

Localizing Reggio: Adapting the Reggio Emilia Approach to Early Childhood  
Education in Three Childcare Centres on Prince Edward Island

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Education  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of  
Master in Education in Leadership and Learning  
University of Prince Edward Island

Anna Baldacchino  
Charlottetown, PE  
November, 2010

© 2010 Anna Baldacchino



Library and Archives  
Canada

Published Heritage  
Branch

395 Wellington Street  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

Bibliothèque et  
Archives Canada

Direction du  
Patrimoine de l'édition

395, rue Wellington  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

*Your file* *Votre référence*  
ISBN: 978-0-494-82245-6  
*Our file* *Notre référence*  
ISBN: 978-0-494-82245-6

#### NOTICE:

The author has granted a non-exclusive license allowing Library and Archives Canada to reproduce, publish, archive, preserve, conserve, communicate to the public by telecommunication or on the Internet, loan, distribute and sell theses worldwide, for commercial or non-commercial purposes, in microform, paper, electronic and/or any other formats.

The author retains copyright ownership and moral rights in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

---

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this thesis.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the thesis.

#### AVIS:

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque et Archives Canada de reproduire, publier, archiver, sauvegarder, conserver, transmettre au public par télécommunication ou par l'Internet, prêter, distribuer et vendre des thèses partout dans le monde, à des fins commerciales ou autres, sur support microforme, papier, électronique et/ou autres formats.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur et des droits moraux qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

---

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de cette thèse.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.



# Canada

**SIGNATURE PAGE**

(i)

**REMOVED**

**Dedicated to  
my husband Godfrey and  
my sons James and Luke**

### **Abstract**

This research is a situational, interpretative case study of three childcare centres in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Canada, which are inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education. This study investigates how these centres came to be inspired by the Reggio principles, the benefits and/or challenges they have encountered in the process, the future goals these centres have for their programs, and the support the centres need to continue implementing the Reggio Emilia pedagogy. Was it worth all the effort to change their former way of teaching? Would the benefits to the children outweigh the challenges involved in implementing the Reggio approach? Could this pedagogy be localized to Prince Edward Island? And if so, with what results?

This study has been inspired by my own personal commitment to the Reggio Emilia principles. Additionally, I had a keen interest to extend the extensive literature regarding the localization of the Reggio approach in other countries and cultural contexts, to Prince Edward Island.

Four interviews were conducted with supervisors, early childhood educators, and parents from each of the three centres (a total of twelve interviews). Twenty hours of observations were also undertaken in each of the centres (a total of sixty hours). This data was analysed, using situational, interpretive case study, in the light of both the existing literature about the Reggio Emilia approach, and the author's personal journal, which was kept while attending a study tour in Reggio Emilia, Italy, in April 2010.

Findings from this research indicate that, although the process of becoming Reggio inspired has not always been smooth, the three centres are implementing the Reggio principles according to the needs of their children and their own cultural context. The three centres are

practicing the fundamental principles of the Reggio Emilia approach. Supervisors and educators have a positive image of the child. Parents are seen as partners in their children's learning, while educators are trying to get them more actively involved in their centre. Educators are working collaboratively to co-construct their children's learning. Children's learning is being made visible through documentation, and all three centres are using the environment as a means of enhancing this learning.

This research also identifies a number of challenges that these centres faced in the process of implementing the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood learning. These include: overcoming initial educators' fears, apprehensions, and self-doubts; time demands for comprehensively documenting children's learning; and convincing parents that their children are learning nevertheless through play.

As a result of this research, the study also offers a number of considerations for future research, and some suggestions and recommendations to all stakeholders involved, including policy makers.

## Preface

Marsaskala Kinder School in Malta: my first experience as an early childhood educator in 1993. From its name one would think that I was working in a large building, called a school, which was focused on the key elements of kindergarten education. Well, in truth this was a five-room, three-floor apartment block with a flat roof surrounded by a high wall, which was used as a play area for the children. Not an ideal place for a kindergarten centre let alone a 'school'. There were two staff members, a cook/janitress and a principal. We had two kindergarten classes and we taught three and four year olds. One has to note that in Malta there are two kindergarten years: one for three year olds and one for four year olds.

Looking back, I realise that, when I was teaching there, I did not have a clear idea of what an early childhood educator's role was with regards to what was taught to kindergarten children. We tried to teach these children how to write numbers, write letters, draw inside the line, and gave them work to do at home. I did not know any better so I assumed I was doing the right thing. How naive I was!!! Two years into my experience as an early childhood educator, the school had to close down and I decided that I wanted to continue my education and get a diploma in early childhood education.

Once I completed this diploma, in 1998, I found employment as a kindergarten teacher in an English speaking, private school in Malta. What a different experience this proved to be. During my diploma studies, I learned how children develop, how important the first years of childhood are, and what we as educators should and should not 'teach' these children. I tried my best to implement what I learned when I started working as a now 'certified' early childhood educator. However, that was not always possible, as certain policies of the school had to be adhered to.

After spending five years in this particular school, my family and I migrated to Prince Edward Island (PEI). Here I had the opportunity to learn even more about the importance of high quality childcare - one that offers children the right environment and tools for them to grow physically and developmentally. Through my work and volunteerism in a few childcare centres on PEI, I learned that this way of teaching really works. Since we moved to PEI in 2003, I have been to several professional development workshops and conferences about early childhood. I found that I wanted to know still more about high quality childcare and how this impacts on the development of the child.

In 2006, while at a conference organized by the Early Childhood Development Association of PEI, I heard for the first time about the Reggio Emilia Approach. I was intrigued by its use of the emergent curriculum and the image of the child as being the centre of learning. The more I read about this approach, the more I believed that it really was the proper and most respectful way to educate young children. I was lucky enough to be working/volunteering in a centre on PEI at the time that this centre was also interested in the emergent curriculum, and the Reggio Emilia principles; so I could see this approach to learning in action, along with its results. I have also had the opportunity to go to Reggio Emilia in Northern Italy in April 2010, and experience firsthand, how the centres for infants/toddlers and the three to six year olds looked and how they were run. This helped me formulate my own conclusions about the Reggio Emilia approach rather than just reading what others say or think about it in various books and journal articles.

This thesis is part of my own journey of discovery.

**Invece il cento c'è**

Invece il cento c'è  
 Il bambino è fatto di cento.  
 Il bambino ha cento lingue  
 cento mani cento pensieri  
 cento modi di pensare  
 di giocare e di parlare  
 cento sempre cento  
 modi di ascoltare  
 di stupire di amare  
 cento allegrie per cantare e capire  
 cento mondi da scoprire  
 cento mondi da inventare  
 cento mondi da sognare.  
 Il bambino ha cento lingue  
 (e poi cento cento cento)  
 ma gliene rubano novantanove.  
 La scuola e la cultura  
 gli separano la testa dal corpo.  
 Gli dicono:  
 di pensare senza mani  
 di fare senza testa  
 di ascoltare e di non parlare  
 di capire senza allegrie  
 di amare e di stupirsi  
 solo a Pasqua e a Natale.  
 Gli dicono:  
 di scoprire il mondo che già c'è  
 e di cento  
 gliene rubano novantanove.  
 Gli dicono:  
 che il gioco e il lavoro  
 la realtà e la fantasia  
 la scienza e l'immaginazione  
 il cielo e la terra  
 la ragione e il sogno  
 sono cose che non stanno insieme.  
 Gli dicono insomma che il cento non c'è.  
 Il bambino dice: invece il cento c'è.

Loris Malaguzzi

(Rechild, 2001, p. 10)

**No way! The hundred is there!**

No way! The hundred is there.  
 The child is made of one hundred.  
 The child has a hundred languages  
 a hundred hands a hundred thoughts  
 a hundred ways of thinking  
 of playing, of speaking.  
 A hundred always a hundred  
 ways of listening  
 of marvelling of loving  
 a hundred joys for singing and  
 understanding  
 a hundred worlds to discover  
 a hundred worlds to invent  
 a hundred worlds to dream.  
 The child has a hundred languages  
 (and a hundred, hundred, hundred more)  
 but they steal ninety-nine.  
 The school and the culture  
 separate the head from the body.  
 They tell the child:  
 to think without hands  
 to do without head  
 to listen and not to speak  
 to understand without joy  
 to love and to marvel  
 only at Easter and at Christmas.  
 They tell the child:  
 to discover the world already there  
 and of the hundred  
 they steal ninety-nine.  
 They tell the child:  
 that work and play  
 reality and fantasy  
 science and imagination  
 sky and earth  
 reason and dream  
 are things that do not belong together.  
 And thus they tell the child  
 that the hundred is not there.  
 The child says: No way. The hundred is  
 there.

Loris Malaguzzi (Rechild, 2001, p. 10)  
*(translated by Lella Gandini)*

### **Abbreviations**

BPCS	Bold Park Community School, Perth, Australia
CBC	Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
CCFA	Childcare Facilities Act (2005)
ECDA	Early Childhood Development Association
ECE	Early Childhood Educators
EECD	Education and Early Childhood Development
ELOPEI	Early Learning Operators of Prince Edward Island
EXE	Experiential Education
EYC	Early Years Centre
H/S	High Scope Curriculum
IJEYE	International Journal of Early Years Education
MIKE	Measuring and Improving Kids' Environment
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
Par	Parent
PD	Professional Development
PEI	Prince Edward Island
RIH	Registered Infant Homes
SUF	Syracuse University in Florence, Italy
Sup	Supervisor
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

## Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the expertise and support of various individuals. I would like to thank my supervisor Dr Carla DiGiorgio for her continued guidance and support, and for opening up an opportunity for me to visit Reggio Emilia in Italy. Thank you also to my second reader, Dr Basil Favaro, who provided me with constructive feedback about my thesis. I would also like to thank my internal and external examiners.

Special thanks go to my husband Godfrey, who has emotionally and physically supported me throughout this journey of discovery. He was always there whenever I hit a bump, misplaced a comma or was ready to give up. I would also like to thank my younger son Luke who has always stood by me while writing this thesis; and to my elder son James who, although far away, supported me with his encouraging words.

My sincere thanks and appreciation to the supervisors, educators, children and parents of the three early childhood centres on Prince Edward Island who generously agreed to participate in this study. Without their help and cooperation, this thesis would not have been possible.

I am grateful to all the early childhood educators with whom I have had the privilege to work throughout all these years, both in Malta and on Prince Edward Island. Their dedication for the children in their care, and the professionalism with which they carry out their work, has always been an inspiration for me.

I would also like to thank Dr Carol Anne Wien for instilling in me the interest and love for the Reggio Emilia approach, back in 2006.

I would like to thank all my professors in the Master of Education program at the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI), for their valuable guidance in how to successfully embark on and complete the process of writing a thesis. Special thanks go to Kate Graham,

administrative assistant in the faculty of education at UPEI, for her continued guidance and problem solving along the way.

This journey would not have been as enriching without the love and support of special friends: I would like to sincerely thank Gaby Sanchez, Heather MacLeod, Melissa Brownlow, Brenda Goodine, Sheila Bartmann, Catherine Xuereb, Anna Zammit and my sister Marisa Micallef, who have always believed in me and supported me throughout this journey of discovery.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	iii
Preface.....	v
No way! The hundred is there!.....	vii
Abbreviations.....	viii
Acknowledgments.....	ix
<b>Chapter One: Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Setting the scene.....	1
Theoretical framework.....	1
Topic and purpose.....	5
Potential significance.....	6
Framework and general research questions.....	6
<b>Chapter Two: Literature Review.....</b>	<b>9</b>
Introduction.....	9
Reggio Emilia in Italy.....	10
Historical background.....	10
Administrative setup.....	13
Reggio Emilia's principles.....	15
Critical research on the Reggio Emilia approach.....	19
Child as the protagonist, collaborator and communicator.....	21
Documentation.....	24
Parents as partners.....	26
Environment as the third teacher.....	28

Criticism and challenges.....	29
The Reggio Emilia approach and other similar inspirations – A global review.....	33
New Zealand.....	33
Sweden.....	36
United States of America.....	39
United Kingdom.....	40
Others.....	41
National perspectives on the Reggio Emilia Approach.....	42
Ontario.....	42
Nova Scotia.....	43
Saskatchewan.....	43
Quebec.....	43
Alberta.....	44
British Columbia.....	44
Early childhood education in Prince Edward Island.....	45
Reggio on Prince Edward Island.....	52
Conclusion.....	53
<b>Chapter Three: Methodology.....</b>	<b>55</b>
Introduction.....	55
Site and population selection.....	56
Researcher's role.....	57
Data collection .....	59
Data management.....	63

Data analysis.....	63
Trustworthiness features.....	66
Limitations.....	67
Conclusion.....	69
<b>Chapter Four: Research Findings.....</b>	<b>71</b>
Introduction.....	71
Section A: Observations.....	72
Introduction.....	72
Child.....	76
Theme 1: Positive strength-building peer interactions.....	76
Theme 2: Children engaged in genuinely collaborative learning.....	76
Theme 3: Children as competent, able and independent learners.....	79
Theme 4: Real opportunities for active problem solving.....	81
Theme 5: Creativity being nurtured at many levels.....	83
Theme 6: Thinking creatively and critically when given the opportunity to do so.....	86
Educator.....	89
Theme 7: Educators actively and intentionally engaging children in their own problem solving.....	89
Theme 8: A sense of real learner accomplishment through task completion.....	90
Theme 9: More choices achieve fewer behavioural issues.....	92

Theme 10: Calming, effective educator interventions when potential behavioural challenges arise.....	93
Theme 11: Representing children's right to choose and trusting in their capabilities to act on their own ideas.....	94
Documentation.....	95
Theme 12: Documenting children's learning.....	95
Environment.....	99
Theme 13: Varied outdoor environments encourage learning through authentic natural play.....	99
Theme 14: A variety of materials in the indoor environment engages children in experiential learning.....	103
Parents.....	105
Theme 15: Positive strength-building parent-teacher interactions.....	105
Reflections on the observation process.....	106
Section B: Interviews.....	108
Introduction.....	108
The Reggio Emilia approach.....	112
Theme 1: Vital role that coaches and mentors played in achieving the commitment of the supervisors to put the Reggio Emilia philosophy into action.....	112
Participants' thoughts about the Reggio Emilia approach: ECEs.....	115
Theme 2: Balancing teacher directed and child directed activities.....	115
Participants' thoughts about the Reggio Emilia approach: Parents.....	117

