosophy was evident in Noddings work.

In the article by Lindsay (2015), *Reflections in the Mirror of the Reggio Emilia's Soul: John Dewey's Foundational Influence on Pedagogy in the Italian Educational Project,* the author discussed John Dewey's socio-political and historical influence on the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education. Lindsay made the connection of Dewey's philosophical beliefs to the theoretical underpinnings and practices that formed the initiation of the Reggio Emilia project. Specifically, the article discussed how the child-focused pedagogy of the Reggio Emilia approach "employs many of John Dewey's ideas about democracy, education and aesthetics" (p.447).

Lindsay (2015) highlighted the key tenets of practice in the Reggio Emilia project which focus on 1) social reform through access and equity; 2) the notion of children's democratic rights as citizens; 3) strengthening community partnerships and democratic participation; 4) images of children as capable and competent co-constructors of knowledge; 5) the role of educators as researchers and co-learners; 6) the use of pedagogical documentation in support of assessment, advocacy, reflection and research; 7) the role of the environment as the third teacher; 8) a particular visual art and aesthetics, and 9) holistic, project-based methodology which respects multiple learning styles and symbolic languages known as the hundred languages of children (Edwards et. al., 2012). Dewey's democratic values are evident in these principles.

Lindsey (2015) stated, "Like their historical counterparts, modern children still have the right to access quality early childhood education and care where progressive activism is fostered. The identification of Dewey's ongoing legacy in a current exemplar of high-quality educational

practice challenged educators to consider their own pedagogical ideas and values while providing a focus for reflection about their current and future pedagogy" (p.455).

Social Constructivism: Malaguzzi was outspoken in his ideas that the traditional early childhood education programs failed to recognize, much less support, children's social and intellectual competencies (New, 2007). Frequently hailed as the best preschool system in the world (Gardner 2012; Hewett, 2001) the Reggio Emilia approach is considered a notable exemplar of social constructivist pedagogy (Collett 2010, Dodd-Nufrio, 2011; Rinaldi, 2013). According to Beck and Kosnik (2006), social constructivism encourages students to be active in learning and to present their ideas strongly, while remaining open to the ideas of others. The key features of social constructivism approaches to learning include the following: (a) learning is social – students work in whole class or small groups and share ideas, (b) knowledge is experience-based – students experiences are provoked and discussed, (c) knowledge is constructed by learners – students are engaged in realistic learning scenarios, elaborate on interpretations of their experiences, test those interpretations, and make meaning, (d) all aspects of a person are connected – students' attitudes and emotions are shown in their learning. Students take part in hands-on activities. Students' values are used in learning, (e) learning communities should be inclusive and equitable – types of these learning communities include families, organizations, and institutions. Interactions of teacher to student and student to student should be equitable instead of hierarchical (Hang et al., 2016).

Many in the early childhood field give credit to John Dewey with concepts such as learning through play, hands-on activities and project-based approaches to curriculum (Lindsay, 2015). Dewey's constructivists beliefs placed the teacher in the role as researcher and co-constructor of learning in partnership with children, within social and community contexts

(Griebling, 2011). His value for children as active participants in their social construction of knowledge and understanding, saw him advocate for curricula based on children's interests (Eisner, 2002).

Brain-based Learning. In recent years, neuropsychological tests and the use of imaging techniques (Vigliocco et al., 2011; Weintraub, 2000) have created opportunities for researchers in the structural and functional studies of the human brain which have provided clues resulting in big changes for the field of education.

According to Jensen and McConchie (2020), Brain-based learning is best understood in three words: engagement, strategies and principles. Brain-based education is the engagement of strategies based on the principles derived for and understand of how the brain works. Brain-based learning refers to teaching strategies and school programs that are based on the latest scientific research about how the brain learns, including such factors as cognitive development—how students learn differently as they age, grow, and mature socially, emotionally, and cognitively. Brain-based education is learning in harmony with the way the brain is naturally designed to learn (Jensen & McConchie, 2020).

There are twelve principles of brain/mind learning (Caine et al., 2016). These principles include:

1. All learning engages the entire physiology
2. The brain/mind is social
3. The search for meaning is innate
4. The search for meaning occurs through patterning
5. Emotions are critical to patterning
6. The brain/mind processes parts and wholes simultaneously

7. Learning involves both focused attention and peripheral perception
8. Learning is both conscious and unconscious
9. There are at least two approaches to memory (rote learning system, spatial/contextual/dynamic memory system)
10. Learning is developmental
11. Complex learning is enhanced by challenge and inhibited by threat associated with helplessness and fatigue
12. Each brain is uniquely organized

Constructivists models such as Experiential Learning, Problem-Based Learning, and Cooperative Learning can be considered brain-compatible approaches because they respect learners as unique individuals with their socio-cultural context; build trust, safe, confirmative, non-threatening, but challenging environments for learning, create an enriched complex learning environment, provide meaningful realistic experiences, offer choices in activities, give learning time and opportunities to process and reflect on what they are experiencing and learning (Gulpinar, 2005).

In the context of early childhood, there is enormous potential that exists in applying knowledge related to early brain development (Schiller & Willis, 2008). Many of these brain-based practices are found in the Reggio Emilia model. The following brain-based strategies are important for creating an optimal learning environment for all children.

1. Safe environments matter – The brain needs safety and well-being before anything. Any child that comes to school hungry, scared, or unhealthy will find it impossible to focus on anything going on in school. Strategies such as making sure the classroom is free of anything that could scare a child, starting the day with a safety ritual or

morning meeting to create positive affirmations to reduce fears, and remind children that they are safe while they are in school (Schiller & Willis, 2008).

2. Emotions are effective tools – Emotions affect memory and brain function. When a person is content, the brain releases endorphins that enhance memory function (Jenson, 2005). Strategies that ensure emotional support include starting the day with humor, singing songs, pacing daily activities, helping learners feel in control of their learning, being proactive by using guidance strategies that reflect natural consequences, and nurturing social and emotional intelligence (Schiller & Willis, 2008).
3. Multisensory practices make sense – The more senses that are engaged during the learning process, the more the brain will receive and process information. When educators employ multiple senses in learning, children will match new information to their existing knowledge. Strategies that support multisensory practices include using real materials to help make ideas concrete, utilizing chants and rhymes to create rhythmic patterns that stick in the brain, provide natural environments for learning (Schiller & Willis, 2008).
4. Differentiated teaching practice is supportive – Addressing all the things that make a child unique, such as culture family, temperament, multiple intelligences profile, personality style, developmental delays, or special needs. As a teacher it is important to provide a focus to hold children's attention, break teaching into small parts, provide hands-on practice, and use an integrated approach in planning instruction (Schiller & Willis, 2008).

5. Special needs are met through planning – In today's classroom children with special needs are integrated in inclusive classrooms. It is important for teachers to work collaboratively as they coteach and make sure concepts are presented in simple steps, materials are modified, and appropriate goals are set (Schiller & Willis, 2008).
6. Sense and meaning are essential – The brain processes new information by making sense and meaning of it (Sousa, 2006). The sense making process is about finding patterns. Educators can help children by tapping into their prior knowledge, use graphic organizers, provide hands-on practice, and give children time to reflect (Schiller & Willis, 2008)

Relational Learning. In the Reggio Emilia model, learning does not take place by means of transmission or reproduction. It is a process of construction, in which each individual creates for himself the reasons, the 'whys', the meaning of things, others, nature, events, reality and life (Moss, 2016). The learning process is certainly individual, but because the reasons, explanations, interpretations, and meanings of others are indispensable for our knowledge building, it is also a process of relations – a process of social constructions. Educational researchers believe that knowledge is a process of construction by the individual in relation with others, a process of co-construction. The timing and styles of learning are individual and cannot be standardized with those of others; however, learners need others in order to realize themselves (Rinaldi, 2021).

Positive relationships in schools are central to the wellbeing of both students and teachers and support an effective learning environment (Roffey, 2012). There is now a wealth of research on the importance of connectedness in schools and on the specific qualities of in-school relationships that promote effective education (Roffey, 2012). According to a meta-analysis by Cornelius-White (2007), learner-centred teacher-student relationships are effective in many

dimensions. Relationships that are non-directive, empathic, warm, and encourage thinking and learning have correlations with the following: increased participation, critical thinking, student satisfaction, perceived and actual achievement, self-esteem, positive motivation, social connection and attendance. There are also correlations with low drop-out rates and reduction in disruptive behavior.

Hattie's (2009) meta-analysis of over eight hundred meta-analyses relating to effective instruction states that schools need to create environments where students can feel safe to learn and explore their understanding. Mistakes must be welcomed as part of this process. As each student constructs their learning differently, teachers need to have feedback from their pupils to make learning meaningful. Hattie's (2009) findings show that too often students are written off. He maintains that high expectations for all students are essential for effective education which is synonymous with one of the major protective factors for children at risk.

Researchers have commented on the need for adults to care for children. For example, Bronfenbrenner (2004) succinctly and powerfully articulated that in order to develop, a child needs the enduring, irrational involvement of one or more adults in care and joint activity with the child. Caring teachers can provide a motivational trigger for both engagement with learning and pro-social behaviour. The educational philosopher Nel Noddings has written extensively on the moral imperative for an ethic of care in education. She believes that children will work harder and do things, even odd things like adding fractions, for people they love and trust (Noddings, 1988).

A child's education is the relationship that is built between the school and home (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). The rationale for positive home-school relationships is far-reaching and congruent with the multiple stake-holder perspective of health promoting schools. Positive

interactions with families motivate children in school (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). When parents feel comfortable and valued, they will pass on messages to their children about the value of school and this increases the respect that students have for staff (Pianta & Walsh, 1996). Supportive relationships may also increase parental confidence in their role and give them strategies to parent more effectively (Roffey, 2004). It may also support the educative process when families become involved in backing up what teachers are doing in school (Roffey, 2012). In the Reggio Emilia model, families are an integral part of the education process and planning for the benefit of the child (Wurm, 2005).

Teacher Professional Development

The application of the Reggio Emilia approach in teacher education and professional development has also been described in several publications (Callaghan, 2002; Hong & Trepanier-Street, 2004; Goldhaber & Smith, 1997). However, few authors studied teachers' or teacher educators' use of the Reggio Emilia approach. Ardzejewska and Coutts (2004) surveyed Australian primary teachers committed to implementing the Reggio approach in their classrooms. The purpose of their study was to examine teachers' understanding of the Reggio Emilia approach, to identify the elements of Reggio Emilia approach teachers believed were most useful in practice, and to describe teachers' beliefs about obstacles they faced implementing the Reggio Emilia approach in their elementary-school contexts. Ardzejewska and Coutts found a wide variation in the participant-teachers' knowledge of the Reggio Emilia approach, although most demonstrated a good understanding of the basic principles. These researchers also noted that many of the participants had difficulty differentiating between core elements of the Reggio Emilia approach from those elements of other child-centered approaches (Ardzejewska and Coutts, 2004).

Opportunities for Traditional Professional Development. One way that educators have access to professional development on the Reggio Emilia approach is to participate in a study group experience. Reggio Children (2020) promotes several study groups annually as professional development initiatives. These offer study opportunities for deeper investigation of the concepts, contents, and values which are part of the educational project of the Reggio Emilia's Municipal Infant-toddler Centre and Preschool project (Reggio Children, 2020).