Theme 3: 'We may not fully understand it: but it is working for our child'..117
Benefits: Supervisors.....121
Theme 4: Young children are honoured for their capability to construct and direct their own learning.....121
Theme 5: Teachers are validated and encouraged in their role as action researchers.....122
Theme 6: Authentic learning partnerships are nurtured.....123
Benefits: ECEs.....124
Theme 7: Deeper levels of ownership by both children and educators.....124
Theme 8: Soaring children, energizing staff, learning surprises.....125
Challenges: Supervisors.....128
Theme 9: Overcoming initial teacher fears, apprehensions, and self-doubt.....128
Challenges: ECEs.....130
Theme 10: Time demands for comprehensively documenting children's learning.....130
Training opportunities offered to staff members by supervisors.....132
Theme 11: The value of site visits to a Reggio inspired centre.....132
Training opportunities received by staff members.....133
Theme 12: The value of training opportunities.....133
Further support: Supervisors.....135

Theme 13: Expose centre staff to more visiting experts on the Reggio Emilia approach in action.....	135
Theme 14: Creating new partnerships with other Reggio inspired centres... ..	137
Further support: ECEs.....	138
Theme 15: Reorganize staff to work in teams of two.....	138
Parental involvement: Supervisors.....	140
Theme 16: Engaging parents by providing documentation and a welcoming environment.....	140
Parental involvement: ECEs.....	142
Theme 17: Engaging parents more actively in their children's learning.....	142
Parental involvement: Parents.....	145
Theme 18: Defining parental involvement to mean reinforcing at home what is being done at the early learning centre.....	145
Theme 19: Willingness to involve themselves in the centres' activities <i>if and when</i> asked.....	148
Theme 20: Attending special events is considered important.....	149
Theme 21: Relevance of regularly discussing educational issues with ECEs.....	150
Theme 22: Interacting daily with ECEs.....	151
Documentation: ECEs.....	153
Theme 23: Time demands for comprehensively documenting children's learning.....	153
Theme 24: Documentation gives voice and ownership to children.....	153

Documentation: Parents.....	156
Theme 25: Staying involved with their children's learning through documentation.....	156
Other themes and/or variations that emerged: Supervisors.....	158
Theme 26: Incremental small steps ensure more lasting change.....	158
Theme 27: The vital role played by the early learning coach.....	160
Theme 28: Team teaching and policy changes.....	161
Other themes and/or variations that emerged: Parents.....	163
Theme 29: Involvement in children's learning is beneficial but challenging owing to time constraints.....	163
Theme 30: Feeling the need to be asked by ECEs to become more involved.....	165
<b>Chapter Five: Summary of findings, recommendations, and reflections on the research process.....</b>	<b>170</b>
Introduction.....	170
First research question.....	171
The image of the child.....	171
Educator as a partner, guide and researcher.....	176
Parents as partners.....	180
Documentation.....	184
Environment.....	189
Second research question.....	192
Benefits.....	192

Challenges.....	195
Third research question.....	198
Future goals.....	199
Support needed.....	200
Cultural differences.....	202
Limitations of the study.....	207
Conclusion.....	209
Considerations for future research.....	213
Recommendations.....	215
References.....	218
Appendices.....	236
Research Ethics Board Approval.....	260

## List of Appendices

### Appendix

A	Interview question guidelines – Supervisors.....	232
B	Interview question guidelines – Early childhood educators.....	233
C	Interview question guidelines – Parents/Guardians.....	234
D	Letter of information - Observation sessions (Parents).....	235
E	Letter of information – Parents/Guardians (interview).....	236
F	Consent form – Parents/Guardians (interview).....	237
G	Information letter – Early childhood educators.....	239
H	Consent form – Early childhood educators.....	241
I	Letter of information – Early childhood educators (interview).....	243
J	Consent form – Early childhood educators (interview).....	244
K	Letter of information and consent form – Supervisors.....	246
L	Letter of information – Supervisors (interview).....	250
M	Consent form – Supervisors (interview).....	251
N	Observation Framework.....	253

## List of Figures

### Figure

2.1	Fundamental principles of the Reggio Emilia approach.....	18
3.1	Data analysis flow chart.....	64
4.1	Themes emerging from observations.....	75
4.2	Link between research questions and interviews.....	110
4.3a	Themes emerging from interviews: Supervisors.....	111
4.3b	Themes emerging from interviews: Educators.....	111
4.3c	Themes emerging from interviews: Parents.....	112

## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

#### **Setting the scene**

The town of Reggio Emilia, in Northern Italy, is not only known for its art, architecture and agriculture. Child welfare and child care for dual earner families has been a key priority of Reggio Emilia's subsidized social services since the end of the Second World War (Rankin, 1997). Currently, no less than 16% of the budget of the city of Reggio Emilia is allocated to early childhood education (Municipality of Reggio Emilia, 2010): there are some 22 schools for children between the ages of three and six years, plus 13 centres for infant toddlers, three months to three years (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1993; Gandini, 1993; New, 1990). Neugebauer (1994) suggests that “the schools in Reggio Emilia ... have grown out of a culture that values children, out of the intense commitment of a group of parents, out of the leadership of a visionary man [Loris Malaguzzi]” ( p. 67).

#### **Theoretical framework**

The Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education is constructivist and progressive. To explain it effectively, it is helpful to look at the work and inspiration of progressive educators like John Dewey, and constructivist theorists like Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. As a philosopher, Dewey argued for progressive education and democratic school environments with a focus on curricula that are project based and follow student interests (Epstein, 1999). He believed that education must be experience based, centering on ideals such as open-mindedness, and aim-based activities. Dewey regarded teaching and learning as a process of continual reorganizing and reshuffling of meanings and understandings. He saw education as a dynamic process enhanced via social direction and through joint activity, where

individuals consciously refer to each other's use of materials, tools, ideas, skills and applications (Dewey, 1966). Dewey believed that learning is reciprocal and collaborative (rather than unidirectional, hierarchical and competitive); during a project based activity, no one person should know how things will eventually unfold or where they will go. Dewey reasoned that process-based education is more "concerned with fluidity and interest inherent in the activity, than with any particular goal or content of the activity" (Glassman & Whaley, 2000, p. 2). The essence of Dewey's philosophy is captured by this fluid mutuality of learning (Rankin, 1997).

As for insights into how children think, and how this thinking changes developmentally, we are much enriched by the insights of Piaget and Vygotsky. As a cognitive constructivist, Piaget argues that the child is inherently competent: education merely refines the child's cognitive skills that have already emerged. As a social constructivist, Vygotsky argues somewhat differently: while he agrees that the child is competent, education plays a central role through the process of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) whereby a child's cognitive development is advanced and nurtured through social interaction with skilled educators contextualized within a socio-cultural and socio-linguistic setting (Vygotsky, 1978; Santrock, 2008). The educator must maintain maximum flexibility, be able to recognize possible aims for child-driven activities, and sets them as immediate goals. Nevertheless these goals are self-motivating; as the child's activity changes, the teacher must be willing to let the goals change so that they will optimally suit the activity of the moment (Glassman & Whaley, 2000). Language and dialogue are very significant in guiding a child to master the tools of the culture.

Embedded in the Reggio Emilia philosophy is the notion that children's interactions and relationships with their peers and adults are an important component of their learning (Shiller, 1995). In line with Vygotsky's idea of scaffolding, Reggio's educators offer just enough

assistance to help a child with his/her self-initiated learning activities to move to the next higher level of awareness and competence (Elicker & Mathur, 1997). According to Shiller (1995), educators involved in the Reggio Emilia way of teaching, promote an integrated curriculum that is both child-centered and emergent. This means that the educators may have some curricular goals but have to be flexible enough to follow the lead and interests of the children in their care.

Children aged four to seven typically find themselves in Piaget's second sub-stage of pre-operational thought: they are naturally inquisitive and curious; but they also seem to know many things intuitively. They bring a process of reconfiguration to their thoughts: a process that involves a shift from a primitive to a more elaborate use of symbolic language to express themselves (Santrock, 2008). Reggio Emilia educators are reported as believing that children have a hundred different languages available to express themselves as they make meaning out of the world around them (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998). Katz (1993) believes that children can express themselves through drawing and other art media. She calls this "graphic language" (p. 20). This language can be used by children instead of, or in addition to, writing to "explore understandings, to reconstruct previous ones, and to co-construct revisited understandings of the topics investigated" (Katz, 1993, p. 20). This is in line with Piaget's concepts of accommodation, assimilation and equilibration (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006).

The implications of Piaget's and Vygotsky's theories for education are that children need support to explore their world and discover knowledge. Dewey believed in collaboration and reciprocity. By a careful and smart blending of key elements from Piaget's cognitive, Vygotsky's socio-cultural constructivist, and Dewey's collaborative perspectives, Reggio children often explore topics in groups. This fosters a sense of community, a respect for diversity, an opportunity to consider different interpretations of a situation, and a collaborative approach to

problem solving (Santrock, 2008). All these educational philosophies are well supported by the key features of the Reggio Emilia approach: collaboration, the image of the child, the role of the parents, the role of the environment, and the project approach. An examination of the key elements of the Reggio Emilia approach also reveals an alignment with both Vygotsky's ZPD, as well as Piaget's pre-operational stages of development – specifically the sub-stages of intuition and symbolic function. From the Reggio Emilia elements mentioned above, the project approach is also closely aligned to John Dewey's idea that education is a continuous process rather than just a goal-directed activity (Glassman & Whaley, 2000).

Teachers inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach are actually facilitators, as Piaget and Vygotsky both recommend. They are not directors, but guides, providing support to children for exploring and discovering knowledge through topics and activities that sustain their interest and curiosity (Gandini, 1993). However, Dewey also believed that educators needed to make sure that the material being offered in an activity must be interesting. This will create a desire in the child to engage further in the activity so that results can be attained (Glassman & Whaley, 2000). The emphasis of this pedagogy is on authentic assessment via the use of portfolios, and detailed documentation, rather than formal standardized tests.

Such theories as those of Piaget and Vygotsky, along with the philosophy of Dewey, have contributed towards the creation of central operating principles and the core features of the Reggio Emilia philosophy; these principles contribute to the crafting of an integrated and culturally embedded approach to education which effectively engages the naturally creative disposition of young children (Rankin, 1997).

## Topic and purpose

My interest in early childhood education started in 1993 when I accepted an invitation to go and help in an early childhood centre. Unfortunately, this centre closed after I had been there for only two years. I had enjoyed working with children so much during those two years that I decided to pursue a college diploma in early childhood education at this stage of my teaching career. After I got my diploma I found employment as an Early Childhood Educator (ECE) within an English speaking, private school in Malta. As I gathered experience in my field working with children, I realized more and more the importance of high quality childcare. I read a number of scholarly articles as I wanted to find out more about what makes and contributes to high quality childcare. The Reggio Emilia approach is frequently mentioned in these articles, and so I started researching that approach. As Gardner (1998) indicated in his foreword to the book: *The hundred languages of children*, edited by Edwards, Forman & Gandini (1998), few of those who read it would “remain unaffected by the experience” (p. xv). Through my research, I found out that this approach has been successfully adapted to other cultures in countries around the world. Delegations of visitors from Spain, Japan, Cuba, Bulgaria, Switzerland and France were amongst the first foreign countries to show interest in the Reggio Emilia approach (Reina, 2005). One can find schools that are Reggio-inspired in many countries including Germany, Denmark, Japan, South Africa, Sweden, Thailand, Australia, Canada and the USA (Reina, 2005).

I had the opportunity to work and substitute as an ECE, and also volunteer in a centre on Prince Edward Island (PEI) that was in its first stages of learning about and adapting to the Reggio Emilia approach. This experience and literature I was reading about the Reggio Emilia at the time, prompted me to start asking myself what benefits and challenges would be faced by the childcare centres that chose to be inspired by the Reggio Emilia way of learning. Was it worth all

the effort to change the present way of teacher-directed and thematic teaching? Would the benefits to children outweigh the challenges? This is what led me to focus on this topic in my Master's thesis.

### **Potential significance**

If my research results suggest that the children who are in Reggio Emilia inspired childcare centres benefit, based on analysis of positive experiences of this approach, I hope that it will serve to encourage other centres on PEI to consider following suit. I also hope that the three childcare centres which participated in this study will be able to act as mentors to any other interested centres. My research could also guide policy makers to implement this type of approach not only in daycares across PEI, but perhaps also into the elementary school system, especially now that Kindergarten is moving into the public school system on PEI. The research that I have conducted could also inspire further research into whether the Reggio Emilia approach will work better in rural areas, where a stronger sense of community may be found, than in urban ones on PEI.

### **Framework and general research questions**

There are a number of fundamental principles of the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education that weave themselves throughout the cultivation of the educational process. The key principles are: the image of the child as a protagonist, collaborator, and communicator; the teacher as a partner and a researcher; the parent as a partner; the environment as a third teacher; and documentation of the process of children's thinking and learning (Cadwell, 1997, p.5-6; Hewett, 2001; Katz and Chard, 1996). These principles will be discussed in more detail in the literature review which follows as Chapter Two.

This leads me to articulate my research questions. Concurrently, this obliges me to probe what features make the Reggio Emilia approach unique. My main research questions are the following:

1. How has the Reggio Emilia approach been adapted by three childcare centres on Prince Edward Island?
2. What were the benefits and challenges that these early childhood education centres faced in adapting to the Reggio Emilia approach?
3. What are the future goals for the Reggio Emilia inspired centres on PEI, and what do stakeholders identify as necessary supports to make these happen?