Participating in a study group on the Reggio Emilia approach means being immersed in the culture, concepts, contents, and values that make up the city's municipal infant-toddler and preschool educational project. It means going back to the origins of this educational project, and familiarizing with its history, how it has evolved through research and innovation, and how it is currently organized (Reggio Children, 2020).

The aim of a course with a study group is to investigate the various professional profiles in schools and centers from different points of view including their responsibilities, roles, organization, work strategies, collegiality, and professional development, the ideas of *progettazione* (curriculum design based on student interests), documentation, and research. Study group programs include theoretical discourse, woven with presentations of documentation, put together as part of the work in Reggio Emilia's municipal infant-toddler centers and preschools. Days are also set aside for visits into the centers and schools themselves (Reggio Children, 2020).

Another professional development opportunity for educators in the United States is spearheaded by the North American Reggio Emilia Alliance (North American Reggio Emilia Alliance, 2020a). NAREA organizes two conferences per year, one in the summer and winter, for participants to come and learn about the Reggio Emilia approach. NAREA, in collaboration

with Reggio Children and various host communities, have coordinated a multi-year professional development series to coincide with the presence of "The Wonder of Learning – The Hundred Languages of Children" exhibit in North America. The objective of this professional development series is to strengthen dialogue and collaborative participation of educators, families, administrators, community members and government leaders within the participating communities with the overall aim of giving more quality and excellence to young children's early childhood experiences and relationships, particularly with regard to children's participation in settings such as schools and child-care centers. NAREA believes this professional development series will serve as a vehicle for the evolution of our conversations and thinking together (North American Reggio Emilia Alliance, 2020a).

According to the NAREA website (2020a) the goals of the NAREA Professional Development Series include:

1. Generating regular opportunities for teachers, parents, administrators, community members and government leaders to meet and discuss the values and goals of education and childhood, in order to better understand the various perspectives that exist within the community
2. Making the learning and relationships of children, teachers and parents visible through the processes of observation, documentation and interpretation within the school community and throughout the community as a whole. Extending the documentation of classroom experiences of learning and relationships to include connections with the values and goals of parents and administrators, including government/district mandated curriculum standards and outcomes

3. Documenting the role of the environment within the school community, in order to highlight the learning and relationships that typically develop within that context
4. Organizing an annual exhibit of documentation of the learning and relationships of children, teachers and parents to be shared with community members in a public context (i.e., municipal/township building, library, senior center, school district building)
5. Learning how to advocate for the rights of children in the community through the understanding of current policies regarding early childhood education, and issues being addressed by school and government officials; developing the disposition to communicate with school and government officials through e-mail and phone, attendance at meetings and rallies (North American Reggio Emilia Alliance, 2020a).

Rationale for Non-Traditional Professional Development. There is a need for urgent reform in teacher education, including early childhood teacher education (Bowman, 2003; Early & Winton, 2001). Studies have pointed to several obstacles to improving ECE professional development; the most imposing obstacle, perhaps, being the fragmented nature of early childhood education in the United States and the persistently low wages paid to early childhood teachers and caregivers.

Buckanan et al. (2006) contest the use of traditional models of professional development as effective designs to drive practice. Urban (2008) also challenges the traditional model of professional development based on hierarchical reproduction and application of expert knowledge by facilitators or trainers, arguing that it is disconnected from how learning and development occur in the field. Fenech et al. (2010) also suggests that when professional development positions the facilitators or trainer as expert, there is a risk that learning will not

transfer to practice. Educators need to understand what needs to change and have the opportunity to reflect on how that might happen in their own contexts. Non-traditional professional development is a part of the everyday experience of teachers in Reggio Emilia. Projects, learning journeys, and processes are openly illustrated and shared by educators, which include pedagogistas and atelieristas, working with the children daily in the municipal infant-toddler centers and preschools (North American Reggio Emilia Alliance, 2020b).

The Use of Documentation. Following the model of educators in Reggio Emilia, documentation is a process that means being open to others and trying to see things from a different viewpoint (Harcourt & Jones, 2016). It offers the possibility to digress from a traditional position of transmission of knowledge, to one that proposes a co-construction of knowledge (Rinaldi, 2001). Rinaldi suggests that a broad range of documentation (videos, notes, recordings, etc.) makes learning visible and is essential for metacognitive processes and understanding (Rinaldi, 2001).

Documentation is used by Reggio Emilia educators to share children's ideas and their progress with families. This documentation is also used to support educator's planning and professional development. Pedagogistas (school curriculum leaders), and atelieristas (educators of the arts) collaborate with classroom teachers on the development of projects, documentation displays, children's portfolios, and the atelier serves as a workshop for developing documentation. Reggio teachers use documentation to record their own work with children and share documentation with other teachers in order to refine their work. In this way, documentation supports their professional development. Documentation in the Reggio Emilia approach moves beyond traditional concepts of recording children at work for the purposes of assessment to look

at the whole child while also including reflection of the teaching process to improve practice (Hartman, 2007).

Implementation of the Reggio Emilia Model in the United States

As noted above, the United States was introduced to the Reggio Emilia approach through the travel exhibit, *The Hundred Languages of Children* in 1987. Since that time, networks of education groups, educators and researchers have been interested in this unique work in early childhood. One of the most prominent organizations, the North American Reggio Emilia Alliance (North American Reggio Emilia Alliance, 2020b), has created an entire network for professional learning, both in the United States and abroad. NAREA has also provided additional resources and support for programs or educators interested in implementing the Reggio Emilia approach such as publications and conferences.

According to the NAREA website over 350 early childhood programs/schools have registered as "Reggio-inspired" programs but many more are working in this way without the official recognition from the NAREA organization (North American Reggio Emilia Alliance, 2020b). Some locations will provide on-site tours and professional development around the approach. The Cyert Center of Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania provides professional development. According the Cyert Center's website, the program promotes lifelong learning for early childhood educators, administrators, art educators, and those who are affiliated with the early childhood profession. They offer a series of professional development opportunities to support the understanding of the philosophy and principles of the Reggio Emilia approach. The professional development events include tours for small groups, observations for students, and an annual Visitation Day (Carnegie Mellon University, 2020).

Many university laboratory early childhood programs also work in a "Reggio-way" and build philosophies around implementing Reggio Emilia practices. Many Reggio-inspired programs reflect research and training collaborations between on-campus child development programs and schools of education, including the Child Development Center for Learning and Research on the campus of Virginia Tech (Virginia Tech, 2020). Graduate programs are also offering certifications based around Reggio Emilia practice and implementation. Webster University offers a graduate certificate program designed in partnership with educational leaders from Reggio Children and the internationally acclaimed Municipal Preschools and Infant Toddler Centers of Reggio Emilia, Italy (Webster University, 2020). It is designed to offer an in-depth understanding of the fundamental principles and pedagogical practices of Reggio Emilia's social constructivist approach to early learning and to enable teachers to learn the role of pedagogical coordinator in schools that are inspired by this approach.

A large action research partnership, known as Project Infinity, is currently taking place in Georgia and South Carolina (Cooper et al., 2020). Project Infinity is a collaborative, longitudinal, action research project involving schools for young children in Atlanta, Georgia, and Greenville, South Carolina. First known as the School Development Project, the work began following The Hundred Languages of Children exhibit in 2000 during the annual conference of the National Association for the Education of Young Children in Atlanta. Project Infinity, a name coined by the founding group of schools in the School Development Project, is meant to suggest a style of work that builds forever on itself.

To be a part of this project, the participating schools make three main commitments: (a) a genuine, school-wide interest analyzing the experiences and philosophies of Reggio Emilia, (b)

an active commitment to the wellbeing of all schools within the project, and (c) an active commitment to the wellbeing of schools in the wider community.

Currently, five schools participate in Project Infinity. First Baptist Day School in Greenville, South Carolina and four schools in Atlanta, Georgia: Grant Park Cooperative Preschool, St. Anne's Day School, Peachtree Presbyterian Preschool, and The Nest Nursery School. Through this collaboration, Project Infinity engages annually with approximately 250 educators who work with more than 1,000 children and their families.

Supports to Implementation. With many early childhood programs and school districts interested in the Reggio Emilia approach, it is important to look at what supports are in place to make implementation of this model successful. One major support when implementing the Reggio Emilia approach is flexibility in curriculum. You will find that many private schools without the constraints of inflexible standards or curriculum requirements have an easier path when trying to incorporate student led projects and student driven investigations. In a study conducted in Australia on the implementation factors of the Reggio Emilia approach, policy and school governance were factors that played a large role in the success or failure. In one case study, supportive school policy and governance promoted rather than constrained the implementation process as compared to a second case study that had restrictive policies in place (Hall, 2013).

Another supporting factor that assists in the successful implementation of the Reggio Emilia approach is professional learning opportunities in the form of conferences, collaborative professional learning opportunities, mentorship, and self-study. Wexler (2004) discusses how different planning looks in a Reggio-inspired classroom verses a traditional classroom. She explains that teachers do not use formal lesson plans because those formats do not allow for the

open-ended time necessary for the depth of children's interpretations of content. In Reggio-inspired environments project arise from collaboration. It is vital that partnership is a part of the theory and practice of Reggio education. In contrast, the United States education model typically requires a single adult to make decisions on the best approach to teach the subject matter. To move away from this type of traditional approach, teachers who wish to be inspired must have professional learning opportunities to move their practice forward in the Reggio way.

Barriers to Implementation. One of the greatest barriers in the United States to implementing the Reggio Emilia approach has to do with content standards and high stakes accountability. According to Wurm (2005) the curriculum in Reggio grows from the teachers, children and families in those schools and from their cultural context. There are not objectives from the outset of a project in Reggio. Teachers are not forced to align their work with standards, readiness guidelines, or pacing guides. This is a completely different way of conceptualizing and planning as compared to teaching in the United States. In many cases, teachers in the United States are driven by testing standards and benchmarks and the curriculum reflects that in the classroom. Wurm states, "In some ways we must abandon what we think we know about educating young children to permit ourselves and the children the freedom to explore" (Wurm, 2005, p. 17).

Another barrier to implementation of the Reggio Emilia approach would be in the learning environments that teachers traditionally create in the United States. American teachers typically would say that they see students as competent and a leader of their own learning; however, create learning spaces that are very limiting, and provide experiences that are teacher driven. Most of the curriculum is dictated by what the teacher "thinks" the children need to know and tied directly to state standards. There is not flexibility, student choice, engagement or

motivation built into the learning process (Wurm, 2005). Loris Malaguzzi explained the responsibility of the teacher and student quite well in this approach. He believed it was not the job of the teacher to make learning easier for the child; rather, the job of the teacher was to stimulate learning by making problems more complex, engaging and difficult (Wurm).

Conclusion

According to Wurm (2005), it is critical to understand that "there are no absolutes in the Reggio approach – no single answer or right way to do something. There are multiple ways of doing anything depending on the children and on the context" (p. 6). Therefore, all educators seeking to introduce the Reggio way into their programs need to remember that "What is done in Reggio Emilia cannot be copied with the hopes of creating an authentic educational experience for young children. Instead, you can start by asking questions and pushing your practice along the path that is Reggio-inspired (Wurm, 2005, p. 6).

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore and examine the experience of five teachers from West Virginia who were on a journey to implement the Reggio Emilia approach in early childhood. This research answered the main question: How is the Reggio Emilia approach being implemented by educators in both the public and private school settings and what are the challenges and supports that occur during implementation? This chapter presents information for this study concerning the research design, population and participants, instrumentation, interview questions, data collection procedures, and analysis of the research questions. To examine this topic, three research questions were developed.

1. How is the Reggio Emilia approach being implemented in West Virginia by public/private early childhood educators who have studied the approach?
2. What do public/private early childhood teachers in West Virginia describe as the supports to their use of the Reggio Emilia approach?
3. What do public/private early childhood teachers in West Virginia describe as the obstacles to their use of the Reggio Emilia approach?

Research Design

This qualitative study focused on understanding the implementation of the Reggio Emilia approach by conducting 1) interviews with educators and 2) classroom observations. The ethnography qualitative research method was utilized to immerse the researcher in the target participants' environment to understand the goals, cultures, challenges, motivations, and themes that emerge. Ethnography has its roots in cultural anthropology where researchers immerse

themselves within a culture, in this case the culture of a school. Rather than only relying on interviewing methods, observations allowed the researcher to experience the environment firsthand. The factor that unites all forms of ethnography research is its focus on culture. Culture refers to the beliefs, values, and attitudes that structure the behavior patterns of a specific group of people (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In this study, the group consisted of West Virginia early childhood educators as participants.

Interviews consisted of open-ended questions to yield in-depth responses about teacher's experiences, perceptions, opinions, feelings, and knowledge as they have implemented the Reggio Emilia approach. Data included verbatim quotations with sufficient context to be interpretable. Observations and fieldwork notes included descriptions of activities, behaviors, actions, conversations, interpersonal interactions, organizational or community processes, or any other aspect of observable human experience. The data from observations and field notes provided detailed descriptions of participant experience and context within which the observations were made. All data were coded to explore the themes that emerged from the research.

Population and Participants

Five early childhood educators or administrators were selected to participate by purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is used when the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Patton (2015) argues that the logic and power of qualitative purposeful sampling derives from the emphasis on in-depth understanding of information-rich cases. The criteria for this purposeful sampling included educators who were or have: (a) experienced formal professional learning on the Reggio Emilia approach (could include

conferences, study abroad experience, webinars, on-site professional learning provided at the building level, book studies, etc.), (b) implemented some Reggio Emilia principles in the classroom, (c) teaching in a West Virginia school (public or private), (d) willing to participate in an interview and allow classroom observations.

Observation Instrumentation

For the classroom observations, the Rating Observation Scale for Inspiring Environments (ROSIE) was used. This tool is used to assess the intentional design of the classroom environment of young children. ROSIE encourages educators to evaluate their classroom from a new perspective by considering and observing aesthetic design elements such as color, focal points, texture, lighting, displays and the use of space and nature (DeViney, 2010). The ROSIE evaluates seven principles of design: Principle 1 Natures Inspires Beauty, Principle 2 Color Generates Interest, Principle 3 Furnishings Define Space, Principle 4 Texture Adds Depth, Principle 5 Displays Enhance Environment, Principle 6 Elements Heighten Ambiance, Principle 7 Focal Points Attract Attention.

Designed as an educational tool, ROSIE provides specific indicators to guide educators through levels of growth. ROSIE encourages educators to consider the elements of design and how to grow into more sophisticated stages. The first level is identified as sprouting. During this stage educators are beginning to understand what it takes to create a beautiful space. The second level is identified as budding. Educators in this stage are becoming more competent at creating inspired spaces for learning. The most sophisticated level is known as Blooming. It is during this stage that educators have reached their full potential and understanding in design. The ROSIE observation tool helps educators understand what is necessary to reach the highest level of aesthetic beauty, known as Blooming (DeViney, 2010).

For each indicator within the seven principles, the rating scale is 1 – 3. A score of 1 is considered sprouting (beginning). A score of 2 is considered budding (developing). A score of 3 is considered blooming (accomplished) (DeViney, 2010).

The ROSIE rating observation scale was selected for this study because it aligns well to the Reggio Emilia approach principles and considers the environment as the "Third Teacher." The Reggio Emilia approach treats the classroom as the 'third teacher', encouraging teachers to take a great deal of care in the creation and setup of the environment of the classroom and the materials that are introduced. Finally, this approach positions the teacher as a researcher, documenting the children's relationships and interactions with people, ideas and materials in the classroom (Wood et al., 2015).

After the ROSIE rating scale was completed, additional observation time was conducted to take field notes on: (a) what was occurring in the classroom, (b) how educators were interacting with children, (c) what curriculum was being used, (d) understanding the roles of educators and children, (e) projects conducted, and (f) children's interactions with peers.

Interview Questions

The goal of the interview process of the educators selected in the study was to gain insight into the experience of implementing the Reggio Emilia approach. Each educator participated in a structured interview where open ended questions were written in advance. The sequence of questions were predetermined and consistent across all interviews. The purpose of this type of interview was to ask the same set of questions of each participant making the data comparable. However, the interviewer was able to determine probing question that needed to be asked to obtain additional information from a participant. The open-ended questions allowed for

flexibility during the interview while following a predetermined structure. Below is the list of questions asked during the interviews:

Demographic Questions

1. How long have you taught?
2. What grade levels have you taught?
3. What is your educational background/certifications?

Open-ended Questions

1. Can you tell me about your experience teaching with the Reggio Emilia approach?
2. What professional learning experiences have made an impact on your implementation of the Reggio Emilia approach? Why?
3. In what ways are you implementing the Reggio Emilia approach?
4. What challenges/barriers have you faced as you have implemented the Reggio Emilia approach?
5. What supports have helped you as you have implemented the Reggio Emilia approach?
6. Tell me about a time that you felt Reggio-inspired learning was occurring in your classroom.

Data Collection Procedures

For this study, observations and interviews were scheduled to ensure adequate data was collected for analysis. The schools and school districts listed below were utilized for observations and interviews. Due to Covid-19 pandemic protocols, all interviews were conducted online via TEAMS.

Each classroom was observed for at a minimum of an hour and a half during classroom exploration for students. The goal was to conduct the observations during a time when children

were actively engaged in activities, experiences, collaborations or other provocations. The Rating Observation Scale for Inspiring Environments (ROSIE) was used to assess the aesthetics and effectiveness of the classroom environment as the third teacher. Also, additional observation time was used to take field notes specific to Reggio Emilia principles and the implementation of the Reggio Emilia approach. The following school systems participated in the study:

Classroom educators were selected from the following schools:

Explorer Academy (Public) – Cabell County, Huntington, WV

Chapmanville Primary (Public) – Logan County, Chapmanville, WV

Wheeling Country Day School (Private), Ohio County, Wheeling, WV

Administration/ Educators were selected from the following schools/systems:

WVU Nursery School (Public/Private), Monongalia County, Morgantown, WV

Harrison County Board of Education (Public)

Qualitative Procedures for Analyzing

According to Patton (2015) credibility is an important issue in qualitative research. Considering the analysis of data in research, it is important to consider three distinct inquiry elements which include: (a) the research includes rigorous techniques and methods for gathering high-quality data that are carefully analyzed. Attention is given to issues of validity, reliability and triangulation, (b) the researcher is creditable and has engaged in qualitative research training and has a credible track record and experience, (c) the researcher believes in the value of qualitative inquiry. These distinct features were a part of the analysis process of this study.

Interviews. After the interviews took place with each educator, all data was transcribed. These transcripts were sent to each participant by email, and educators were asked to validate the data and to review for correctness. The educators were asked to add comments to the interview

transcripts, if necessary. The rationale for this process was to ensure themes that emerged during the interview were checked, verified, and clarified by the interviewee.

Coding procedures. During this study, specific coding procedures were used. First, the transcripts were coded to ensure they were anonymous and organized. The transcripts were labeled with an "T". This sign was followed by the code "E" for educator or "A" for administrator. This was necessary to keep the data confidential and anonymous. Next, the date of the interview, starting with the month followed by the day and the year was noted.

Second, the transcribed interviews and the narrative data were reviewed for emerging themes. Deductive coding was used as a reference and guide to pre-plan the coding process. Three criteria were coded the following way: (a) implementation of Reggio Emilia approach (Blue), (b) supports and successes (Yellow), (c) challenges and obstacles (Red)

Observations. To participate in the study, educators agreed to classroom observations. During the observations the researcher focused first on the environment of the classroom by utilizing the Rating Observation Scale for Inspiring Environments (ROSIE) scale (Appendix C). This observation scale assessed the aesthetics and effectiveness of the classroom environment as the third teacher. This scale is scored 1 to 3 (1 being the least developed and 3 being the most developed).

Finally, with the use of interview data, the Rating Observation Scale for Inspiring Environments (ROSIE) data and additional fieldnote data, triangulation was an important piece for ensuring high-quality qualitative research. The goal of triangulation in this case was to ensure or test the consistency of the findings (Patton, 2015).

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

This study was designed to explore and examine the experience of five teachers from West Virginia who are on a journey to implement the Reggio Emilia approach in early childhood. The research focuses on answering the question: How is the Reggio Emilia approach being implemented by educators in both the public and private school settings and what are the challenges and supports that occur during implementation? Data for this study were compiled from five interviews and five follow up observations and consisted of transcribed interview dialogue and field notes from classroom observations. For the classroom observations, the Rating Observation Scale for Inspiring Environments (ROSIE) was utilized. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the five teachers, their teaching philosophy and background of the Reggio Emilia approach and their classroom practice and analyze data presented from interviews and observations.

Participants

The five early childhood educators were chosen from various counties that represent regions in West Virginia. These counties included Cabell, Harrison, Logan, Monongalia, Ohio counties. Educators were selected as a purposeful sampling. The criteria for that purposeful sample included educators who have: (a) experienced formal professional learning experience on the Reggio Emilia approach (could include conferences, study abroad experience, webinar, on-site professional learning provided at the building level, book studies, etc.), (b) implemented some Reggio Emilia principles in the classroom, (c) taught in a West Virginia school (public or private), (d) willing to participate in an interview and allow classroom observations.

Three of the five early childhood educators (ECE) had less than 10 years teaching experience, two teachers had 10 – 20 years of experience, and one ECE had over 40 years of experience in early childhood environments. Four of the 5 ECE held bachelor's degrees. The other teacher held an associate and a regent's degree and went on to pursue two master's degrees. Three of the five ECE held at least one master's degree. See Table 1 below for a summary of the demographic information.