I planned my research in such a way that it included the following research components:

(a) interviews with supervisors and staff at three childcare centres on PEI; (b) interviews with parents of children attending these centres; and (c) observation in the three childcare centres. The focus of my fieldwork observations was to identify: (a) the benefits of the fundamental principles of the Reggio Emilia approach; and (b) the challenges that are being faced by the staff in implementing these principles. This identification process was undertaken via a translation of the Reggio principles into a set of recognizable observational practices. I used such a framework (Appendix N) to guide my observations, so that I was able to deduce whether the principles were being implemented or not. If the principles were being implemented, then that will be a manifestation of the Reggio Emilia principles in practice. If not, this served as an opportunity to identify the challenges of implementing the Reggio Emilia approach. Both these issues could then be further discussed with participants during their interviews.

A broad literature review is provided in Chapter Two. This examines the origins and establishment of the Reggio Emilia approach, its eight guiding principles, and the spread of Reggio-inspired schools across the world. It also gives an introduction to early childhood education on Prince Edward Island and how the Reggio Emilia philosophy was introduced to the centres on PEI.

Chapter Three will then review the design and strategies being used to conduct and analyse this study. To facilitate the reader's understanding of the methodology being used, a description of the different sources of data is provided, as well as how this data has been collected, organized and analysed. The findings that resulted from the interviews and observational field notes will be presented in Chapter Four. Reflections from my personal journal will be incorporated in the discussion of all the findings that will be reviewed in Chapter Five. Finally, a summary of my research findings, the insights they provide to my research questions and recommendations that have emerged from this study will comprise my conclusion.

## Chapter Two

### Literature Review

#### Introduction

While the time children spend at home with their primary caregivers in the first few years of life is crucial for their development, as soon as children enter an early childhood education program, they are exposed to a variety of new media, with which they can interact to develop skills and attitudes. Physical, emotional, social, linguistic and intellectual development are often enhanced and enriched. Considerable research now shows that the most crucial years for learning are the pre-school years because the child's brain is growing and developing rapidly at that time (Doherty, Lero, Goelman, & Tougas, 2000; Essa, Young & Lehne, 1998; Friendly, 2008). This suggests that, with appropriate stimulation from the early childhood centres, children should develop deeply and vastly in these settings.

Considerable research into early child development has concluded that good quality early childhood programs not only improve the life and knowledge of the child and family involved, but also result in economic benefits to the community (Mitchell, Willie, & Carr, 2008; Muller-Kucera & Bauer, 2001; Mustard, 2002). High-quality programs reduce the need for special services as the child can be better integrated into the mainstream. They decrease welfare dependence and also reduce delinquency in adulthood (Muller-Kucera & Bauer, 2001). Childcare centres generate money annually through fees from parents which are then spent on salaries, rent, food, and supplies (Mitchell, Willie, & Carr, 2008).

This literature review will provide some key insights into the historical aspects of the Reggio Emilia approach, its philosophy and pedagogy, and what research has conducted on this

approach. Next, it will present how the Reggio approach spread to various regions in Italy. After that, the Reggio-inspired schools across the globe are reviewed, followed by a brief history of how early childhood education came about on PEI and how some childcare centres in this province began to implement the Reggio Emilia approach. The review will also identify centres or schools in other provinces in Canada which have implemented the Reggio Emilia approach.

### **The Reggio Emilia Approach in Italy**

#### **Historical background**

Reggio Emilia is a cosmopolitan metropolitan area of 160,000 people in the Emilia Romagna region of Italy. It is a prosperous town nestled in the hills of northern Italy, rich in culture and famous for its vintage basil vinegars, Parmigiano cheese, and Lambrusco wine (LeBlanc, 2009). Over the past 50 years, their school system has initiated a distinctive and innovative set of philosophical assumptions, curricula and pedagogies, methods of preschool organization, and environmental designs which, when looked at holistically, have become known as the Reggio Emilia approach (Edwards, Forman, & Gandini, 1993; "Research in Reggio", n.d.).

The Reggio Emilia approach was started in the town of Reggio Emilia, in 1945 after the Second World War left the community in ruins and with no appropriate schools for its young children (Gandini, 1997; McClow & Gillespie, 1998). This city has since been developing an educational system for young children through collaborative efforts of parents, teachers, and the general community, under the original guiding influence of a visionary man: Loris Malaguzzi (Gandini, 1994; Hewett, 2001; Malaguzzi, 1993; New 1990).

The first school for young children in Reggio Emilia was literally built by the hands of parents using earnings they made from selling a war tank, six horses and three trucks left behind

by the retreating German army (Gandini, 1993; Hewett, 2001; Malaguzzi, 1993; Walsh & Albrecht, 1996). Malaguzzi himself states:

It all seemed unbelievable: the idea, the school, the inventory consisting of a tank, a few trucks, and horses. They explain everything to me: 'We will build the school on our own, working at night and on Sundays. The land has been donated by a farmer; the bricks and beams will be salvaged from bombed houses; the sand will come from the river; the work will be volunteered by all of us' (Malaguzzi 1993, p. 50).

To this day, a fundamental element of the Reggio Emilia approach is "the essential role and intimate involvement of parents in their children's education..." (Hewett, 2001, p. 95).

According to LeBlanc (2009), the first preschools in Reggio Emilia were built amidst the rubble and devastation of World War II, with the insistence of parents and the community. They managed to build preschools that would far exceed the "mere custodial services such provision – appropriated for the past twenty-odd years by Mussolini's government – normally offered at the time" (LeBlanc, 2009, p. 1). The fact that they built their first school from military scraps and war-time wreckage is a powerful indication of the motivation these community members felt. It could not have been an easy task to build and run a school in the challenging, post-war environment. But it was this environment that really shaped the way the citizens were thinking about their children's education. Loris Malaguzzi himself explains:

...World War II, or any war, in its tragic absurdity, might have been the kind of experience that pushes a person toward the job of educating, as a way to start anew and live and work for the future. This desire strikes a person, as the war finally ends and the symbols of life reappear, with a violence equal to that of the time of destruction (Malaguzzi 1993, p. 56).

As a result of this community's hard work and collaboration, and of many others since, an approach to education has been created in this small Italian region which has spread to other regions across Italy. These include Bologna, Pesaro, Rome, Salerno, Trento (Corsaro, 1996); Naples (New, 2001) and Modena, Lazio, Milan, Venice, and Brescia (ZPZ Partners, n.d.). Corsaro (1996) argues that these schools have evolved after a long process of "deep and often controversial struggles and debate involving the national, regional, and local governments, the Catholic church, civic organizations, and local citizen groups" (p. 217). Some early childhood programs are more extensive and progressive in some Italian regions than others. It seems that the programs in the North (particularly the Emilia-Romagna region) are especially extraordinary given this area's long history of "civic determination and passion" (Malaguzzi, 1993, p. 44). The Reggio Emilia municipal early childhood programs, have created an educational approach that other educators strive to achieve. Wurm (2005) says that "a 1991 *Newsweek* article identified the programs in Reggio Emilia as the best early childhood programs in the world" (p. 1).

Soler and Miller (2003) contend that the Reggio Emilia approach can definitely be called a progressive, learner-centered approach with beliefs that shape early childhood curricula in these schools. However, "Reggio Emilia educators do not follow any predetermined national framework and this is often referred to as an 'approach' or 'educational system'" (p. 64). OECD (2004) states that the school community – municipality, teachers, staff, parents and advisory council – regularly meet and discuss the educational objectives for the schools in Reggio Emilia in detail, but the yearly program is elaborated and set out by children and teachers, based on the particular interests of children and current concerns and opportunities that might arise. The Reggio Emilia approach is a localized and activity-based learning system which is a realization of progressive education. It is progressive in that its curriculum is created based on the children's

interests and changes according to what they would like to learn about. It was inspired by the late Loris Malaguzzi, rather than from centralized policy making and national guidelines (Soler & Miller, 2003). Malaguzzi, as cited in Pramling Samuelsson et al. (2003), used to say:

What takes place within Reggio Emilia should not be seen as a preschool pedagogy but as a philosophy where everybody involved with the children should be engaged in the explorative phase in which the child discovers the world (p. 10).

Loris Malaguzzi's thinking was influenced by Dewey's notion of a learner-focused view of learning, while also adopting Dewey's project approach (Glassman & Whaley, 2000). It recognizes and emphasizes the understandings and experiences that the child brings to his\her every day setting (Soler & Miller, 2003). Central to accomplishing this is a view of the development of knowledge through a collaborative partnership between children and adults (Hewett, 2001). Malaguzzi was also inspired by Vygotsky's social theory, which acknowledged the central role of the relationship between child and adult, hence the scaffolding and zone of proximal development taking place (Santrock, 2008). Kim and Darling (2009) agree that "the Reggio Emilia approach is based on social constructivist theories that see children as social actors active in the construction and determination of their social lives" (p. 138). Patricia Ghedini, head of Early Years services in the Emilia Romagna region, highlights Reggio Emilia practitioners' belief in Malaguzzi's progressive philosophy, "with its emphasis upon individual difference, pluralistic approaches and processes, and their opposition to focus on standardization, outcomes and economic productivity" (Soler & Miller, 2003, p. 65).

### **Administrative Setup**

A brief outline of the administrative polices and organizational features of Reggio Emilia schools would be appropriate at this point. A head administrator, who reports directly to the town

council, works with a group of *pedagogisti* (curriculum team leaders), each of whom coordinates and supports the efforts of teachers at each of five or six schools (New 1993; Cadwell, 1997; Wien 2008). Each school is staffed with: (a) two teachers per classroom (each having up to 12 children in infant classes, 18 in toddler classes, and 24 in preprimary classes); (b) an *atelierista* (a teacher trained in the arts who works with classroom teachers in curriculum development and documentation); (c) a full-time cook; and (d) several auxiliary staff who help out in schools at different times of the day as necessary (LeBlanc, 2009; New, 1993). There is no principal, nor is there a formal, hierarchical relationship among the teachers. The staffing plan, coupled with the policy of keeping the same group of children and teachers together for a period of three years, facilitates the sense of community that characterizes relationships among adults and children (New, 1993). Educators in Reggio schools work 36 hours a week. Thirty are contact hours with the children while the other six hours a week are allotted to: planning, staff meetings, documentation, professional development meetings, discussion about children's learning; and meetings with parents and/or *pedagogista* when necessary (Municipality of Reggio Emilia, 2010).

Another feature of the Reggio schools is the design of school buildings which reflect the structure of the community. Patricia Tarr (2001) points out that, "the schools reflect a diversity of ages and architectural styles; yet each school is designed around a piazza, or town square, which reflects the central piazzas of the city" (p. 6). These are not solely places one moves through to get to another place but serve as gathering places for children from all age groups and comfortable meeting spaces for parents and teachers (Cadwell, 1997; Abbott & Nutbrown, 2001). According to Tarr (2001), as you enter one of the Reggio schools – Diana School – the visitor:

...looks down the piazza where floor to ceiling windows and plants blur the boundaries between outside and in, supporting the concepts of transparency and osmosis. Lights and shadows reflect and flicker across the floor. The piazza offers many possibilities: a store, stocked with real vegetables during my visit; the kaleidoscope large enough to hold several children; and fanciful dress-up clothes all invite investigation, lingering, conversation and collaboration (p. 6).

Reggio educators always try to include aspects of home into the school: vases of flowers, real dishes, tablecloths, and plants. They do not display cartoon like images that are assumed to appeal to children, but instead they use objects that are “beautiful” in their own right, as they believe that children are capable and intelligent beings and form an integral part of the community: dried flowers hanging from the ceiling beams, and attractive jars with beans and seeds which are placed on shelves around the dining area (Tarr, 2001). Tarr (2004) argues that “the mass of commercial stereotyped images silence the actual lived experience of those individuals learning together” (Tarr, 2004, p. 90).

The eight fundamental principles of the Reggio Emilia approach will be discussed in the next section.

### **Reggio Emilia’s principles**

The Reggio Emilia approach is based on a comprehensive philosophy, fortified by several guiding principles, eight of which are fundamental (Cadwell, 1997). For the sake of clarity, these eight principles will be presented individually below. However, they should be considered as a tightly woven, integrated philosophy (Gandini, 1998).

These are the eight core principles which Reggio Emilia practitioners acknowledge as their fundamental guidelines (Cadwell, 2003; Edwards et al., 1993; Gandini, 1993; Spaggiari, 1993):

1. *The child as protagonist.* Children are strong, competent and capable. All children have awareness, capability, curiosity, and interest in constructing their learning, interacting with everything their environment brings to them (Cadwell, 1997). Children, teachers and parents are considered the three central protagonists in the educational process (Gandini, 1993).
2. *The child as collaborator.* Gandini (1993) believes that education has to focus on each child in relation to other children, family, teachers, and the community, and not on each child in isolation. There is also an emphasis on working in small groups, which is based on the idea that the child forms his/herself through the interaction with peers, adults, and the environment (Lewin, 1995).
3. *The child as communicator.* Children have the right to use a variety of materials in order to discover and communicate what they know, understand, wonder about, question, feel and imagine (Cadwell, 1997). This approach promotes children's intellectual development through a systematic focus on symbolic representation, including words, drawing, movement, sculpture, building, painting, collage, shadow play, dramatic play and music.
4. *The environment as third teacher.* The design and use of space encourage encounters, communications, and relationships (Gandini, 1993). It opens up the possibility for children to engage in the environment together with their peers and to respond to thoughtful decisions made by the educators in an effort to support

the children's engagement (Wurm, 2010). Lewin (1995) contends that there is an underlying order and beauty in the design and organization of all the space in a school and the equipment and materials within it. Wien (1997) refers to pedagogist Tiziana Filippini, who, when speaking about systems theory, describes the Reggio school environment as a "living organization, involved constantly in interchange, self-nourishment, and adjustment" (p. 31).

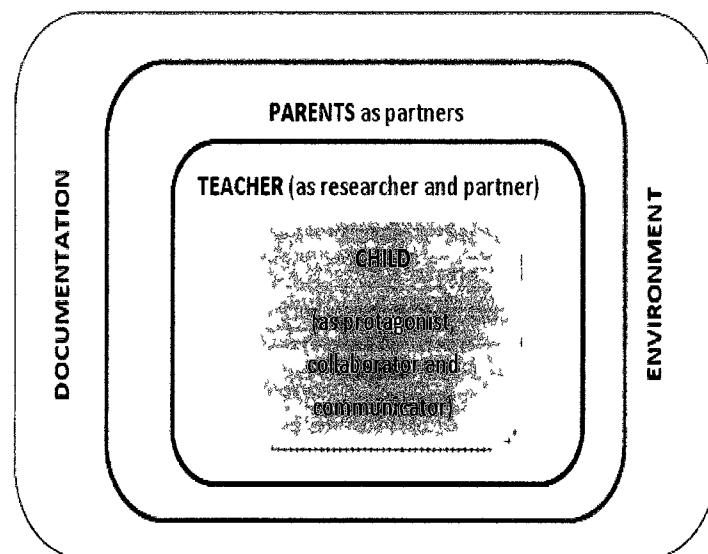
5. *The teacher as partner, nurturer, and guide.* Reggio Emilia inspired educators fill the simultaneous roles of partner, nurturer, guide and researcher (Edwards, 1998). It is essential that teachers see themselves as partners in the co-construction of knowledge with the children. Teachers do not view themselves as leaders who are superior to children; but rather they work with the children, exploring, discovering, and learning together (Gandini, 1993).
6. *The teacher as a researcher.* Teachers work in pairs and maintain strong, uncompetitive relationships with all other teachers and staff (Cadwell, 1997). Cadwell goes on to argue that teachers "engage in continuous discussion and interpretation of their work and the work of children" (p. 6). Through their discussions, teachers can see what the children's interests are and build their activities around that. Teachers see themselves as researchers, preparing documentation of their work with children whom they also consider researchers (Cadwell, 1997).
7. *Documentation.* Teachers' commentary on the purposes of study and the children's learning process, transcriptions of children's verbal language, photographs of their activities, and representations of their thinking using a

variety of media are composed in carefully designed panels or books to present the process of learning in schools (Cadwell, 1997).

8. *The parent as partner* Parents' participation is considered essential and takes many forms. The ideas and skills that the families bring to the school, as well as the exchange of ideas between parents and teachers, favour the development of a new way of education, which helps teachers to view the participation of families not as a threat but as an intrinsic element of collegiality and as the integration of different wisdoms (Spaggiari, 1993)

A schematic representation of the fundamental principles of the Reggio Emilia approach can be seen in Figure 2.1 below.

**Figure 2.1 Fundamental principles of the Reggio Emilia approach**



## **Critical research on the Reggio Emilia approach**

This section reviews a body of scholarly research that has looked critically at these principles and their cultivation in early childhood education.

The study of the cultivation of the Reggio Emilia approach in early childhood settings outside of Reggio Emilia, Italy, has been a key interest of many researchers (Corsaro, 1996; Hewett, 2001; New, 1998). The benefits, challenges and limitations of implementing such an approach have also been the subject of considerable research (Abramson, Robinson & Ankenman, 1995; Goldhaber & Smith, 1997; Haigh, 2007; Kroeger & Cardy, 2006). The research questions that are driving this study are similar to those that have inspired such research:

1. How has the Reggio Emilia approach been adapted by three childcare centres on Prince Edward Island?
2. What are the benefits/challenges that these early childhood education centres faced during the process of adapting to the Reggio Emilia approach?
3. What are the future goals for the Reggio Emilia approach on PEI, and what do stakeholders identify as necessary supports to make these happen?

At least two major studies have compared Reggio-Emilia based curricula in different cultural contexts. Soler and Miller (2003) examined the curricula of three very different contexts in Reggio Emilia schools in Northern Italy, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. This study concluded that the curriculum in the UK is an example of “centralised, competency-oriented curriculum” (p. 66), as it establishes and specifies national educational goals and content in advance; whereas the Reggio Emilia approach offers a more localized and place-specific model “generated to meet local needs in order to support collaborative community visions for young

children" (p. 66). Soler and Miller, (2003) put the New Zealand curriculum "somewhere in between" the UK and Reggio Emilia practices since this offers a consultative framework which provides the main values, orientations and goals for the curriculum but does not define how these goals should be achieved (p. 66).

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2004), and Pramling, Sheridan & Williams, (2003) also supported a significant study on five curriculum approaches: Experiential Education (EXE); the High/Scope curriculum (H/S); the Reggio Emilia approach; *Te Whariki*; and the Swedish curriculum. It set out to find what the next generation of children need to learn; what types of thinking and learning work best for young children, and to identify staff competence issues. These studies both concluded that teachers are now more aware that "better curricula are based on the principle that children should decide and develop freely their projects with their teachers" (OECD, 2004, p. 25).

OECD 2004 concluded that the Swedish curriculum is formulated in such a way that it provides an answer to this dilemma as it has structure and educational direction but at the same time it leaves room for flexibility according to the children's interests and needs (Rinaldi, May, Laevers, Weikart & Pramling, 2004). Pramling, Sheridan & Williams, (2003) argue that "the most obvious characteristic of all the curricula is that the child is described as an active child who initiates communication and who is interested in the surrounding world" (p. 6). However, the view of the child seems to vary in the different curricula. In the *Te Whariki*, the Swedish curriculum and the Reggio Emilia approach, "it is obvious that the child is seen as a cultural citizen" (p. 13). In the EXE and H/S, it is "the developmental psychological child with different needs and possibilities at different ages" (p. 13) that appears. The OECD study concluded that the overall aim of these five curricula is to engage the children in life-long learning by focusing

on qualities and abilities that help children to learn and develop in preschool, such as being analytical, reflective and critical (OECD, 2004).

### **Child as the protagonist, collaborator and communicator**

One of the fundamental principles of the Reggio Emilia approach is based just on that: the child is seen as the protagonist, collaborator, and communicator. Children are seen as capable and strong, competent and resourceful in their own learning (Strong-Wilson, 2007). Gillen, Cameron, Tapanya, Pinto, Hancock, Young & Accorti Gamannossi (2007) conducted a comparative study between five families – one each from Peru, Italy, Canada, Thailand, and the United Kingdom - about the culturally diverse meaning of a “strong child” and focal points in a child’s daily life that make the child stronger. When parents were asked what made a “strong child” (p. 212), it was surprising how varied the answers of these different cultures were. For the purpose of this paper I will only refer to the Italian and Canadian interpretation of what makes a ‘strong child’. The Canadian parents’ priority of a ‘strong child’ was “to be kind, independent and sociable” (Gillen et al., 2007, p.212). For the Italian parents, the priority was that the child was healthy, had the ability to act on his/her own initiative, had self-confidence and a sense of security. The Italian child’s father said: “I am convinced that our presence is fundamental...we think we are able to give her [their child] our good principles and for me this is a good starting point” (p. 212).

Parents were then asked what would be an important activity during the child’s normal day that would contribute to the child becoming a strong individual. Doing some sort of activity with the child at home, such as building a bird house with her daughter, was an example given by the Canadian parent. However, this mother also reported to the authors that “there was no pedagogical motivation in her plan to engage in the activity other than that she [the mother] had

wanted to construct a bird house for some time, and this was an occasion to do it while still supervising her children" (Gillen et al., 2007, p.213). On the other hand, the Italian parents emphasized "their noon mealtime routine" (p. 213) as being very important for their child's development as a strong individual. The paper concluded that parents from different cultures could have very different interpretations of what makes a 'strong child' depending on their expectations, beliefs and values. The parents also pointed out that they were raising their children mainly as they themselves had been raised, in accordance to the culture of that particular country.

Edwards (2005) conducted a study with four early childhood educators in Australia about how they envision the child differently after having implemented the Reggio Emilia approach. A participant in this study believes that "...children can achieve many things, beyond our expectations, if you broaden the horizons and allow children to be able to think in different ways..." (p. 73). Another participant talked about how she viewed the child differently now that she has been implementing the Reggio approach and believes that, if she provokes the children to move forward in their thinking, they are capable of doing things beyond the teachers' expectations (ibid.).

Kim and Darling (2009) conducted a study in a Reggio-inspired child care classroom of four-year-olds in Canada. This study looked at how social interaction plays a role in young children's learning processes, and focused on in-depth observations of six children's activities as they undertook a project in their classroom. Through the process of the different activities undertaken for this project, the children learned to see themselves as "...thinkers with unique points of view. They also learned to accept other people's opinions and feelings and offer their own, whether they were in agreement or not" (Kim & Darling, 2009, p. 144). This project helped

the children to develop metacognitive abilities as well as have respect for different ideas since they were working in a small group (Kim & Darling, 2009). The Reggio Emilia approach emphasizes the fact that children should work individually at times but also in small groups as this is beneficial to them (Gandini, 1993). Children in learning groups experience knowledge as a constant process of negotiation and reflection, argues Rogoff (1990). According to Malaguzzi (1993), educators in Reggio Emilia prefer using small groups because they provide a social context that fosters meaningful dialogue, collaborative problem solving and productive cognitive conflict. Similarly, Haigh (2008) argues that the Reggio Emilia approach provokes children to become problem solvers, decision makers, negotiators, collaborators and good communicators who could express themselves in many ways.

Salmon (2008) conducted a study about nurturing a culture of thinking in young children by means of a project approach as used in the Reggio Emilia way of teaching. The study confirmed that, when thinking is part of the daily routine, as is implemented by the Reggio Emilia approach, children become alert to situations that call for thinking. As a result, they build up positive attitudes toward thinking and learning: “By re-visiting their documented work, children developed metacognitive and critical thinking skills which make them more alert to situations that call for thinking” (Salmon, 2008, p. 457). Similarly, Gordana Rabitti (1992) conducted a study at the Villetta pre-school in Reggio Emilia, Italy. The author wanted to study the way projects were carried out in that school according to the Reggio Emilia approach. She hoped to answer two main questions: (a) is it possible to build a project based mainly on the interests of the children “in an attempt to investigate and discover their own methods, the development of their ideas, words, graphic representations, and play”? (Rabitti, 1992, p. 62); and (b) is it possible that the project [investigating shadows] could hold the children’s attention for a

long time? From Rabitti's class observations and interviews with educators conducted during the process of her research, she concluded that "it is possible, [to conduct such a project] if adults share the belief of the importance of critical thinking and metaphoric imaging and believe that children have these abilities" (Rabitti, 1992, p. 62). The author also concluded that this project could take place, and be a success, because of certain factors: the environment was set out carefully to gather and show children's thinking; educators knew how to listen carefully to children's ideas; educators were ready to accept children's ideas and provide supporting media for them to carry out their ideas; educators knew how to work collaboratively and knew how to provide children with situations where they could work together (Rabitti, 1992). This is in accordance to what Wien (2008) argues in her book *Emergent curriculum in the primary classroom* when she says that "teachers and children together decide what to do and teachers participate in learning alongside children..." (p. 147).

### **Documentation**

A theme in Reggio-inspired teaching is listening with care to children's ideas and theories about the world. There is a great emphasis on the documentation of children's work in the Reggio Emilia approach (Hall, Horgan, Ridgway, Murphy, Cunneen & Cunningham, 2010). Various studies confirm the benefits of documentation. In her research, Gigi Schroeder Yu (2008) found that the examination and documentation of the process of children's learning reveals much about the artistic development of the child and that the child can articulate this process by means of different media. This issue has been reinforced in research done by Kroeger and Cardy (2006). They contend that documentation "allows young children to construct their own knowledge and curiosity, making learning more meaningful to them and more visible to others" (p. 389).

A study was conducted by Goldhaber & Smith (1997) amongst three childcare educators in Vermont, US, who were trying to incorporate documentation into their practice. This study found that the educators envisaged documentation as promoting staff development and collaboration. They also concluded that documentation creates a climate of inquiry; makes the thinking process of learning more visible to children, parents and families; invites meaningful dialogue and advocates for the children in that it shows the process of their thinking and learning. Through documentation, the child's attention can be drawn to significant examples of their thought processes (Goldhaber & Smith, 1997). Colledge (2002) argues that it is not merely the non-verbal modeling that becomes important in social learning but the verbal descriptions of thought processes, that is, the meta-language that should also be shared. As described by Colledge (2002), when models demonstrate both actions and thought processes, the learners' cognitive skills improve because the thoughts behind the action become more transparent through documentation.

Five kindergarten classrooms in New Westminster, British Columbia, participated in a study conducted by MacDonald (2007). This study concluded that documentation is useful to both teachers and parents as a way to document the interests of the children in the class. According to MacDonald (2007), the use of documentation allowed parents and teachers to develop a deeper understanding of the children's strengths, interests and curiosities. It also highlighted the children's learning process and, from this, "the teachers in the study felt that they had a richer understanding of the child within the learning process" (p. 15).

Both Goldhaber and Smith (1997) and Kroeger and Cardy (2006) talk about challenges faced by their teacher participants in their studies about documentation. According to their research findings, some challenges came about because of limited understanding of the

importance of documentation, what or how to document, and the effective use of documentation (Goldhaber & Smith, 1997; Kroeger and Cardy, 2006). Similarly, both studies found that limited resources (time, tools, and assistance) and/or predetermined curricular guidelines prevented the proper implementation of documentation. Kroeger and Cardy (2006) also argue that “some teachers, especially inexperienced early years teachers, have trouble simultaneously engaging with children and documenting” (p. 389).

Journals, daily reflections, and documentation of children’s work displayed in various media invite a shared communication that is honest, specific and mutually supported (Valik, Freeman & Swim, 2003). Frilik (1996) argues that: “a powerful partnership... enables a more thorough exploration of each child’s interests and strengths... and a strong sense of community among the adults involved” (p. 217). Documenting children’s experiences with photographs, video recordings and other representations using different media, invites the parents and the community to have a more visible view and appreciation of the children’s learning process. What and how they learn will also promote the children’s relationships with their families and with the values and traditions of their community (New, 2001).

### **Parents as partners**

Parents as partners of their children’s learning community, is another fundamental principle of the Reggio Emilia approach. New (2001) speaks of her visit to a Reggio-inspired school in Naples, Italy, and how the educator there involved parents and grandparents through a growing interest that the children had of how to make wine. The children not only learned how to estimate, measure and collaborate in early symbol-making, but also interacted and learned through their parents and grandparents who came in to help the children prepare the wine (New, 2001). Similarly, the study conducted by Kim and Darling (2009) contends that parental and

community involvement in a project that the children were undertaking during the study helped to promote social interaction and children's development through the guidance provided by these persons.