Table 1
Participant Demographics

Participant	Degrees	Certifications	Years of Experience	Grade Levels Taught
ECE 1	Bachelor's	K – 6th grade	5	Title 1 Reading, 1st grade, 4th grade
ECE 2	Associates Regents Master's Second Master's	Birth – 3rd grade	20	PreK, K
ECE 3	Bachelor's Master's	PreK-K K – 6th grade Reading (birth-adult)	7	PreK
ECE 4	Bachelor's Master's Second Master's	Birth – 5th grade Reading (birth-adult)	11	PreK, K
ECE 5	Bachelor's	K – 5th	42	PreK, K, 1st grade, 2nd grade

Data Collection

Interview Information. All interviews were conducted in February and March of 2021. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, TEAMS (online platform) was used to conduct the interview as well as record the session. Each interview started with obtaining consent and providing the participants with information about the study, per the IRB protocol (Appendix A). All participants were told the sessions would be recorded. The interviews included pre-determined questions (Appendix B) and were transcribed and organized into themes that emerged from the

data. In addition to the interviews, classroom observations were conducted in May 2021. At that time, Covid-19 protocols were followed during the observations which allowed the sessions to take place. To visit classrooms, certain guidelines had to be followed which included: 1) permission from an administrator, 2) proof of full COVID vaccination, and 3) full masking indoors. These observations were conducted for one day at each location. Below are the themes that arose throughout the data collection process and were organized based on the research questions from this study. During the classroom observations, a companion observation guide for inspiring spaces for young children was utilized called "ROSIE" which is an acronym for Rating Observation Scale for Inspiring Environments (Appendix C).

Learning About the Reggio Emilia Approach

First Encounter. Many similar characteristics emerged among the teachers when discussing the implementation of the Reggio Emilia approach. The teachers described how their "journey" started on the path to evolving practice. Several teachers had an "early experience" and introduction to this approach. The educator known as ECE 3 shared her first knowledge about the Reggio Emilia approach occurred during an undergraduate course in an early childhood class. From this small encounter, she was able to build more of an understanding as a graduate assistant teaching under a lead teacher who was trying to implement the Reggio Emilia approach. She stated, "When I was in my grad program and a graduate assistant, I got to see it in action. It was an expectation of the program and something I had kind of embodied myself as an educator." ECE 4 also described an early Reggio Emilia learning experience. She explained the director of the university childcare center also taught an undergraduate course "heavily focused" on the Reggio Emilia approach. ECE 2 explained she first learned about the Reggio Approach while completing her master's degree program. She stated, "It started back when I was doing my

master's degree, and apparently I have been teaching that way for as long as I can remember but didn't really know there was an approach like that." She described how she always planned hands-on engaging activities based on student interests.

For the two other early childhood educators in the study, the beginning of their Reggio journey started after they were hired into full time teaching positions and through in-service training. ECE 5 explained she had been working in this way for the last eight years. Her journey started with a focus with the learning environment as the third teacher. The Reggio Emilia approach treats the classroom as the "third teacher," encouraging teachers to take a great deal of care in the creation and setup of the environment of the classroom and the materials that are introduced. The third teacher approach positions the teacher as a researcher, documenting the children's relationships and interactions with people, ideas and materials in the classroom (Wood et al., 2015).

Once ECE 5 felt the environment was set for this exploration in learning, she started planning open ended explorations and provocations. She stated, "It just kind of evolved from there." She described how some methods were like how she had taught before; however, "It wasn't totally as open ended and as inviting as it was now." ECE 1 was only in her fifth year of teaching. She elaborated by saying in her first few years of teaching she mostly utilized the county mandated curriculum for her content. She did not build studies from the children's interests but rather followed the county "manual" when planning her lessons. Her experience into the Reggio Emilia approach was led by an initiative in the school where she taught. She explained before attending (the Reggio Emilia specific) trainings and the North American Reggio Emilia Alliance (North American Reggio Emilia Alliance, 2020b) Conference, she was "a totally different teacher."

Professional Learning. An important component to becoming a Reggio-inspired educator evident throughout all interviews was professional learning and development. Training for the five educators in this study seemed to come in various forms and at different levels and prices. These trainings included Reggio Emilia specific conferences, study abroad experiences to Reggio Emilia, Italy, NAREA (North American Reggio Emilia Alliance) conferences, exhibits and documentation tours, self-study of resources (books, magazines, etc.), local trainings and support from others who have experiences the Reggio Approach.

ECE 1 discussed how attending a conference changed her mindset as a teacher and impacted her practice. She said, "Before I attended trainings at the NAREA conference … and other trainings that have been offered from the June Harless Center at Marshall, I was a totally different teacher. I guess I could say it has absolutely changed my whole outlook on teaching." ECE 3 also shared about her NAREA conference, "During my time as a grad assistant, I was given the opportunity to go to a NAREA conference. That really helped give me gain insight and to see how they do it in Italy. It explained the principles behind the Reggio Emilia approach and gave me more of the why."

ECE 4 echoed the importance of a NAREA conference experience. She explained, "I attended a NAREA conference in Pittsburgh years ago, and we took our undergraduate students. When you're actually there at the conference, hearing other people or seeing the documentation of the learning - that is really inspiring. I was like, I want to do a sound project. I want to incorporate more shadow and light tables and more natural materials in our classroom."

Another conference that was mentioned in the interviews was a statewide "STEAMposium" conference hosted by the Marshall University Early Education STEAM Center. ECE 5 shared that attending the STEAMposium helped in her implementation because it

connected her to other educators in West Virginia who were trying to incorporate the Reggio Emilia approach. She thought it was important to be able to share stories about the journey of becoming a Reggio-inspired educator.

Two educators (ECE 2 and ECE 3) in the group of five interviewed spent two weeks engaged in a study-abroad experience in the town of Reggio Emilia, Italy, and the surrounding area of Pistoia, Italy. When asked about the study abroad experience, ECE 2 stated, "One of the very first preschools I observed was amazing. The children were running around the school. They were able to be outside. They were able to be inside. They were working on projects. What caught my attention was that the kids had created their own alphabet. They were not being forced to learn the Italian alphabet. We asked the teachers about what we observed, and they were like, no - it will come. They told us that they don't force them to learn the symbols and learn to read. It comes naturally with them. I mean it was just amazing to see the difference."

ECE 3 described her study experience in Italy like this, "It was just an invaluable experience. It opened my eyes to the possibilities of what my classroom could be and gave me more ways to be more intentional with my experiences I provide, but also again, give the children more freedom." Although only two of the five educators had this first-hand experience in Italy, the others mentioned that opportunity as a professional goal.

Self-study was also a form of training that some of the educators mentioned as a support in professional growth. One of the educators shared she holds a subscription to the NAREA magazine called *Innovations*. Another educator mentioned she explores articles found on the internet. Also, books such as *Working in the Reggio Way* and *The Hundred Languages of Children*, were mentioned during the interviews to be helpful in the overall understanding of the approach.

Qualities of a Reggio Inspired Teacher

Flexibility. Many times, the teachers discussed their own personalities and how those personal characteristics either supported or inhibited growth to be a Reggio Inspired teacher. One theme was consistently discussed in all interviews was educators of this approach must embrace flexibility. ECE 3 explained flexibility was something she had to improve personally to make this work in the classroom. She described herself as a very "type-A planned person" and she had to "lose that a little bit." She went on to explain, "We want the children to help plan and be co-constructors of their learning. So, I can still have a plan, but it might not go the way I envisioned and I just kind of have to allow flexibility to let the children navigate where we go." ECE 4 also confirmed this type of flexibility was necessary. She explained at her school they have tried to let children have control of their environment and incorporate a lot of child centered projects that "really focuses on their own interests."

Teachers, share control with children. With flexibility comes the aspect of giving up control or allowing the children to control pieces of the planning, the daily experiences and overall direction of learning. Children in this type of environment are seen as equal and valued citizens of the learning community. Although there are boundaries that are necessary for productive, safe learning, the children have a voice in what to learn and how to learn. ECE 3 highlighted the importance of observation. She stated she felt it was important to "step back and be an observer in the classroom." She explained that a lot of time she would want to jump in when she would see something evolve. Instead, it was important to "sit back and allow them to have the experience and really try to dig deeper into what they are thinking and what can be given to them later to expand on the children's learning."

Always learning and growing in the approach. Throughout the interview process, a common theme that emerged was processing and implementing the Reggio Emilia approach was not a destination but a journey. Each teacher described the various experiences that led them to want this kind of teaching and learning in their classroom. From professional learning experiences to self-study, each educator had a different path that grew to similar understanding. The father of the Reggio Emilia approach, Loris Malaguzzi said, "Learning and teaching should not stand on opposite banks and watch the river flow by; instead, they should embark together on a journey down the water. Through an active, reciprocal exchange, teaching can strengthen learning how to learn" (Edwards et al, 2012). For all the teachers in this study, the journey had taught them so much about their own ways of learning. ECE 5 explained learning from other educators was extremely important in her own understanding, she stated, "I think just listening to other teachers that have their own journey and sharing with us has been the most helpful." She went on to say, once you start growing in your own professional journey, educating yourself and experiencing this kind of learning with the children, they will deepen their understanding with Reggio inspired provocations and invitations."

Implementation of a Reggio Inspired Teacher

Every educator in this study described implementation of the Reggio Emilia approach at different levels. Some of the study participants had been on this "journey" for a decade or more while others were new to their own implementation. Each educator had a variety of experiences to share about the implementation of the Reggio Emilia approach in their classroom. Below are the themes that emerged from our discussion.

Learning environment. During several occasions throughout the study interviews, the early childhood educators discussed focusing on the learning environment. ECE 1 discussed how

at a NAREA (North America Reggio Emilia Alliance) conference hosted in Atlanta, Georgia, was her first professional learning experience that she got to witness for herself an "inspiring" space. She explained during the site observation she took many pictures of the indoor and outdoor learning environments, documentation in the hallways, indirect lighting, and soft spaces. She said, "it was all so amazing" and she still uses those pictures as a reference. When she returned to her own classroom, she used the pictures to make modifications to her own learning space. "When I came back, I used ideas from the classrooms we visited at the NAREA conference. I immediately changed the colors found in my room and made the space more neutral. I feel like this has really allowed the children's work to stand out."

ECE 4 discussed how the learning environment supported the children to make their own choices in learning. She stated, "We try to let children have control of their environment and we do many child-centered projects that focus on their own interests." ECE 5 also discussed how creating small centers for the children to explore supported their interests. She said, "We keep our eyes and ears open when the kids are exploring in their centers. We opened a discussion on what the children would like to change in our learning environment. We asked, what would you like to have as a center in our classroom that is not already present?" Following this ECE 5 explained that a child came to her to see if they could create a "kitty store" and began a brainstorming session to see what materials were needed. The children really owned the space and took care of the materials that were needed to play productively in the "center." As this process became part of their classroom other children brought in materials to add to the housekeeping area, block area, and other spaces. ECE 5 stated, "The ideas that the children are coming up with are really beautiful and we are moving forward with their interests. It is amazing

to see this engagement and passion for learning. We keep inviting them to move things around in the classroom and use it in another way and create a new center."

One of the educators described this process of creating the classroom as the "third teacher." ECE 3 detailed how setting up a learning environment differently created new opportunities for play and creativity. She explained after returning from Italy, one area she focused on was a little hallway space between her classroom and another classroom. She visited several "ateliers" there. (An atelier in the Reggio Emilia classrooms is like studio spaces for types of learning.) So, she turned her dimly lit hallway space into an area for light and shadow play. She included different lights for children to manipulate and various types of transparent materials. Just by thinking of the learning environment as a teacher, ECE 3 was able to create a space that opened new possibilities for her children. She summed up her new philosophy about learning space in one statement during the interview, she said, it was "more their (the children's) space, than mine."

Project work based on student interests. Another important component of implementation of the Reggio Emilia approach is distinct when comparing it to "traditional" teaching methods is the idea of project work based on student interests. ECE 4 explained in her interview, "We try to let children have their control of their environment and we do a lot of child centered projects. We focus on their interest. One thing we do know is young children are making meaningful decisions regarding their own learning and we try to help coordinate and plan activities that support what the children want to learn." She followed the statement with a story about an interest a child had in making her own musical instruments. She explained once other children saw the girl creating her own instrument several others began discussion about what they could make. They decided they wanted to make instruments as well. They began

helping the girl initially paint her instrument and then started researching and looking at pictures of other instruments to create. This experience led to a multi week study where children were engaged, researching and learning about music and tools for creating music.

Another example of student led project work was shared from ECE 3. She shared that her children decided the classroom needed a new alphabet. She explained in her interview, “We already had an alphabet in our classroom, but the children wanted to create something new. In the past, I would have dismissed this request but in this case, I tried to dig deep into what they really wanted. So, the children explained they wanted to create an animal alphabet. We tore the old alphabet down and created an alphabet inspired by animals. It was one of our big projects that year.”

Valuing children. Another topic that emerged in our discussions about implementing the Reggio Emilia approach is the importance of the educator placing value on the children. This value is demonstrated by listening to the children’s ideas, creating plans and activities for researching questions the children have, displaying the documentation of the children’s work and including the children’s voice in all aspects of the classroom. Children are co-planners, co-creators and co-learners alongside the educators in the classroom.

An example of seeing great value in children, as capable learners, was explained during an interview with ECE 5. She said, “I think for me, it's just any of those little kind of moments throughout the day where you see a kid making these discoveries on their own. You didn't have to do anything for them. We are giving them the time they need. It might just not be in one day. It might be over a period of a week they're working on something, and the light bulb light goes off in their eyes. I just think… ok, we are doing the right thing. They are being heard. They are being valued. Their ideas are valued. Our morning meetings are basically to say, what's on your

mind? What are you interested in? What should we talk about? It's just they feel they have a voice, and that is exactly what we want them to feel - very confident they are being heard and respected and valued. We just want our students to know they are safe with us - they are free to be whoever they want to be."

Revisiting and relaunching. One interesting teaching practice that is utilized intentionally in Reggio Inspired classrooms is reflection. Revisiting prior research and other learning experiences such as project work, is a habit which is documented while children are engaged in a topic. The Italians would call this process the "Progettazoine" which includes hypothesis, observation, interpretation and relaunching (Rinaldi, 2021). As educators grow in understanding the documentation process, they begin to record these stages and the relationship between observation and interpretation.

Children can use this documentation process to revisit and relaunch. Children and educators in this approach give attention to pictures, anecdotes, and student discourse in documentation. Children can revisit the documentation that is kept on a project to reflect. For example, pictures from project work are displayed so children can remember what they have experienced, reflect on new learning and ask more questions.

A great example of this type of revisiting and relaunching process was shared by ECE 4. She shared, "I think the biggest piece for us is revisit the work. I mean, it's something we do but we need to do better when revisiting that work. You know we are trying to go back and allow children to edit or to add to their work or to review what they did the prior day. Sometimes they want to sit and look at everything they have done. They take great pride in their work. We really want to emphasize the children's potential."

Challenges and Barriers for a Reggio Inspired Teacher

Managing the mandates. One of the most prevalent challenges for all of the educators in this study was dealing with regulations from various agencies that are stakeholders in the early childhood classrooms. The West Virginia legislature, West Virginia Department of Education, in partnership with Department of Health and Human Resources (DHHR) and other partners, created a universal Pre-K program for all families through legislative action and WVBE Policy 2520. However, this system is built on collaboration which means many agencies are involved in the decision-making process and the mandated requirements. Below is a description of each educator from the study and the different organizations who oversee their early childhood classrooms. This information was obtained during the interview process.

- ECE 1 and ECE 2 were county hired employees. These classrooms were managed by the county school system, under state regulations. The educators in the two classrooms had a county adopted curriculum, state mandated assessment, and county and school level administration.
- ECE 3 and ECE 4 were teaching in early childhood classrooms at universities and were also county collaborative sites. These classrooms were regulated by DHHR licensing requirements, NAEYC accreditation standards, county contracts which require certain curriculum standards and assessments as well as obligations to professional learning sessions and finally directed by the West Virginia Department of Education. In addition, the university classroom supports the undergraduate programs and adhere to department requests or recommendations. These programs were pulled in various directions due to the number of partners and guidelines.

- ECE 5 taught in a private early childhood setting. She was also in a county collaborative classroom and adheres to all county requirements including curriculum and assessment. As a private school educator, she answered to the headmaster of the school and was also accountable to the families' expectations.

When discussing this challenge of working under state and county mandates, ECE 1 stated, "At first it was really hard to find a balance between trying to teach in the Reggio way and meet the county expectations. We have a reading basal and a math series and assessment benchmarks to meet. It is hard to get all these things that the county is requiring of me done, plus being able to let the children learn based on their own interest."

ECE 4 shared that various regulations from agencies inhibits what she would like to see occur in the classroom. She said "We are heavily regulated. We have DHHR and licensing requirement, plus county requirements, plus university requirements and departmental things. So I feel like that takes away from what we really want to do with the curriculum."

Getting others on board. Four of the five educators in this study work within a building with other educators. Some are teaching in buildings that house Pre-K classrooms through grade 5. Several of the educators discussed the challenge of helping other grade levels understand the Reggio Emilia approach during the interview. Early childhood has traditionally been seen as an individual entity but now, like never before, some of these early childhood "practices" are being challenged for teachers beyond the Pre-K classrooms. Many teachers, even in kindergarten classrooms, do not understand children centered learning, small group work, higher level questioning and research. These educators, alongside families who did not have this experience, will question and insist that young children cannot do this kind of work. The educators in this study pointed to this misunderstanding as a great challenge. ECE 3 stated, "My greatest

challenge is probably getting people on board and understanding what we do and why we do it. Sometimes when I work closely with our kindergarten teachers. They don't quite understand what I am doing in here and wonder, for instance, why I am not doing worksheets. They think all we do is play."

ECE 5 explained the challenge of being in a building of other grade levels. She said, "We feel like there are teachers here in our building that we want to get involved in our approach. We have support staff in the arts that could tie their experience directly into what we are learning in our classroom. To be honest, sometimes they are on board and other times they are like – you do your thing and I'll do my thing."

Relationship building and creating trust also seemed like a challenge for getting other educators on board especially for ECE 2, who also works with other Pre-K and kindergarten educators in the county system. She said, "The main thing is building relationships with the teachers and for them to know it's not going to be a one and done thing. They are so used to all you ever get is this professional development and then no one will come back and support the implementation. I try to get buy in and build relationships with teachers. They have to know you are going to be there for support."

Supports for a Reggio Inspired Teacher

Other Educators. Every educator in this study pointed to other educators, who were also interested in implementing the Reggio Emilia approach, as the greatest support needed for success. Whether it was a co-teacher, mentor, administrator, or outside person, having support from another educator was crucial to successful implementation. These human resources aided in a variety of ways which included problem solving, planning, organizing resources, finding experts or simply being a "sounding board" for others.

ECE 3 described her "team" as being a staff of women who have all been studying and growing in the Reggio way. She said, "Our team is my greatest resource. A lot of times when the children have an interest and I might be struggling to plan activities that are engaging, I can go present it to our team. It is always helpful because I get multiple perspectives. The support of our team is critical to my planning process and working through different challenges that come up."

ECE 5 shared that her co-teacher is the most important resource she has for this type of work. She immediately responded to the question regarding support by saying, "My co-teacher. Our best ideas come from each other. Just having the ability to talk, plan and work with each other is huge."

ECE 1 and ECE 4 spoke of other mentors who have supported their learning. While discussing what those mentors bring to the table, ECE 4 shared that one of her former professors has created a PowerPoint presentation that outlines basic information about the Reggio Emilia approach that is shared with undergraduate and graduate students in her classroom. She also uses this presentation as a touch stone for her own understanding and shares it with anyone who is new to the program. ECE 1 mentioned a retired teacher who does consultant work for the school where she teaches who also promotes the Reggio way. In describing the retired teacher, she said, "She has really been helpful. We have a 2-hour PLC that she attends weekly. Anything I need – she always says, what can I do for you?"

Administrative Backing. Support from building level and county level administration was important to each of the educators in this study. ECE 1 shared her principal and the assistant principal both promoted the adoption of the Reggio Emilia approach in her school. She felt like they had placed priority on the success of implementation by funding appropriate materials,

creating new spaces and environments for learning and furnishing classrooms for this type of collaborative learning.

ECE 2 discussed her administrative support, “I have a lot of support from my boss. I have ideas to implement in the classroom and she always finds a way to purchase small materials to make it work. Our superintendent has also supported this initiative. He is an “out of the box” thinker. I could go to the superintendent, and he would ask for specifics and what was needed. If I had a good plan, then he would make it happen.”

Materials. The Reggio Emilia approach is known for its unique materials. Teachers and children use recycled materials and natural materials with a wide variety of color, texture and movement. Materials was a topic of discussion during the interview process of this study. Teachers used describing words like transparent, natural, recycled, wooden, and also described loose parts like pop lids, old screws and rocks that were used in the classrooms.

ECE 3 described the importance of these materials, “Having materials and things we need to allow children to create is important. Without those tools and those materials that are open-ended, it would be hard to do what we do.” She went on to describe an intended project that was planned for each year with her children. “One project that we do is called Beautiful Stuff. We have the children bring in recyclable materials to use from home. The support of our families is always important through that project. That’s one way that we incorporate them in their learning at school.”

One of the educators (ECE 5) spoke of how remote learning due to the Covid-19 pandemic has shown their families how these types of materials, found materials, can be engaging for their children at home. She explained that with remote learning, parents had to gather some of the needed materials. She and her assistant hear a lot of feedback from families

that what they were doing was really “great!” That parents/families had not thought of those materials to engage their children and so they saw first-hand how those materials were engaging, promoted creativity and that their child enjoyed learning. These simple invitations and provocations were very joyful for children and inspiring to the families.

Stories from Reggio Inspired Teachers

Another way to showcase how educators were implementing the Reggio Emilia approach was to ask them the question, “Can you tell me about a time when you felt like Reggio-inspired learning was really occurring in your classroom?” Below are the stories.

ECE 1. “My favorite time is just a small success I guess, but it's just something that we do every day during morning meeting. We have always greeted our students but with this routine we listen to them. We call this the “kid news.” We want to hear what the children have done over the weekend. We talk and listen and connect. After this happens, I have them to write it down for me. Then I scaffold their writing with the group. We look for punctuation. We talk about sight words. We count the words. They enjoy the kid news because they want to share something about themselves. They have celebrations to share. But then we're doing so much with that. I mean, it can literally be anything. It's just so simple. I just feel like that's like a Reggio Way because it's not really like scripted. It just it kind of flows. I have been doing this for a couple of weeks and it's my favorite part of the day. I feel like I enjoy it so much just because I just get so much out of it. They love it too because they can talk about themselves. They are proud to share out. All those things in that little, short greeting in our morning meeting is just something that is great.”