A study by Huang & Mason (2008) was conducted amongst parents whose children attended a Head Start Program in a large, mid-western urban city in the US. The authors explored what motivated parents to be involved in a family education program that was available in this school. They also examined parents' views about their children's education. This study showed that parents found that "working with other parents and family educators who share similar goals was essential for their involvement in the family education program" (Huang & Mason, 2008, p. 24). Another result was that parents were motivated to be involved in their children's learning but most of the time they felt that they lacked the knowledge to do so. This showed that "parents' level of involvement related to their knowledge and ability to help their children succeed in school" (p. 25). What also resulted from this study was that parents who participated in this study more showed motivation to find out and attend educational opportunities that would help them to assist their children to be successful in their learning. The significance of this study is that it shows that family education programs should "recruit more parents to participate in workshops and activities that will enhance their children's learning..." (Huang & Mason, 2008, p. 26). This study showed that, to develop an "effective family education program, it is critical to understand and meet parents' motivational needs for involvement" (p. 25) and then address their concerns about their children's education.

The importance of parental involvement can be seen through various references dealing with the cultivation of the Reggio Emilia approach, not only in Italy, but also in other countries. And yet, there seems to be limited research carried out about what parents think of this approach.

One such research was conducted by McClow & Gillespie (1998) through a focus group study amongst parents of a Reggio-inspired Head Start program in the US. The authors concluded that the feelings expressed during the focus group meeting had several implications for the Head Start staff: parents lacked enough information about the Reggio Emilia approach and how it worked; educators needed to understand that the experience within Reggio-inspired classrooms are different from the educational experience of most parents; parents need to be provided with opportunities to become involved in the classroom as meaningful contributors; and that communication between staff and parents needs to improve in order to create an environment where everyone truly collaborates with one another in a way consistent with the Reggio Emilia philosophy (McClow & Gillespie, 1998). Similar processes may be at play in early childhood education centres trying to implement the Reggio Emilia approach on Prince Edward Island.

These critical implications are the basis of formulating my own interview guide which I used when I conducted my interviews with parents from the three early childhood centres on Prince Edward Island. I will also be addressing the degree of parental involvement in my interviews with the childcare centre's supervisors and staff during my interviews.

### **Environment as the third teacher**

Since I conducted observations in early childhood settings as part of my study, research about the environment as the third teacher (Rinaldi, 2005), was interesting to find and review. Carol Anne Wien (2008) in her book *Emergent Curriculum in the Primary Classroom* describes how, during one particular study tour to one of the Reggio Emilia schools in Italy, she and the other participants had seen a low laying table full of natural plant items organized in transparent containers. While these participants were looking at the display, a young girl came up and started using some of the material on the table. One of the participants pulled something else out of

another container and this girl came over and joined this participant in creating a collage. All of a sudden, more children came over and invited more participants to join them. Wien (2008) points out that it did not matter that the participants could not speak Italian: the materials provided for the children carried forward interaction, creativity and learning. To Wien (2008) this was an example of the environment as a third teacher, “a space organized for particular learning possibilities by its placement, design, and content” (p. 9).

Research conducted by Strong-Wilson and Ellis (2007) about the environment as the third teacher found that such a rich environment helps the educators to begin to notice how their surroundings can take on a life of their own that contributes to children’s learning. Cadwell (2003) explained how, before being introduced to the Reggio Emilia view of the environment as being central to learning, teachers used to have materials for children in boxes and on high shelves and the children would just dump blocks on the floor or empty containers on the light table. Now that materials were being carefully selected and placed in transparent containers on low shelves, the children were making better use of them (Cadwell, 2003).

The next section will discuss what research has to say about criticism and challenges that come with implementing the Reggio Emilia approach in other cultural contexts as well as some selected criticism of the approach itself.

### **Criticism and challenges**

As with every model, approach, or curriculum, there are always some shortcomings. During my research I have come across some criticism of the Reggio Emilia approach.

Soler & Miller (2003) critique the Reggio Emilia approach because of the absence of a pre-made curriculum which in turn leads to lack of accountability to the wider early childhood community. However, advocates of the Reggio Emilia approach retort that there is a detailed

recording of the curriculum process, which opens their practice to criticism and scrutiny (Dahlberg, 2000). It is also argued by Dahlberg (2000) that this is achieved through rich documentation of the children's work through photographs, slides and film, and in the form of publications and travelling exhibitions. According to Wexler (2004), teachers do not use "formal lesson plans because they do not allow for the open-ended time necessary for the depth of children's interpretation of content" (p. 16). Rather, projects arise from collaboration. Partnership is a critical part of the theory and practice of Reggio education (Wexler, 2004).

A second critique I have come across is that teachers in Reggio Emilia schools, in Italy, tend to ask persistent questions in order to provoke more thinking and problem solving from the children. Educators in Reggio schools in Emilia Romagna do not give false praise to children for work that is below their full capability. Instead, they are viewed as capable learners who can go beyond developmental expectations (Warash, Curtis, Hursh, & Tucci, 2008). This might be a challenge when taken out of the context of Italy and adapted to countries (like Canada) where praise and positive reinforcement are usually the norm when dealing with children. In North America, fostering self-esteem is often a more dominant concern. Teachers are encouraged to use open-ended questions to help children obtain higher level thinking skills in North America whereas teachers in Emilia Romagna are persistent in their questions "to the level of creating cognitive disequilibrium" (Warash, Curtis, Hursh, & Tucci, 2008, p. 5). This encourages children to further challenge their thinking and to value their own ideas.

A third stream of criticism concerns documentation. Kroeger and Cardy (2006) in their paper *Documentation: A hard to reach place*, discuss how educators in Ohio, US, that took part in their study found insufficient time to undertake proper documentation. Having an extra staff member to help out, as in Reggio Emilia schools, would help; but it is not always possible to

have that extra staff on hand. Haigh (2007) conducted an action research study with the teachers from her childcare centre in a Headstart program in Chicago, US, as they started to implement the Reggio Emilia approach. In her research, she found that teachers in her centre were concerned about the lack of time for discussing their thoughts and findings with each other about the children's interest with other teachers. From her research, it was clear that "professional development must be seen as essential to the daily life of the teacher..." (p. 63). Haigh (2007) also points out that a great challenge with her teachers was for them to become open to new ideas and new ways of learning and teaching.

Like other initiatives that emerge from a particular set of historical and cultural features, the Reggio Emilia approach is so context specific that it cannot be fully and faithfully replicated in any environment other than the one in which it was spawned. Hewett (2001) states that Reggio Emilia is:

Not a model nor recipe with a set of guidelines and procedures to be followed; therefore, one cannot and should not attempt to simply import it to another location. Rather, it must be carefully uncovered and redefined according to one's own culture in order to successfully affect practice elsewhere (p. 99).

Strong-Wilson (2007) stresses the fact that: "We cannot lose sight of the fact that Reggio Emilia is rooted in concrete cultural practices. As such, the Reggio Emilia approach has very specific ties to Italian notions of citizenship" (p. 2). However, she also contends that since it has become "translocal", the Reggio Emilia approach has responded well to local contexts in which it has been applied (Strong-Wilson, 2007). "Its strength, in fact, is its capacity to become culturally rooted" (p. 2). Susan Fraser (2007) studied a group of 20 four-year-olds and their two teachers in a preschool in Vancouver, Canada, where many of the children did not speak English.

The results of her study show that the children were able: a) succeed via different materials supplied by the teacher to help them express themselves and lessen the language and cultural gap; b) through socio-dramatic play to help with their communication; c) and through documentation which helped the parents of the foreign student to engage in the process of what the children were learning at the childcare centre. Fraser (2007) also states that with the teachers' support, the children were able to carry out complex imaginative project work while engaging in many of the pedagogical processes inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach.

Although the Reggio Emilia approach could likely never be transferred directly or fully to other countries, research shows that it can still be adapted to other early childhood settings in different countries (Kim & Darling, 2009; Pramling, Sheridan & Williams, 2003; Rinaldi et al., 2004). Early childhood educators around the world have had, and continue to have the opportunity to visit Reggio Emilia, where professional development opportunities are offered through study tours organized by the *Reggio Children* (Reina, 2004). Here, educators have the opportunity to visit the infant/toddler and preschool centres and listen to presentations by *pedagogistas* and special art teachers who work in these centres. Educators can learn from Reggio Emilia's way of teaching and their efforts to concentrate on the child as a protagonist, the parent as a partner, and the teacher as a learner and researcher. Any possible degree of emulation of these pedagogical practices will surely enhance early childhood education (Fero, 2000).

From the town of Reggio Emilia in Northern Italy we now turn our attention to the rest of the world and take a look at other curricula with similar inspirations and at other Reggio-inspired schools.

## **The Reggio Emilia Approach and other similar inspirations: A global overview**

The preschools of Reggio Emilia and their approach to learning have been generating interest and inquiry as to how this approach could be implemented in other parts of the world. This study looks at how three childcare centres, in Charlottetown, PEI are adapting the Reggio Emilia approach and to make it work for their children's needs, even though in a cultural context different from the one in Reggio Emilia.

This section of the literature review discusses how a few countries, like New Zealand and Sweden, that have formally prescribed curricula, have similar inspirations to those of Reggio Emilia. Other countries have been inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach and strive to implement its principles and philosophies around their own children's needs in different cultural contexts. The curricula of New Zealand and Sweden will be discussed first and in some detail, since these are the two countries that acknowledge to having the same inspirations as the Reggio Emilia approach. They will be followed by a review of practices from other countries.

### **New Zealand**

ECE in New Zealand is a very diverse sector (IJEYE, 2003). The sector includes centres that cater for: children from birth to five years of age; centres for children from three to five years; full day or part day centres; and language immersion, English-based or bilingual programs. The title of this curriculum – *Te Whariki* – is a central metaphor. First, the early childhood curriculum is envisaged as a *whariki*, which in the indigenous Maori language means a woven mat for all to stand on (May, 2002). The principles, aims and goals defined in this curriculum provide the framework “which allows for different program perspectives to be woven into the fabric of learning. There are many possible patterns for this” (May & Carr, 1997, p. 228). Secondly, it describes a ‘spider web’ model of curriculum for children, in contrast to a

‘step’ model (Eisner, 1985, p. 143). The ‘step’ model invokes the image of a series of independent steps that lead to a stage from which the child departs and at which point measurable outcomes can be identified (May & Carr, 1997). According to May and Carr (1997), the *Te Whariki* model envisages the curriculum for each child as more like a ‘spider web’ or weaving, and stresses a model of knowledge and understanding for young children as being a tapestry of increasing intricacy and richness. Thus, *Te Whariki* in name and content envisages the curriculum as a web or woven mat rather than a set of stairs (Soler & Miller, 2003). Drummond, 1997 argues that “(*Te Whariki*), instead of being preoccupied with specific skills, which children do or do not have when they get to school, the concern is more for developing an overall enthusiasm for learning” (p. 30).

Pakai (2004) contends that “ *Te Whariki* has been the catalyst for change and major tool for governmental support to increase participation of all children in early childhood education and support families (parents/*whanau*) in their role as teachers and agents of change” (p. 5). This curriculum was intended to be relevant and applicable to all early childhood education in New Zealand. As Cowie and Carr (2008) explain “the national curriculum document *Te Whariki* leaves considerable opportunity for local ‘weaving’ so the curriculum can be locally responsive” (p. 3). *Te Whariki* developed a framework that has implemented a bicultural perspective, an anti-racist approach and reciprocal relationships with the Maori community in New Zealand (Smith, 1999, p. 6). The indigenous people of New Zealand, the Maori, had a considerable input in the making of *Te Whariki*. The Maori version of this curriculum is not just a translation of the English version, but incorporates Maori knowledge and values (IJEYE, 2003).

The principles of *Te Whariki* are built on the learning theory related to the Vygotskyan perspective in which the social context is a forceful indicator for learning and development

(Pramling, Sheridan & Williams, 2003). Rita Walker (2007) in her paper *Foundations of ECD in Aotearoa/New Zealand* states that “the curriculum guidelines are based on Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological model of human development where the child’s diverse environments assist and encourage his or her development” (p. 34). *Te Whariki*’s foundational theory is that children learn through collaboration and sound relationships with their peers and adults, through guided participation and observation of others, and through individual exploration and reflection (Walker, 2007). The four guiding principles of *Te Whariki*, are that “the curriculum should reflect the holistic development of children; that the empowerment of the child should be a key factor; that family and community links should be strengthened; and that children learn through responsive and reciprocal relationships” (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 30; May, 2002).

The *Te Whariki* curriculum looks upon the child as an individual with complete capabilities, skills, knowledge, and attitudes. Ministry of Education (1996, p. 9) states that the *Te Whariki* curriculum is founded on the following aspirations for children: “to grow up as confident and capable learners and communicators; healthy in mind, body and spirit; secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society.”

Although this curriculum claims to be child-centered, however, Soler and Miller (2003) challenge this by saying:

Although a learner’s needs are seen as central, the broader curriculum prescribes a developmental sequence, even if that sequence is seen as relatively flexible. In this situation, the individual learner cannot be the sole source of curriculum development, as stated in the *Te Whariki* document (p. 64).

In a conference paper by Smith (1999), it is argued that:

Opting to define a curriculum, even in a flexible manner, could restrict the child's active role in co-constructing and reconstructing personal meanings and limit the ability of teachers to co-collaborate with children through shared meaning and understandings where children take an active and inventive role (p. 6).

Another challenge is assessment. Because *Te Whariki*'s emphasis is on holistic goals rather than on 'hard' knowledge-based areas and the acquisition of selected skills, the assessment of this curriculum is difficult (Carr, 2001). Carr and May (2000) go on to say that:

Recent research in New Zealand seems to favour 'teaching stories' as an approach to evaluation of what goes on in early childhood education centres (Carr, May & Podmore, 2000). The authors describe 'teaching stories' assessment in terms of the four Ds: describing, documenting, discussing and deciding (Carr, May & Podmore, 2000).

The next section will briefly examine the Swedish curriculum which has similar inspirations to that of New Zealand.

### **Sweden**

Public pre-school in Sweden has had a long tradition of regulation and professionalism. As early as the 1960s, the national Swedish government has set up committees to investigate content and working methods in the pre-school class for six-year-olds (OECD, 2004). Educators working in daycare and preschool were expected to have similar training and work on similar subject matter for children of all ages. According to OECD (2004) "the educational function of both daycare and preschool were recognized, as well as the key notions of interaction, communication and dialogue" (p. 21).

There seems to be a strong sense of decentralization, egalitarianism, and deregulation in all fields of Swedish society, and not least in the school system. Decisions are meant to be taken

at municipal level, and within the municipal system, at the level of preschool centres, and in classrooms, by children and their teachers. OECD (2004) contend that “the curriculum is based on a division of responsibility where the state determines the overall goals and guidelines for the pre-school and where the municipalities – and staff working in the centres – take responsibility for implementation” (p. 21). Though the Swedish curriculum has formulated learning goals, it is seen more as a service regulator than a detailed curricular guideline. It is up to the municipalities and centres to determine how they will go about achieving the goals of the national curriculum, where the content and range of these goals are clearly set out (OECD, 2004).

In the Swedish curriculum, the child is seen as competent and active, and so it is the responsibility of preschool educators to give children the opportunity to develop their skills further (Pramling Samuelsson, Sheridan & Williams, 2003). The activities offered by preschool educators should stimulate play, creativity and joyful learning, and use children’s interest in learning and mastering new experiences, knowledge and skills. Pramling Samuelsson et al. (2003) state that “preschool should strive to ensure that children feel secure in developing their own identity, free to develop their ability to listen, narrate, reflect and express their own views, develop their vocabulary and concepts as well as their communicative skills” (p. 8). OECD (2004) go on to state that “pre-school centres are encouraged to work on all the different aspects of child development and learning, as well as focusing on values and norms” (p. 21). The Swedish Ministry of Education and Science (1998) adds that “learning should be based not only on interaction between adults and children, but also on what children learn from each other” (p. 10).

Just like the New Zealand curriculum and the Reggio Emilia approach, the value of society and culture also forms an important part of the Swedish curriculum. Pramling

Samuelsson et al. (2003) agree about this and state: “outstanding cultural qualities in Sweden are the democracy and equality aspects; in New Zealand we see the close relation to the Maori people...” (p. 19). OECD (2004) argue that preschools should actively and consciously influence and stimulate children to develop an understanding of common democratic values in Swedish society. The Swedish Ministry of Education and Science (1998) states that:

An important task of the pre-school is to establish and help children acquire the values on which our society is based. The inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between the genders as well as solidarity with the weak and vulnerable are all values that the school shall actively promote in its work with children (p. 7).

It seems that there has been little evaluation research done up to this day about the Swedish curriculum and how its goals have influenced either pedagogical practices or children’s learning outcomes (Haug, 2003). Brostrom (2003) has also criticized the Swedish curriculum for being too loose and vague, and suggests that teachers can decide by themselves what content to work on.

These readings show that, although New Zealand and Sweden have formally prescribed curricula, as do most educational systems, they have *not* imposed rules about the implementation of these curricula. These only serve as guidelines, allowing for considerable discretion at both school and teacher level. These curricula look at the child as being able and competent and therefore allow each teacher to construct planning in accordance with the children’s interests. In this respect, the inspiration is similar to that of Reggio Emilia.

The following section will give a brief overview of some of the practices from other countries across the world that have Reggio-inspired learning approaches.

### **United States of America**

There are quite a number of school/preschools in the USA that are trying to implement the Reggio Emilia approach (Forman, Moonja, Wrisley & Langley, 1993; Fyfe & Cadwell, 1993; LeeKeenan & Nimmo, 1993). La Scuola in Miami, Florida, is a state-of-the-art Reggio Emilia inspired school for children from six weeks to fifth grade (La Scuola, 2009). La Scuola's mission is to “create a dynamic, engaging, child-centered community characterized by developmentally appropriate learning, risk-free exploration, mutual cooperation, genuine diversity, and consistent respect” (para. 2). The school offers families the assurance of a safe and caring environment for their children and an atmosphere of support and understanding for themselves.

Sanchez Elementary school in San Francisco, California, is another example of a Reggio-inspired school in the USA. The centre serves about 40 four-year-olds. Sanchez Elementary school celebrated the opening of a new child development centre in October 2006 (Ansell, 2006). This child development centre “offers something not yet typical to child development programs in San Francisco; it has been inspired by and modeled after the world renowned early childhood system in Reggio Emilia, Italy” (para.1). Ansell (2006) states that, “we’ve been using many elements of the approach at the K-5 level, including collaborative learning, professional development, and inspiring environments for the kids. It was only natural that we apply these elements to our child development program” (para. 4).

A three-year Danforth Foundation grant was awarded to ten schools, both public and private, in St Louis, Missouri in 1992, from the city and county to study the Reggio approach and try and implement it in their schools (Cadwell, 1997). The College School of Webster Grove is a private, independent school for students from pre-school through to eighth grade, in St Louis. Parents, teachers and the director of the College decided to study and implement the Reggio

Emilia approach after experiencing the exhibit “The Hundred Languages of Children” (Cadwell, 1997).

Karen Haigh (2008) claims that “there are various types of programs in the Chicago, Illinois area exploring aspects of the Reggio Emilia approach in harmony with their own interpretations and contexts” (p. 2). The rationale of pursuing Reggio elements and being inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach was to support and incite children to become problem solvers, decision makers, collaborators, negotiators, and good communicators who could express themselves in many ways (Haigh, 2008).

### **United Kingdom**

Lesley Abbott and Cathy Nutbrown, editors of the book *Experiencing Reggio Emilia: implications for pre-school provision* (2007) speak about the experiences of several educators in the United Kingdom who have had the opportunity to visit and experience the Reggio Emilia approach in Italy first-hand through various study tours. Abbott and Nutbrown (2007) state that: “the structure of this book echoes the ethos of Reggio Emilia practice” (p. xvi). Each chapter, written by different authors, includes their experience of exploring and/or implementing the Reggio Emilia approach in their respective workplaces. Wendy Scott (2007) describes how implementing the Reggio Emilia approach has helped her to pay more attention to all the expressive languages used by young children to represent their thoughts and feelings (p. 21). In another chapter, Knight (2007) examines the implications of the *pedagogista*’s role for UK practices with early childhood practitioners (p. 30). Bishop (2007) describes how one can create an environment that would serve as a third teacher in his Reggio-inspired classroom in the UK.

## Others

In this section I will be giving a very brief overview of schools that have been inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach. These are only a few examples of what amount to hundreds of programmes that are Reggio-inspired. These include programmes that are self-advertised on websites as Reggio-inspired schools such as the one in Japan called Bilingual Kids International (Bilingual Kids, 2009); and one in Guatemala called Colegio Interamericano (Colegio Interamericano, 2008). Three other schools claim to be Reggio-inspired in Australia: Bold Park Community School in Perth (BPCS, 2008); Collingwood College in Victoria (Collingwood, 2009), and Findon Primary School in Northern Melbourne (Szymanski, 2000). In Malta, there are four preschool centres that claim to be Reggio-inspired: Kidstart, Lelluxa, Pepprina and Nannakola (Vista Coop, 2008).

These are just a few of the many Reggio-inspired schools/preschools that present themselves as being inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach around the world. Their diverse location is evidence of the global impact that the Reggio Emilia approach has had on early childhood education provision.

In the next section of this literature review, I will provide a brief overview of practices in at least six provinces in Canada that claim to have been inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach. The information below has been collected from self-advertised websites of the relevant centres and only represents a small portion of the many Reggio-inspired programs that exist across Canada. More critical research of centres in Canada has been discussed in a previous section of this literature review.

## National perspectives on the Reggio Emilia Approach

### Ontario

The Glebe Reggio Centre in Ottawa became a Reggio-inspired centre in 2004. It is based on the Reggio Emilia approach philosophy “which recognizes the desires and talents of each individual child” (Glebe, 2004, para. 2). This centre claims that: “we remain proudly, the first and most established Reggio-inspired Centre in Ottawa” (para. 5). The Glebe Reggio Centre encourages parents to share their talents and skills through volunteering as they see it as a great way for the parents to learn about their children’s learning.

The London Bridge Day Care in Ontario is a network of childcare centres in London, Exeter and Sarnia that are inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach. They presently operate 14 childcare centres (London, 2009). These centres “provide a unique environment in which our programs are developed by listening to, respecting, observing and documenting the children in our care” (London, 2009, para. 2).

One particular school in Toronto, Ontario, implements a Reggio-inspired philosophy of learning up till Grade six. This is the Bishop Strachan School for girls. It has integrated this approach for the past six years. This school has been “an inspiration to many educators in both the child care sector and in public schools” (Armstong & Hislop, 2008, p. 81). Armstrong and Hislop (2008), go on to say that Bishop Strachan School is at the forefront of the Reggio movement in Canada. It seems that the adaptation of an emergent curriculum in elementary schools is spreading across North America as stated by Professor Carol Anne Wien in her introduction to the book, *Emergent curriculum in the primary classroom: Interpreting the Reggio Emilia Approach in schools* (2008). Wien believes that “...emergent curriculum in early

childhood education is a grassroots movement among creative, thinking teachers influenced by progressive philosophies" (2008, p.1).

### **Nova Scotia**

Peter Green Hall children's centre, in Halifax, Nova Scotia, has been a Reggio-inspired centre since 1997. It caters for infants, toddlers, preschool, and also offers before/after school programs (Peter Green, 2007). Peter Green Hall is a "progressive child care facility which works with parents, teachers and community members to provide quality child care in a safe, healthy, enriched environment" (Peter Green, 2007, para. 4). I have had the opportunity to personally visit this centre during 2009 and I was impressed with the importance the educators in this centre assign to documentation. They believe that evidence of the children's work and their participation in their own learning should be seen throughout the classrooms with various forms of documentation.

### **Saskatchewan**

Lester B. Pearson is a public school in Saskatoon, SK. It is a close-knit school community. The school believes that relationships are the foundation of the interactions that take place between their staff, students, families, and throughout the wider community (Lester, 2009). This public school values the involvement of parents: "...we seek to engage as many of our parents and guardians as possible" (para. 1). The pre-kindergarten and the kindergarten classroom environments are Reggio-inspired. This philosophy reflects a belief in each child as a capable being (Lester, 2009).

### **Quebec**

Another Reggio-inspired school that I came across during my research is the Garderie School in Montreal, Quebec. The owner explains that "the teacher's job is to provoke thought

and encourage children to take their own interests to the next level" (Garderie, 2008, para. 3).

Teachers pride themselves with their meticulous documentation of each child's interests, activities and progress. Through these documentations, parents can follow what their children are learning (Garderie, 2008).

### **Alberta**

St. Monica is an elementary school in the Edmonton Roman Catholic School district. It states that it places its "children first in all decisions which impact student learning" (St Monica, 2010, para. 3). This learning centre has a "special focus on the Reggio Emilia philosophy which enables and promotes the many expressive languages of children. Teachers and students together work to document the learning process, and content" (para. 3).

### **British Columbia**

Roseberry Preschool is a Reggio-inspired school in Comox, British Columbia. The owner of this preschool claims to provide a rich and exciting learning environment that promotes: "exploration, creativity and cooperation, using children's interest and questions to inspire projects and promote learning" (Government of Canada, 2008, para. 12). The environment in this preschool is enhanced by the involvement of community members in its program.

Another Reggio-inspired preschool is Little Ark in Vancouver, British Columbia. This preschool views the child as a "protagonist, a philosopher, an investigator and a scientist" (Little Ark, 2009, para. 1). It also believes that, while children are individuals with the environment around them, they also have a sense of belonging to their group, their school, their family and their community as a whole. That is why Little Ark values the parents' involvement in their preschool.

The above examples of Reggio-inspired schools or preschool centres show that it is possible to take the principles of the Reggio Emilia approach, and implement them in other cultural contexts, as has been done in Prince Edward Island.

The next section of this literature review will focus on how early childhood education came about and developed on Prince Edward Island, and how the emergent curriculum and the Reggio principles were introduced to early childhood educators on PEI.

### **Early childhood education in Prince Edward Island**

Although formal childcare did not come about until the 1960s on PEI, early childhood programs appear to have existed on this province in one form or another from at least the early 1800s (Pence, 1992). PEI has always been a primarily rural province, with close-knit communities and extended families being the norm. For many years, it was expected that, if a woman was employed outside the home, she would give up her work once she got married or had children. Primarily, children during this era were taken care of by their own parents, relatives or neighbours, thus absorbing childcare costs as part of family practices. Religious organizations also used to help out with the care of children, usually in the form of institutionalized care such as orphanages (Essa et al., 1998). Another form of childcare in the 1940s and 1950s was through a housekeeper. Large and relatively rich families used to have a live-in housekeeper/nanny and part of her job description would be to take care of the children, especially when the parents were not at home (McCormick, 2005). The provincial government's involvement in this field at the time was non-existent; firstly because it did not have the resources to fund such a program and secondly because it seemed that the matter was being well taken care of at the household level, even without the government's help (McCormick, 2005).

Changes in family styles and society - such as lower birth rates, smaller household size and an increased participation of families in the workforce - moved hand in hand with a stronger demand by parents for greater quality care and education opportunities for their children (Austin, 1976). According to a study by Jillian Ridington (1998), the first impact of women joining the workforce in Canada dates back to World War I. The demand, for women (even married ones with children) to join the workforce to fill in spaces in essential industries, which were left empty by males going to war became greater. This created a demand for some sort of childcare. Jillian Ridington (1998) argued that "Perhaps more importantly, from the government's perspective, it also hindered recruitment into essential industries" (p. 63). The number of women in the workforce increased sharply again during World War II for similar reasons (MacDonald, 2000). This of course was temporary and most women, especially women on PEI, returned back to what was envisaged to be a women's role in society at that time with the end of hostilities (MacDonald, 2000). Although women's employment was temporary during wartime and the majority left the workforce once the war ended, the experience strongly changed women's perceptions about their role in society. Many women now took interest in advancing their education so that, if the opportunity for a job arose, they could consider taking it (MacDonald, 2000).