ECE 2. “At a school in our county, I created a STEAM Center with a grant from the state department. We call it the STEAM Lab. It is Reggio based and we have Pre-K through third

grade that visits it when they're technically in school. They would visit the STEAM Lab once a week. We would use that space for ongoing project work. In fact, we had a project that we worked on for two years with *Three Billy Goats Gruff.* These kids started this project in Pre-K and we continued for two years. They were creating the scenes and characters and stuff out of clay and 3D materials. It's disheartening with everything that's going on with Covid because we have not wrapped up the work. I don't know when or if they'll ever be able to come back up here to finish the project."

ECE 3. "A few years ago, the first year in our new building, was my third year of teaching. I went on a trip, so I was gone for a week and of course preparing the children that I was going to be gone. I explained that I was going on an airplane. When I returned they were building airplanes everywhere. Inside, outside, in the block area, on the light table, everywhere I looked there was an airplane. The project evolved.

At the time, there was a second classroom that was connected to ours, but it wasn't being utilized and so we turned that into an airport. We researched all the components. This was probably a 5-to-6-month project, probably the longest project I had experienced. The children were interested the whole time. We researched different airplanes. We compared different airplanes. We took a trip to conduct field work at the Tri State Airport in Huntington. We got to see security. The children watched several of the airplanes take off and land while we were sitting on the runway. It was a great experience.

One of the culminating pieces of that project involved the kindergarten crew. They were working on weather in the classroom. So, we did a weather forecast with the kindergarten crew. They would tell us about the weather and whether it was safe to fly an airplane. Then our children created the airport experience. They would check in for the flight. They got their ticket.

They went through baggage claim. They boarded the airplane. We had a pilot who would update us on the weather. We had flight attendants that were serving food. That was probably one of those times I just went with it. I didn't know much about airplanes, so it was a learning curve for me. But it was really a lot of fun.

During the project and at the end I thought about what the children were learning. They were learning all about the mechanics of the airplane. They researched various planes and families would send us back information on different planes like a Cessna or an Airbus. I still see some of these kids today and they're like Miss K- remember when we had that airport? They are still remembering it."

ECE 4. **"**Last year we were drawing pictures and some of the children drew very detailed pictures. Other like to draw crazy "tornados." Some of the children said, that's really a scribble. So, we took the scribble and went with it. We did a whole year-long project on scribbles. We used the light and sprinkled sand to make their scribble artwork. We discussed what you can do with the scribble and what you can see with the scribble. We did some self-regulation with music, and they would draw and scribble and then I would stop the music and we could discuss. I had five or six with those big panel boards just full of scribbles and dictations. It was great."

ECE 5. "My favorite project was when we did the Dinosaur and Rock Museum. We have two big slides that go down to our playground. The slides are built into the hillside. The kids love this area because there is a lot of dirt and mud in there. So, the kids started getting really interested in finding fossils and dinosaurs in that area. We decided that we needed to gather some instruments like little hand shovels and spoons to start digging. They were digging up rocks and calling them fossils. From there, the fossils took us to the idea of a museum of dinosaurs and

fossils. So, we ended planning a trip to the Pittsburgh Natural History Museum and doing like a full-blown tour.

We saw such a passion for this topic with the children. It wasn't just a small group; the entire class was involved. Just watching this all play out with the children and their ideas – like when they created a museum in our room and how they loved digging with the goggles and shovels – you think as a teacher…this is how it should be. No doubt."

ROSIE Scale and Observation

For the classroom observations, the Rating Observation Scale for Inspiring Environments (ROSIE) was used to assess the intentional design of the classroom environment for each of the participating educators (Appendix C). The ROSIE tool encourages educators to evaluate their classroom from a new perspective by considering and observing aesthetic design elements such as color, focal points, texture, lighting, displays and the use of space and nature (DeViney, 2010).

ROSIE provides specific indicators to identify the first level of growth (sprouting), the second level of growth (budding) and the highest level of growth (blooming). ROSIE supports educators to consider these elements of design to grow into more sophisticated stages. The ROSIE observation tool helps educators learn what is necessary to reach the second level identified as the budding stage and, ultimately, grow to the highest level of aesthetic beauty, known as blooming (DeViney, 2010).

ROSIE evaluates seven principles of design that assist educators as they consider their classroom space. The seven principles of design are Principle 1 Nature Inspires Beauty, Principle 2 Color Generates Interest, Principle 3 Furnishings Define Space, Principle 4 Texture Adds Depth, Principle 5 Displays Enhance Environment, Principle 6 Elements Heighten Ambiance,

Principle 7 Focal Points Attract Attention. For each indicator within the seven principles, the rating scale is 1 – 3. A score of 1 is considered sprouting (beginning). A score of 2 is considered budding (developing). A score of 3 is considered blooming (accomplished) (DeViney, 2010).

Below is a chart that indicates how each study participant (ECE) scored in the 7 principles of design.

Table 2
ROSIE Rating Scale Scoring

Participant	Principle 1	Principle 2	Principle 3	Principle 4	Principle 5	Principle 6	Principle 7	Total	Level
ECE 1	17/18	15/15	23/36	9/9	36/39	11/18	11/12	122/147	budding
ECE 2	15/18	11/15	23/36	7/9	31/39	13/18	9/12	109/147	budding
ECE 3	14/18	15/15	31/36	7/9	37/39	15/18	10/12	129/147	blooming
ECE 4	15/18	12/15	32/36	8/9	30/39	10/18	9/12	116/147	budding
ECE 5	16/18	11/15	29/36	8/9	27/39	12/18	9/12	112/147	budding

Four of the five educators in this study rated at the "budding level" of the scale. To graduate to the accomplished level "blooming" they would have had to score a 124 or higher. One educator ranked at the highest level "blooming." None of the teachers in this study rated themselves at the sprouting level (lowest, most basic).

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this chapter is to inform the research questions which explored educator experiences implementing the Reggio Emilia approach in early childhood classrooms. These questions included the following:

1. How is the Reggio Emilia approach being implemented in West Virginia by public/private early childhood educators who have studied the approach?
2. What do public/private early childhood teachers in West Virginia describe as the supports to their use of the Reggio Emilia approach?
3. What do public/private early childhood teachers in West Virginia describe as the obstacles to their use of the Reggio Emilia approach?

In this chapter, the implications, analysis, discussion, conclusions and recommendations for further research are presented based on the qualitative data collected from interviews and observations. Interviews were conducted with five educators from various regions of West Virginia which included Cabell, Harrison, Logan, Monongalia and Ohio counties to gain insight into their perceptions of the supports and challenges that are in place when implementing the Reggio Emilia approach.

Conclusions

On a journey. Educators in this study described the implementation process of the Reggio Emilia approach as a "journey." The word journey could be defined as the action of going from one place to another. This definition makes sense when reflecting on the interviews in this study. Many times, during the interview process, the educators would talk about sharing their own "journey" as well as listening to others on the "journey." This description implies that learning

about the Reggio Emilia approach and implementing this process with children requires time, space and effort. The "journey" is never complete and always evolving. This type of teaching and learning requires much reflection. Lindsey (2015) stated, "Like their historical counterparts, modern children still have the right to access quality early childhood education and care where progressive activism is fostered. The identification of Dewey's ongoing legacy in a current exemplar of high-quality educational practice challenges educators to consider their own pedagogical ideas and values while providing a focus for reflection about their current and future pedagogy" (p.455). Reflecting on ideas, process, and planning is critical as teachers work through this "journey" of implementation.

The third teacher is a must. The data also revealed that a critical component of effective implementation of the Reggio Emilia approach is knowing how to set up the learning environment as the "third" teacher. The Reggio Emilia approach considers the environment as the third teacher which is built on a socio-constructivist model that views knowledge as constructed through interactions with both people and the environment (Dodd-Nufrio, 2011). Several participants mentioned that the very first step in their process of becoming a Reggio-inspired teacher was to focus on their learning environment. Many of the participants changed the overall color scheme, decluttered the space, and included new materials that aligned with a Reggio-inspired classroom.

Professional learning experiences matter. For all the educators in this study, effective implementation of the Reggio Emilia approach occurred due to quality training experiences. Conferences, webinars, coursework and coaching made a difference as educators began and continued this implementation journey. One participant (ECE 4) spoke to the impact of attending a conference, she said, "When you're actually there at the conference, hearing other people or

seeing the documentation of the learning - that is really inspiring." One of the most prominent organizations, the North American Reggio Emilia Alliance (NAREA), has created an entire network for professional learning, both in the United States and abroad (NAREA, 2020c). NAREA has also provided additional resources and support for programs or educators interested in implementing the Reggio Emilia approach such as publications and conferences. All the educators in this study experienced some type of professional learning opportunity from NAREA and mentioned multiple training sessions or professional learning provided by NAREA. These professional learning opportunities did make a difference. For example, all participants rated high budding (medium range) or blooming (highest range) on the Rating Observation Scale for Inspiring Environments (ROSIE) which was used to collect observational data in this study.

Mandates kill creativity and inspired learning. Educators in this study described barriers that impeded implementation of the Reggio Emilia approach. One of the most common barriers that was shared during the interviews dealt with mandates and regulatory agencies in early childhood programs. In a Reggio-inspired classroom, children are learning through play with hands-on experiences. This approach draws from work of philosopher John Dewey from the early 20th Century. Dewey's constructivists beliefs placed the teacher in the role as researcher and co-constructor of learning in partnership with children, within social and community contexts (Griebling, 2011). Dewey's value for children as active participants in their social construction of knowledge and understanding inspired him advocate for curricula based on children's interests (Eisner, 2002). Therefore, mandates on curriculum, assessment and other policies like health and safely from agencies such as county school districts, Department of Health and Human Services (DHHR), universities and the West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE) can limit the creative, child-initiated and exploratory learning space that is

needed to truly implement the Reggio Emilia approach. ECE 4 noted during the interview process that heavy regulations from DHHR, WVDE and the university she represents takes away from the curriculum with competing policies. Other educators in this study also noted that regulations from various agencies are barriers to implementing the Reggio Emilia approach.

Project work is key. Educators in the study also shared that project work based on student interest was very important in engaging children. In Reggio Emilia schools the core of the curriculum is developed from the interests and questions of the teachers and students. These projects are ways of doing work with children that in effect simulate real life (Wurm, 2005). During the interview process, the educators were asked to "describe a time in the classroom when you felt Reggio-inspired learning was really occurring." All five educators gave detailed stories of learning experiences where children were thriving as they learned about new topics. The levels of engagement in these student-led experiences were extremely high and the student interest continued for days and weeks as creative products were completed through extensive research.

This study divulged that without student inspired project work there is no Reggio-inspired processes. The father of the Reggio Emilia approach, Loris Malaguzzi, created an approach where curriculum would incorporate children and adults working together to construct knowledge (and values and identities) – meaning-making through processes of building, sharing, testing and revising theories, always in dialogic relationship with others, working through the medium of open-ended project work (Moss, 2016). The pedagogical approach is built on the interests of children and welcomes the unexpected and the unpredicted, that values wonder and surprise (Moss, 2016). The stories that the educators shared in each interviews followed these features and values.