By 1960, women started joining the workforce in greater numbers on PEI (MacDonald, 2000). By 2003, 83% of all island mothers of young children were in the paid workforce. This was due, in part, to the fact that there was an increase in single parents who needed to work to support their families (PEI Advisory Council, 2003). This is about 20% more than the Canadian average at the time. This in turn left its impacts and demands on society (PEI Advisory Council, 2003). Women joining the workforce had an economic impact on society as well. More money

was being generated. Demands for childcare would in turn generate more money in the community. Research has shown, that for every dollar spent (on childcare), two were being gained by the society (Cleveland, Forer, Hyatt, Japel & Krashinsky, 2008). All these trends influenced the need for childcare centres to start operating on PEI.

Kindergarten programs were the first to start developing in PEI during the 1960s, particularly in the Charlottetown area. These programs did not yet fall under the jurisdiction of any provincial government department, so no government standards or funding existed (Essa et al. 1998). The first kindergarten centre to be established was at the newly built Confederation Centre of the Arts, Charlottetown, in October 1964. It was a half-day program and was initially aimed at attracting adults to the centre's activities (Pence, 1992). This made it more convenient for the adults to attend the activities organized by the Confederation Centre of the Arts while their children attended the Kindergarten centre in the same building (Pence, 1992).

Day care centres, meaning full-day early childhood programs, actually originated out of the kindergarten movement, but were still largely influenced by the orphanage atmosphere of the 1940s and 1950s, in that these places were seen as merely nurseries and not a learning environment (Pence 1992). Major concerns in the province at the time were arising about the needs of disadvantaged children (MacDonald, 2000). Social workers began to realize that these needs could not be met properly in an orphanage environment where the numbers were large, ventilation was inadequate, and lighting was generally poor. Half-day kindergarten programs seemed to offer more benefits to disadvantaged children at this stage. So, social workers and other public officials pressured some of the programs to expand to full-day operations. This expansion was due to the needs of working parents, particularly single parents who were now working longer hours (Flanagan-Rochon, 1983).

Day care and kindergarten centres in rural areas began to develop later, between 1969 and 1971. This started happening when the consolidation of schools accelerated in the early 1970s under the PEI Comprehensive Development Plan (Flanagan-Rochon, 1983). The now empty one-room school houses were made available to operators to be used for small kindergarten programs for local children.

In the early 1970s, the provincial government was under pressure to improve the poor conditions and sanitation in some day care centres in Charlottetown. Some programs took in too many children within a confined space and without paying much attention to providing appropriate learning experiences for the children. Operators usually justified this measure by arguing that the children were not spending long periods of time at the centre (Pence, 1992). So, in 1971, the Department of Social Services took over responsibility for the regulations of child care facilities and for the management of any public funds that would be appropriate for day care purposes (Pence 1992).

In 1973, the Child Care Facilities Act was enacted. This addressed only such basic concerns as health and safety regulations. Other regulations were introduced following an amendment to the Act in 1978. These regulations introduced indoor and outdoor space requirements, first aid certification requirements, staff/child ratios, and fire and health safety provisions. This Act was amended again in 1988 and in 2005 (Legislative Council, 2005). These amendments included maximum centre size, types of early childhood programs, required qualifications/certification for early childhood educators, and appeal provisions (Flanagan, 2010).

In 1974, the Early Childhood Development Association (ECDA) of PEI was formed by a number of childcare centre operators who then went on to hold discussions with the provincial

government about additional regulations to be added to the Child Care Facilities Act (Essa et al. 1998). The ECDA is a non-profit organization that is committed to promoting and supporting quality early learning and child care programs and services for PEI's children and families (ECDA, 2010). The association relies heavily on grants from both provincial and federal sources.

The main goals of this association are to strive to:

- Build an educated workforce that is dedicated to life-long learning
- Contribute to partnerships and networks that support the healthy development of young children
- Provide information to families about childcare services on Prince Edward Island
- Encourage research and projects that support early childhood education and care
- Promote a strong membership base (ECDA, 2010, para.2)

The Early Childhood Development Association (ECDA) of PEI is an affiliate organization of the Canadian Child Care Federation, Canada's largest organization concerned with the health and well being of Canadian children (ECDA, 2010). On PEI, the ECDA is instrumental in seeking out "solutions to promote and support high quality early childhood educators, high quality programs, and a financially stable infrastructure for learning and child care across PEI" (ECDA, 2010a, para. 4).

There are currently two other well-established organizations involved in providing professional support to early childhood educators on PEI. These are: La Fédération des parents de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard, and the Early learning operators of PEI (ELOPEI), (Flanagan, 2010).

In September 2010, PEI public schools opened the doors to kindergartens for the first time. This created new challenges to the early childhood centres such as "loss of revenue, higher costs in delivering programs for younger children (due to requirements for additional staff for

younger age groups), and difficulties in recruiting qualified early childhood educators for key staffing positions" (Flanagan, 2010, p. 1). Mella (2009), in *Every child a better future – the public kindergarten commissioner's report*, noted that since kindergarten on PEI was moving into the public school system, a need and opportunity for a comprehensive review of early childhood education was created. The author contended that this would strengthen the early childhood development sector which would provide more access and higher quality early learning to Island children (Mella, 2009). Recommendations outlined in Mella's report resulted in Flanagan's (2010) report on early childhood education on PEI.

In 2009, Kathleen Flanagan started working on a report for the PEI government about a new vision and framework for early childhood development on Prince Edward Island. The report was completed and presented in May 2010. It represented:

...ideas, perspectives, and preferences of hundreds of Island parents of preschool children, along with their grandparents, family members and friends...Island professionals who work with young children participated in interviews or submitted their opinions in writing...National and international experts were interviewed for their advice in developing early childhood systems, and research from around the world was carefully reviewed and studied (Flanagan, 2010, p. 1).

The report suggests a new holistic vision of the child – a vision that recognizes that children "are parts of families, communities, their province, and their world" (Flanagan, 2010, p. 90). The author also contends that "children are learning and developing every minute of the day – not just in organized programs, but wherever they are, whomever they are with, and whatever they are doing" (p. 90).

The framework proposed in the Early Years Report by Flanagan (2010) is intended to describe how the child, in his/her family, will be supported throughout the early childhood years. As a result of Flanagan's report, the Early Years System was created. This included the initiation of Early Years Centres (EYC) and Registered Infant Homes (RIH). Important features of the EYC include: regulation of parents' fees; wages paid to staff established on a scale based on their qualification and length of service; centres funded according to a new unit funding model; a centralized waiting list for the centres; centres required to follow a common curriculum; centres to serve a minimum of 40 children "with provision for smaller centres in areas where local needs must be taken into account" (EECD, 2010, p. 5); centres to be required to establish a parents' advisory committee "to ensure a parent voice in the centre's operations" (EECD, 2010, p.5); centres to integrate an infant/toddler section, and children with special needs; and that new centres opening as EYCs must be non-profit (Flanagan, 2010). The main features for the RIH include: all registered infant homes to be licensed; parents' fees to be regulated; providers who do not have the necessary training to be "required to complete a 90-hour training course and be certified" (EECD, 2010, p. 5); the infant homes to be supported by local family resource centres; and a new infant toddler specialist to work with the local family resource centres to "provide outreach to rural communities to bring information/resources/support to parents of infants and toddlers" (Flanagan, 2010, p. 38).

As a result of the Early Years report by Flanagan (2010), the PEI government presented the early childhood and development sector with a Preschool Excellence Initiative (EECD, 2010). Existing licensed centres had to decide whether to apply to become an Early Years Centre and follow the set of criteria mentioned above, remain private, or retire their license. Out of the 95 centres on PEI, in July 2010, 55 decided to apply to become an EYC, 17 decided to retire

their license, and 23 decided to remain private (CBC News, 2010). The transition of the 55 who applied was to be undertaken in two cohorts. The first cohort, which consisted of 36 centres that met the criteria for an EYC, would start operating as such in September 2010. The rest would be included in the second cohort when and if they would have met all requirements to become an EYC by January 2012 (Press Release, 2010).

### **Reggio on Prince Edward Island**

It has been quite a task to find out how the emergent curriculum and the Reggio Emilia approach came to be adapted on PEI. There are no official documents to provide this information; so I had to rely on various personal communications I obtained from early childhood educators.

The idea of the emergent curriculum as inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach has been around since 2000 when a couple of early childhood learning managers from Holland College attended a conference in Vancouver. After returning to PEI, they immediately integrated an emergent curriculum/Reggio-inspired approach into an existing program - a two year diploma on early childhood education at Holland College (H. Moses, personal communication, March 4, 2010). In 2002, two other early childhood educators went to the US for training about the project approach which is an element of the Reggio approach (S. Flynn, personal communication, March 1, 2010). In 2006, four early childhood coaches embarked on a project whereby they would lead four training sessions for the director/s and staff of various childcare centres across PEI, exploring the concepts of the Reggio Emilia approach and the emergent curriculum (B. Goodine, personal communication, February 27, 2010). Some of the centres were more receptive to the idea than others and commenced with the cultivation of these concepts. In February 2007, Carol Anne Wien from York University in Toronto was the guest speaker at a conference for ECEs

organized by the ECDA in Charlottetown (M.M. Dumville, personal communication, March 5, 2010). Wien considers herself a student of the Reggio Emilia approach and a supporter of those who wish to attempt Reggio-inspired interpretations in our culture. She discussed the Reggio Emilia approach with the educators present. In June 2008, Wien was invited back to PEI by the Early Childhood Development Association to take part in a conference where educators from eight different programs on PEI presented a project their centre had carried out with the children as they proceeded towards the adaptation of an emergent curriculum (M.M. Dumville, personal communication, March 5, 2010).

To answer my research questions about how three childcare centres on PEI are being inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach to learning, and to see what the benefits and challenges of such an implementation are, I collected data through in-depth observations as well as interviews with directors, staff and parents of three childcare centres in Charlottetown. My investigations suggest that these are the three centres that have decided to be inspired by the Reggio Emilia philosophy to learning on the Prince Edward Island.

### **Conclusion**

This literature review has attempted to provide an overview of how Reggio Emilia schools started out of the rubble of World War II, pushed on and built by the determination and collaboration of parents, community members and their founder Loris Malaguzzi. The eight fundamental principles of this approach were outlined and discussed in some detail, while taking a critical look at research on the Reggio Emilia approach. Interest in Reggio-inspired schools has grown internationally and can now be found in about 80 countries across the globe. This literature review has looked at a few examples in Canada – giving a more detailed overview of the history of PEI and its early childhood education initiatives - and a few other countries that

have Reggio-inspired schools. *Te Whariki* in New Zealand and Sweden's curriculum were also discussed in some detail as their respective curricula have similar inspirations to that of Reggio Emilia but operate in different cultural contexts.

Chapter Three reviews the research methodology that have used for this study. This includes the data analysis process, sample selection, and other data strategies that have been carried out.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

Since my research questions were intended to connect me with the feelings, interpretations and understandings of parents, and staff working at the three Reggio-inspired childcare centres on PEI, I chose to conduct this study through qualitative research. Bryman and Teevan (2005) argue, “one cannot understand the behaviour of members of a social group other than in terms of the specific environment in which they operate” (p. 155). According to Key (1997), qualitative research “emphasizes the importance of looking at variables in the natural setting in which they are found” (p. 1).

After much thinking and discussion with my supervisor, I concluded that a situational interpretive case study would be the right research design to use for my research. Such an approach allows the researcher to explore individuals or organizations within their context, using a variety of data sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Baxter and Jack suggest that “this ensures that the issue is not explored through one lens, but rather a variety of lenses which allow for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood” (p. 544). Key (1997) suggested that the “principle (*sic*) difference between case studies and other research studies is that the focus of attention is the individual case and not the whole population of cases” (p. 4). An advantage of a case study approach is the close collaboration between the researcher and the participants, while enabling the participants to narrate their stories at the same time (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). My case study is a single case with embedded sub-units (Baxter & Jack, 2008), as I will be looking at

the single case of Reggio Emilia childcare centres on PEI with the three different centres as the embedded sub-units.

This research is also a descriptive case study since I will be giving an in-depth description of how each centre is implementing the Reggio Emilia philosophy. Yin (2009) suggested that this type of case study is used to describe an involvement or occurrence that takes place in a real-life context. According to Stake (1995), the design I used for my research is an intrinsic case study since the subject is being researched for its own sake rather than as an example to apply to other situations. Baxter and Jack (2008) suggest that when the case study is intrinsic “it is not undertaken primarily because the case represents other cases or because it illustrates a particular trait or problem, but because in all its particularity and ordinariness, the case itself is of interest” (p.548). Through this in-depth description, I have attempted to outline the benefits and challenges of becoming a Reggio-inspired centre. If the data analysis shows that benefits outweigh the challenges, I hope that this study will encourage other early childhood educators to embark on the journey of being inspired by this approach.

### **Site and population selection**

I used purposeful sampling in choosing my participants. Yin (2009) suggests that researchers will often use information-oriented sampling, as opposed to random sampling, when conducting a case study. Moreover, purposeful sampling gives the researcher the ability to select “information-rich cases for study in depth” (Patton 2002, p. 230). For this reason, I have conducted my research in the only three early childhood centres on PEI which have been inspired by the Reggio approach. These three centres were introduced to the emergent curriculum in 2006 through the Measuring and Improving Kids Environment (MIKE) program

conducted by the Early Childhood Development Association (ECDA) of PEI (B. Goodine, personal communication, February 27, 2010). This led these three centres to become Reggio-inspired as the year went on. I chose to work with these three particular centres because they are the only three centres on PEI that are adapting the Reggio Emilia approach to their centres. To verify this, I had contacted the three early learning coaches who are responsible for early childhood centres, in each region of PEI, and these three centres in Charlottetown were confirmed as having taken up the emergent curriculum initiative set out by the ECDA in 2006 (S.Flynn, B.Goodine, M.Dumville, personal communication, March, 2010).