Support from other educators is crucial. Pervasively throughout the interviews of this study, participants mentioned collegial support that was critical to the effectiveness of implementing the Reggio Emilia approach. Whether it was an administrator, mentor, collaborating teacher, or outside person, having support from another educator was vitally important. Cooperation and collaboration have been described as the backbone of the Reggio Emilia system (Hendrick, 1997b). The collaboration of another educator aided in a variety of ways which included problem solving, planning, organizing resources, finding experts or simply being a "sounding board" for others. In most cases, the educators in this study oversaw the only classroom inside their building attempting to work in a Reggio-inspired way. Support from colleagues from within and outside of the school building was imperative for successful implementation.

Implications

Educators need professional learning. Throughout the study, educators pointed to training as being essential to their understanding and implementation of Reggio inspired learning. In the state of West Virginia, training in the Reggio Emilia approach is limited and not easily accessible. Within the community of Reggio inspired educators, training can be limited to in-house trainings, NAREA Conferences, study tours and sending teachers to Reggio Emilia, Italy where this philosophy is reality. The educators in this study have sought out training on their own to extend their knowledge. Many of these professional learning opportunities have been out of state or even out of the country.

The lack of training opportunities within West Virginia creates a barrier for educators. Without the opportunity to learn and observe what Reggio inspired classrooms involve, educators have a difficult time successfully implementing the approach. For many early

childhood educators, training that requires travel and possible conference fees may be out of reach and would need support from administration to cover costs.

All five educators in this study detailed a professional learning experience or training that helped them move forward to implement the Reggio Emilia approach. For example, ECE 1 discussed how attending a NAREA conference changed her mindset as a teacher and impacted her practice. ECE 4 also echoed the importance of a NAREA conference experience and explained that it was important to hear from other people who were teaching in this way and to see the documentation of the learning. During the interview process, the participants mentioned only one conference that was held in West Virginia. This "STEAMPosium" was hosted and organized by the June Harless Center at Marshall University and held in Huntington, WV. All five participants in this research study attended at least one time prior to Covid-19 in 2020. Since the pandemic the conference has been put on hold. By bringing more professional learning opportunities to educators in West Virginia, a network of Reggio-inspired educators could be built in the state and best practices could be shared.

Educators need support. Collaboration and cooperation of all educators is an important component of the Reggio Emilia approach. The educators in this study emphasized the importance of support. When implementing a new strategy or technique it is important to have the backing of other educators or administrators. To teach this approach in isolation would be extremely difficult. The educators in Reggio Emilia have a strong commitment to collaborative relationships amount all adults which is extremely impressive (Katz, 1994). Some of the educators in this study had additional personnel in the classroom. Time for collaboration is tremendously important and must be provided and planned. During this collaboration educators would be expected to share ideas, classroom challenges, project planning, and questions for

future research with children. Educators who felt success implementing the Reggio Emilia approach had support personnel who shared a vision for Reggio-inspired practices.

Other support that is vital to the success of implementing the Reggio Emilia approach involved administrative backing. Educators in this study mentioned administration in the form of a principal, curriculum director or superintendent. Reggio-inspired early childhood classrooms can look very different from "traditional" classrooms. For example, Reggio-inspired classrooms would involve student-initiated projects that could include field work and expert guests to answer student questions. Also, students in a Reggio-inspired classroom might not bring home worksheets that families are accustomed to seeing. All these components would need administrative backing, understanding and support.

During the interviews, the participants explained how their administration had created an environment for this approach to be successful. ECE 1 shared her principal and the assistant principal both promoted the adoption of the Reggio Emilia approach in her school. She felt like they had placed priority on the success of implementation by funding appropriate materials, creating new spaces and environments for learning and furnishing classrooms for this type of collaborative learning. ECE 2 explained how the administration allowed for creative thinking and provided needed materials. She explained the support from her director allowed her to implement ideas in the classroom. She also said that her director would always find a way to purchase small materials to make the ideas work.

Teachers, share control with children! The very nature of teaching lends itself to taking charge and taking control. Many educators have well over twenty students in their room. They plan for every activity and experience. They also are responsible for ensuring appropriate behaviors from students. All these factors can lead an educator to over-control the classroom

environment. Interestingly, to effectively teach in a Reggio-inspired way educators must let go of control. Teachers who micro-manage every aspect of the day in a classroom will find great difficulty in implementing the best practices of the Reggio Emilia approach. It is essential that educators embrace the notion that students need to drive their learning - meaning children should be allowed to think critically about topics and develop essential questions and research methods. For any educator who has a tight grasp on every aspect of the classroom, this will take some time and effort.

Reggio-inspired educators allow children to control pieces of the planning, the daily experiences and overall direction of learning. In this environment it is important that children are seen as equal and valued citizens of the learning community. Although it is important that boundaries are set to ensure productive, safe learning, the children have a voice in what direction the learning should go. A great example of this was shared during ECE 3's interview. She highlighted the importance of stand back and observing. She explained that a lot of time she would want to jump in when she would see something evolve. Instead, it was important to "sit back and allow them to have the experience and really try to dig deeper into what they are thinking and what can be given to them later to expand on the learning." ECE 3 explains that an experienced Reggio-inspired teacher spends time observing is contemplating the next level of learning, creating new questions and challenges to push children to think beyond what they currently understand.

Educators feel pressure to control every minute of the day. Many reasons could account for this behavior which include time constraints, curricular demands and requirements, as well as ensuring an orderly classroom. The beauty in the Reggio Emilia approach is how engaged learning looks and feels in the classroom. Much of this is because students have choice and are

making decisions about their own learning. As educators empower students to be more independent and take an active role in their own learning process, deeper levels of engagement and learning occur.

Flexible curriculum. In the Reggio Emilia approach, educators facilitate learning rather than direct learning; therefore, a flexible curriculum is important to successful implementation. Schools without the constraints of inflexible standards or curriculum requirements have an easier path when trying to incorporate student led projects and student driven investigations. A flexible curriculum that emphasizes student-centered learning does not diminish the important role of the teacher but seeks to use a teacher's expertise in various ways to increase student engagement.

During the interview process, the educators in this study emphasized that mandated curriculum expectations was a challenge for implementation. One participant even said that it was very difficult trying to "fit it all in" during the school day. During the interview process, the study participant meant it was difficult instructing students using county mandated curriculum for English/Language Arts and Mathematics, complete the county required benchmark assessments and implement Reggio-inspired student directed projects. The participant felt like it was impossible to make this work during the course of a day at school without flexibility. More flexibility and alignment of curriculum would increase the opportunities for educators to allow for student choice and student directed learning. When students can make decisions about their own learning, engagement and understanding will increase.

As an educational system, highly engaging educational experiences that are provided in the Reggio Emilia approach will require looking beyond the step by step, day by day, cookie-cutter, pre-planned curriculum for all subjects and content. Students in today's classrooms will be adults in a world with many complex problems that need solved. If they have opportunity to

develop questions, create hypothesis, research, analyze and share findings as young learners they better prepare them for their future.

Suggestions for Future Research

Recommendation 1: A study to expand the participant area and scope of the study. The study could be broadened to include teachers in other states outside of West Virginia. For example, a tri-state study could be conducted including West Virginia, Kentucky, and Ohio.

Recommendation 2: A study to determine efficacy of administrators and their knowledge of the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood. This study would be based West Virginia to see if the administration of schools or centers have knowledge or experience with the Reggio Emilia approach.

Recommendation 3: Longitudinal Study on the outcomes for children who experience these Reggio inspired environments. This study could focus on the critical thinking and problem-solving skills that the students demonstrate later in school. The children could be selected from the programs or districts that are represented in this study.

Recommendation 4: Creation of teacher and administrator professional learning activities to support the implementation of the Reggio way.

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APPENDIX A: IRB Approval

MARSHALL UNIVERSITY
www.marshall.edu

Office of Research Integrity
Institutional Review Board
One John Marshall Drive
Huntington, WV 25755

FWA 00002704

IRB1 #00002205
IRB2 #00003206

December 7, 2020

Edna Meisel, Ed.D.
Curriculum & Instruction CEOPD

RE: IRBNet ID# 1668014-1
At: Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral)

Dear Dr. Meisel:

Protocol Title:	[1668014-1] Embracing the Reggio Emilia Approach for Early Childhood Education"	
Site Location:	MU	
Submission Type:	New Project	APPROVED
Review Type:	Exempt Review	

In accordance with 45CFR46.104(d)(1&2), the above study was granted Exempted approval today by the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Designee. No further submission (or closure) is required for an Exempt study **unless** there is an amendment to the study. All amendments must be submitted and approved by the IRB Chair/Designee.

This study is for student Tarabeth Brumfield Heineman.

If you have any questions, please contact the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/ Behavioral) Coordinator Anna Robinson at (304) 696-2477 or robinsonn1@marshall.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

Bruce F. Day, ThD, CIP
Director, Office of Research Integrity

APPENDIX B: Research Protocol and Interview Questions

Interview Protocol
Embracing of the Reggio Emilia Approach in Early Childhood

Pre-Interview Consent to Participate in Research

Hello, my name is Tarabeth Heineman. You have been chosen to be in a study about Embracing the Reggio Emilia Approach for Early Childhood Education. This study involves research. The purpose of this research study is to determine how elementary teachers have embraced and utilized the Reggio Emilia Approach in their classrooms. The Marshall University Institutional Review Board has approved this study. If you choose to be in the study, I will interview you and you will be expected to provide answers to the questions to the best of your knowledge. I will record this session using Microsoft Teams for the purpose of transcribing your responses. Once the responses are transcribed, the recording will be deleted from the secure server, files of transcribed notes will be deleted, and any paper copies of transcribed notes will be shredded.

There are no foreseeable risks or benefits to you for participating in this study. There is no cost or payment to you. If you have questions while taking part, please stop me and ask. Your responses will remain confidential.

If you have questions about this research, or study related problems, you may call Dr. Edna Meisel at 304.638.1780. If you feel as if you were not treated well during this study, or have questions concerning your rights as a research participant call the Marshall University Office of Research Integrity (ORI) at (304) 696-4303.

Your participation in this research is voluntary, and you will not be penalized or lose benefits if you refuse to participate or decide to stop. May I continue?

Interview Questions

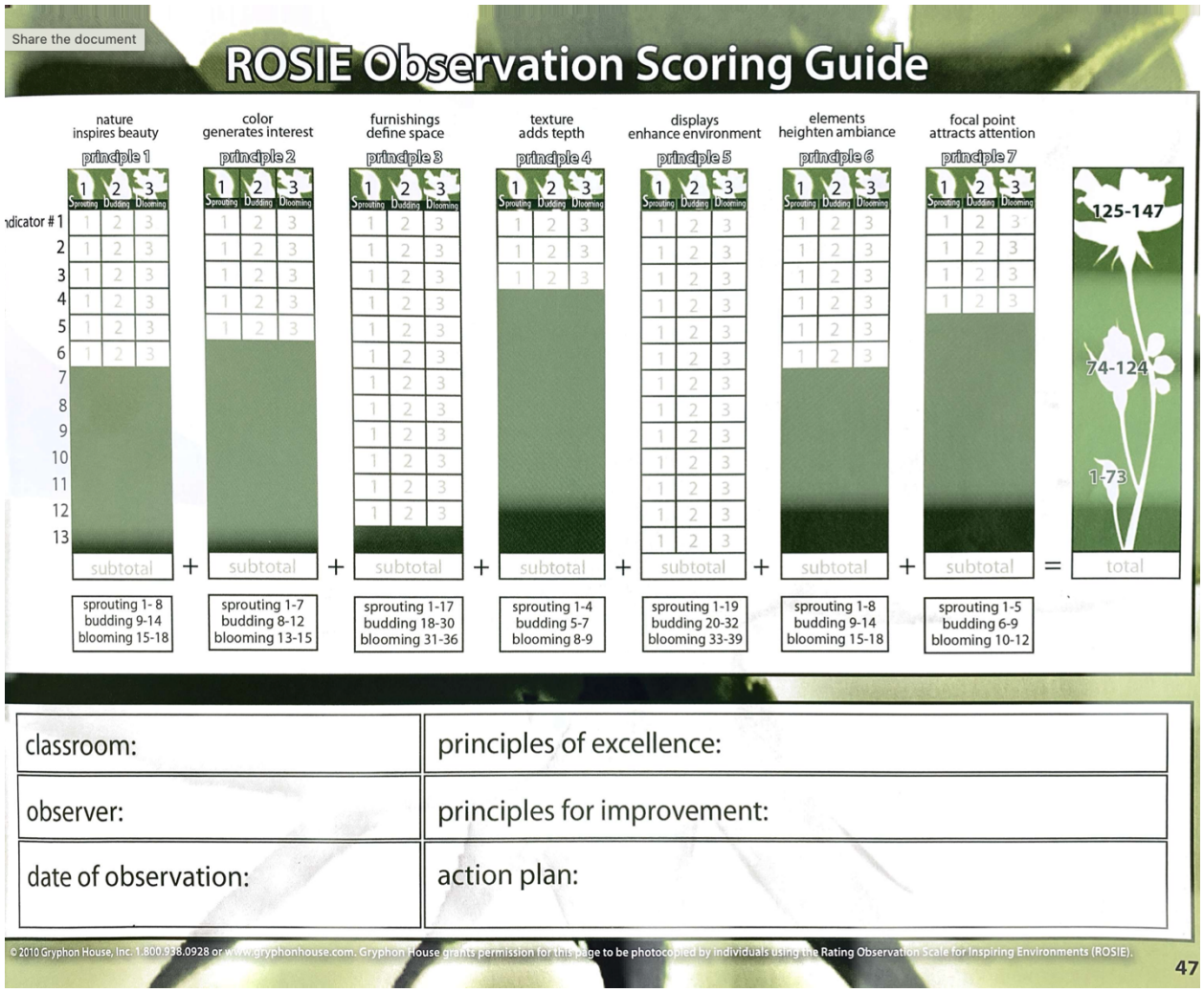
Demographic Questions

1. How long have you taught?
2. What grade levels have you taught?
3. What is your educational background/certifications?

Open-ended Questions

1. Tell me about your experience teaching with the Reggio Emilia Approach?
2. What professional learning experiences have made an impact on your implementation of the Reggio Emilia approach? Why?
3. In what ways are you implementing the Reggio Emilia approach?
4. What challenges/barriers have you faced as you have implemented the Reggio Emilia approach?
5. What supports have helped you as you have implemented the Reggio Emilia approach?
6. Tell me about a time that you felt Reggio-inspired learning was occurring in your classroom.

APPENDIX C: ROSIE Observation Scale



APPENDIX D: Vitae

Heineman, Tarabeth tarabeth.heineman@marshall.edu

Education

Marshall University, Huntington, WV
Curriculum and Instruction Ed.D. (In Process, ABD) Projected completion date 5/22

Marshall University, Huntington, WV
Master of Arts **2006**
Literacy Education

Bachelor of Science **2004**
Major: Elementary Education K-6
Minor: Pre-K - Kindergarten

Certification

Professional Teaching Certificate
Elementary Ed K – 6
Pre K-Kindergarten

Professional Experience

June Harless Center
Executive Director **2021- Present**
Oversees all operations of the JHC

Chief Program Development Officer **2021-2011**
Coordinate and oversee programming of the June Harless Center for Rural Educational Research and Development.

Program Director **2008-2011**
Coordinate 21st century outreach programming for rural schools. Write, monitor and implement grants with school systems. Assist individual schools in developing a 21st century school learning environment.

Marshall University
Adjunct Instructor **2006-2008**
Developed syllabus and overall course structure and administered all grades. Courses include CI 343, CI446, and CIRG 654.

June Harless Center
Professional Development Coordinator **2006 - 2008**
Planned and coordinated professional development for teachers and administrators K-12.

Marshall University
Graduate Assistant – June Harless Center Demonstration Site **2004-2006**
Collaborated on curriculum and co-taught in elementary classrooms K-3.

Wayne County Schools
Substitute Teacher Taught in elementary classrooms. **2004-2006**

Highlighted Career Achievements

Program Developer
2007 – 2011 / Work as a member of a team to develop, implement and sustain the June Harless 21st century Model Schools Project at Kellogg Elementary School and Vinson Middle School. As a part of this initiative, collaborated with other schools across West Virginia to roll out the model of 21st century teaching and learning.

2015 – present / Work as a member of a leadership team to develop the West Virginia Campaign for Grade Level Reading, Leaders of Literacy project which serves all 55 counties in West Virginia. This is a partnership with the WV Department of Education.

Program Director
2010 – present / Lead and direct the Marshall University Early Education STEAM Center and fulfill the following responsibilities: coordinate programming, manage budget, supervise staff (9 total), comply to WVDE, Cabell County, DHHR, and LINK requirements, and coordinate events.

Grant Writer and Awardee
Author and coauthored state, federal, and foundation grants to support innovative programming for rural school systems. Served as a primary consultant and coordinator. Example projects funded include:

Primary Consultant – 2 Year Project – Reggio Inspired Practices – totaling $340,000 - Funded by the Benedum Foundation to support the development of a Reggio Emilia inspired Prek – 1st grade early childhood educational laboratory with Logan County Schools.

Primary Consultant -2 Year Project Focus – $145,000 – Funded by the Improving Teacher Quality Grants Federal Program that supported Lincoln County schools in literacy curriculum development.

Co-Consultant - Project FIRST – *21st Century Model School Project* - $280,000 – A two-year grant from the Benedum foundation which awarded monies to establish a 21st century model school, supporting teachers and students in professional development and curriculum enhancement.

Co-Consultant - Project E3 - Funded by the Improving Teacher Quality Grants Federal Program, 3-year mathematics grant that supported teachers in Lincoln County, WV.

Research Consultant
Conducted research for two years for aha! Process, a Ruby Payne corporation, to evaluate the effectiveness of an innovative program that uses alternative measures to identify gifted students of poverty.

Professional Education Consultant and Trainer
Presented innovative professional development to K-8 teachers in the areas of 21st century learning, school/classroom culture, standards-based mathematics, literacy instruction, integration of technology in the classroom and virtual field trips.

Communicated cutting-edge Harless programming, including the 21st century Model Schools project, to educators, parents, and business leaders at numerous local and state conferences.

Advised educators and educational systems for curriculum enhancement.

Marshall University Certified Teacher

Taught undergraduate and graduate level classes

Professional Presentations and Publications

The list below is a sampling of presentations that highlights the work of each year:

2004 - Demonstration of Reading Best Practices through Videoconferencing Pendleton County Schools and Marshall University June Harless Demonstration Site

2006 – Early intervention for Preschool Reading Development
Marshall University June Harless Center Higher Education Symposium

2006 – Reading Success through Modeling
Thurgood Marshall Elementary Professional Development, Lynwood, California

2006 – Bringing Virtual Field Trips to the Classroom
Wayne County Public Schools

2007 – Multiplication Content Development for Elementary Teachers
Lincoln County Mathematics Academy

2007 – 21st Century Teaching and Learning
Model School Teacher Professional Development, Kellogg Elementary

2008 – A Model of 21st Century Learning
Model School Teacher Professional Development- Kellogg Elementary, Vinson Middle, and Tyler County

2008 – From Theory to Practice: An Elementary Model of 21st Century Learning
WV Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development Conference and WV Center for Professional Development Showcase

2009 – The Model School Initiative: Retrofitting Schools for the 21st Century
CPD Showcase

2010 – Leading Change in West Virginia -West Virginia Statewide Principal's Conference

2010 – Retrofit at Cherry River Elementary
Cherry River Staff in Nicholas County

2011 – Professional Development Schools State-wide Conference

2011 – Empowering Practices Professional Development Sessions
Including West Hamlin, Hamlin, Guyandotte, and Highlawn Elementary Schools

2013 – International SITE (Society for Information Technology in Education) Conference in Austin, TX – Harless CREATE Satellite Programming in Early Education

2016 – International SITE (Society for Information Technology in Education) Conference in Savannah, GA – Leveraging the Rural Zip Code: Enriching Summer Learning through Integrating Robotics and the Arts in Southern West Virginia

2017 – CONTEXT Conference at Carnegie Mellon University – Engaging Community Partnerships

2018 – University of Illinois Press: Book Review of Palindrome by Pauletta Hansel (Fall 2018, Vol. 24 Issue 2)

2018 – West Virginia Reading Association – Creating an Inspired Environment for Small Group Instruction

2018 – Planned, organized and initiated a statewide early childhood conference in West Virginia titled "STEAMPOSIUM: A Collaboration for Inspired Learning." Continued in 2019 but did not occur in 2020 and 2021 due to Covid-19.

2020 – Green Schools Conference in Portland, Oregon – Inspiring Culture Shift Through a Multifaceted Approach

2020 – Digital Portfolio for Doctoral Program at Marshall University - https://tarabethheineman.weebly.com

Professional Training

Data Analysis 2006
TERC Training (Standard-based Mathematics) 2006
NCTM National Conference 2009
NCSM National Conference 2009
WV Department of Education State Reading Conference 2007-2019
WV Council of Teachers of Mathematics State Conference 2008 - 2020
EL Education Model Schools
Study Abroad, Reggio Emilia, Italy (2012, 2018)

Professional Memberships

Alpha Delta Kappa
NCTM – National Council of Teachers of Mathematics
NCSM – National Council of Supervisors of Mathematics
IRA – International Reading Association

Current Professional Assignments and Activities

June Harless Center Administrative Work
Co-direct Harless projects around the state of West Virginia
Co-direct 15 Harless employees, 7 graduate interns
Serve in the absence of Executive Director and Program Development Director
Work as a part of a team to manage Harless Center accounts, including budget development, salary decisions and purchasing
June Harless Center Programming
Oversee and direct the Marshall University Early Education STEAM Center
Oversee and co-direct the Leaders of Literacy Campaign partnership with WVDE
Oversee and co-direct the June Harless Center STEM Team
Coordinate and implement the Harless CREATE Satellite Partnership with Carnegie Mellon University
Provide professional development to participating counties
June Harless Center Marketing
Oversee the development of the MU Early Education STEAM and Harless CREATE website
Communicate with partnering counties
Develop and maintain Harless publications (ie. annual reports, brochures and flyers)
Plan and organize Harless events including but not limited to the Harless Hall of Fame
www.harlesscreate.com
www.mueesteamcenter.com
June Harless Center Funding
Develop and submit grant applications for program funding
Coordinate Harless team members in the development of grant proposals