A total of twelve interviews were conducted in this study. I interviewed three supervisors (one from each centre), and three staff members (also one from each centre). I also interviewed the parents/guardians of two children from each of the three centres (a total of 10 individuals), to investigate their involvement in their child's learning, and what benefits/challenges they saw arising from such an involvement. The population of parents in the three centres varied from middle class to upper middle class and included both single parents and married couples. The parents' sample in this research is not representative of the whole parents' population of the three centres since the sample size in this study is small. I wanted to interview a selection of parents, teachers and supervisors, so had to limit the numbers of each. All supervisors and staff interviewees were female as there are no male staff persons in these centres. However, four male parents attended with their spouses for the parents' interviews.

### **Researcher's role**

I have been in the field of early childhood since 1993 and I have since then been interested in the impact that high quality childcare has on the development of children. High

quality child care is based mainly on these characteristics: high adult-child ratio; small group sizes; well trained staff; positive care provider-child relationship; well-defined spaces; parental involvement and low staff turnover (Doherty, 1995).

I have had the opportunity to work or volunteer in all three centres taking part in this study which demonstrated the above characteristics in their early childhood setting. I have also had the opportunity to volunteer at various centres that did not have all the above characteristics. I was always intrigued by the question of why not all childcare centres on PEI had the same level of quality.

I first heard of the Reggio Emilia approach through a conference held here on PEI, organized by the ECDA, in 2006. I was quite impressed and intrigued by the Reggio Emilia approach as presented to us by the conference guest speaker, Dr. Carol Anne Wien. I have since read quite a considerable amount of literature on the subject. I also attended a study tour in Reggio Emilia, in Italy, in April 2010, as I wanted to experience this learning approach first hand and then develop my own critical appreciation and assessment of the approach. I kept a personal journal of my week in Reggio Emilia and have used it as a source of data for my research.

After receiving approval from the UPEI Research Ethics Board, I approached the supervisors of the three childcare centres and discussed my research plans with them. On gaining their approval, I sent out information letters and consent forms to all participants being involved in the study (Appendices D-J). I also spent a couple of days in each centre prior to starting my observations interacting with children and staff during their daily routines. This helped me to orient myself with the settings and it also gave the children an opportunity to get to know my face a little and get used to my presence at the centre. I then conducted my observations and interviews on site. Each interview was transcribed and forwarded to the respective interviewees

for their approval. At the end of my research, I plan to share my findings with the three childcare centres and share any recommendations that have emerged from my investigations. I have kept my participants' names anonymous, using a pseudonym, and I have treated all data collected for my research with strict confidentiality.

### **Data collection**

I used qualitative triangulation for my data collection. This was done through the collection of data from observations, interviews and my personal journal. Bryman and Teevan (2005) suggest that triangulation helps researchers check their observations with interview questions for any misunderstanding of what they had observed. Moreover, they argue that “triangulation refers to a process of cross-checking findings...” (p. 325). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) go on to say that “triangulation serves also to clarify meaning by identifying different ways the phenomenon is being seen” (p. 444).

I conducted on-site observations of daily activities in the three childcare centres, with reference to the main principles of the Reggio Emilia approach relevant to this study, as outlined earlier in the literature review (Cadwell, 1997, p. 5-6; Hewett, 2001; Katz & Chard, 1996). The data from these observations consisted of detailed descriptions of the staff and children's activities throughout a period of time, until a saturation point was reached and no more insights were forthcoming (Patton, 2002; Burgess, 1997).

For my observations and based on the fundamental principles of the Reggio Emilia approach, I developed an observational framework (Appendix N), which concentrated on the following:

- The image of the child as a protagonist, collaborator and communicator. That is, I was on the lookout for those activities going on that are child-centered and child-initiated, and where the child is taking an active part in these activities. I was also noting the child's interaction/relationship with peers and adults around him/her.
- The documentation that the teachers undertake to illustrate the children's process of attaining a goal. I looked at the instances when documentation was taking place and the process of how it was being done.
- The parent is a partner in the child's learning. I attempted to look out for instances when the parent partook, in any way, in the child's activities or learning. This was a challenge since these occurrences mostly took place when I was not in the centre as I was not present the whole day. To counter balance this, I also conducted interviews with parents about their involvement in their child's learning. Moreover, I also addressed this issue with the supervisors and staff during their interviews.
- The environment as the third teacher. I looked to see if the environment provoked the children's interest and curiosity; if there was a variety of media being offered to the children for their symbolic representation; if shelves were at the child's reach; if the use of real life objects was being used to decorate the classroom/play area.
- The teacher as partner and researcher. I tried to observe if the educators provided stimulating environments for the children; interacted with the children and their parents/guardians; listened and observed children; followed the children's lead in what they wanted to learn; and documented the children's process of learning.

A more comprehensive framework of my observations can be seen in Appendix N.

Since I have had the opportunity to work or volunteer in each of these three centres, I did feel it necessary to be a participant in my observations conduct participatory observation, as I already have experience in all of the settings, and their surrounding environments (Mason, 2002). However, I felt that it was not possible for me to be just an observer in the setting. Instead, I agree with Coffey (1999) who argues that, instead of trying to “place oneself on the participant-observer continuum”, one should be “actively reflexive” of what is going on in the settings one is in (p. 36). So I tried to stay as objective as I could during my observations, with as little interaction as possible so as not to influence in any way the child or the educator’s actions. I conducted 20 hours of observation in each centre successively: during which time, I specifically looked out for a set of criteria (both environmental features and behaviour patterns) and analysed whether, and the extent to which, they conform to the Reggio Emilia pedagogy (See Appendix N).

Another method of data collection used in this study was interviewing. I interviewed the supervisor of each centre, and one staff member from each centre whom the directors pointed out to me as being educators with more years of experience with the Reggio principles. This was done so that the person chosen was able to give me more detailed information during the interview about the issues under question. However, I acknowledge that this might create a bias and lack of anonymity on the director’s side, since she knew the staff member that I was going to interview. Two sets of parents (of two children from each centre) were also chosen (where possible) by the director for the above reason. As Patton (2002) argues: “interviews yield direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings and knowledge,” (p. 4). He goes on to say that “qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of

others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit" (p. 341). I used semi-structured interviews as these provide the researcher with opportunities to develop a rapport with the participants and get information about "critical areas that are not readily assessed through standardized questionnaires" (Bickman & Rog, 2009, p. 336). Patton (2002) had this to say about interviewing: "An interview is an interaction where the interviewer provides stimuli to generate a reaction and where the interviewee's stimulus in turn generates a reaction from the interviewer" (p. 374). Each interview took between 45 – 60 minutes, and included issues about: the benefits and challenges of being a Reggio-inspired centre; parental involvement (to what extent; benefits/challenges to parents); staff training; and any staff conflicts arising from this implementation (Appendix A-C).

The third method of data collection is my personal journal and collection of materials which I kept during my study tour in Reggio Emilia, Italy, in April 2010. According to Patton (2002), documents "prove valuable, not only because of what can be learned directly from them but also as stimulus for paths of inquiry that can be pursued only through direct observation and interviewing" (p. 294). Byrman and Teevan (2005) argue that documents are an important source of data collection since they are an unobtrusive measure: "they are non-reactive, thus removing one common threat to the validity of the data" (p. 122). I kept a detailed journal during my study visit in Reggio Emilia and which served as an additional and valuable source of data collection. I believe that, through data analysis and discussion of the findings, I have been able to compare and contrast my journal entries of observation in Italian centres, with what I observed in the PEI centres and also with questions tackled during the interviewing sessions.

## **Data management**

Interviews were transcribed. Observations notes were made for each observation by hand/computer. Documents were collected and stored according to chronological dates and purpose. For the security and confidentiality of my participants, I kept all hard copies of the data collected from my observations in a locked filing cabinet at my residence for use in my analysis. Since I digitally audio recorded my interviews to help with the transcribing, I kept two copies of each interview, for backup purposes, on two separate pen drive devices which were kept in the locked filing cabinet as well. The recordings of each interview were downloaded onto my password protected personal laptop, in my residence, only for the duration of the transcription process. In any case, the transcripts, and their recordings, will be destroyed in the year 2016.

## **Data analysis**

A deductive strategy was used to analyze my data since my research questions are based on existing principles (Charmaz, K. 2009). I have outlined what the literature on the Reggio Emilia approach says, with particular reference to the main principles that make up this study, and then compared these outlines to the findings of the observations, interviews and documents. I used theme coding throughout my observations, according to the principles of Reggio, and the observational framework that I compiled for this study, after the data was collected (Charmaz, 2009). When all the observations were done, I read them several times and colour coded similar categories that came out of the observations such as: child's interaction with peers, problem solving, being creative, role playing, outdoor and indoor environment, various types of documentation, educator interacting with child, educator dealing with behavioural problems, and problem solving with the child. Then I gathered similar examples that had occurred several times

in each centre, and put them together in relation to a particular theme that corresponded to my observational framework (Appendix N) such as: child, teacher, documentation, environment, and parents.

**Figure 3.1 Data analysis flow chart**

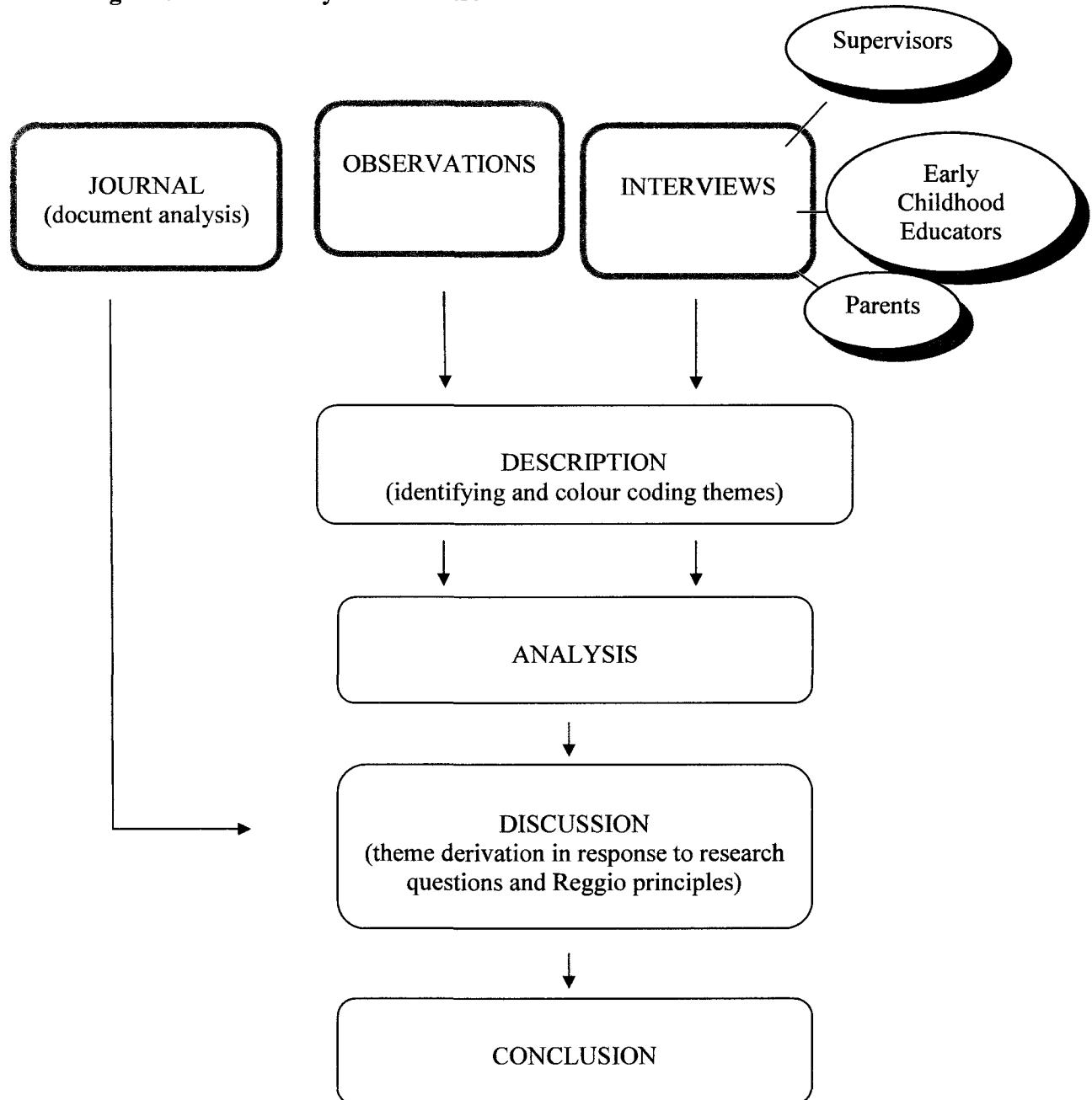


Figure 3.1 gives a graphical layout of the data analysis strategy for this study.

In the semi-structured interviews, I developed three sets of semi-standardized questions: one for the supervisors, one for the staff members, and one for the parents. In this way a systematic analysis could be undertaken after the data from the interviews was collected. These sets of questions were informed by existing literature, my reflections from my visit to Reggio Emilia in Italy, and my own experience in early childhood development. The interview questions for supervisors and staff members covered and included issues about how and when they became interested in the Reggio Emilia approach, the benefits and challenges of being inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach, what future goals the supervisors have for their centres, and what further support do they think they need to meet these goals (Appendix A-C). The interviews conducted with the parents covered different aspects of their involvement in their child's learning and what it meant to them, and what their thoughts were about the learning approach being used in their child's early learning centre. After a thorough analysis of the interview answers, I colour coded them based on similar questions asked to supervisors, early childhood educators (ECE), and parents during the interviews, and their responses (Charmaz, K. 2009). I narrowed the categories down to: thoughts about the Reggio Emilia approach and its benefits and challenges; training opportunities offered to staff; parental involvement; documentation; and what further support, if any, is needed by ECEs and supervisors. To differentiate between similarities and differences amongst the responses, I colour coded them further to facilitate my analysis. The themes were specifically related to the questions that I asked the interviewees which were later on confirmed by all interviewees.

The personal journal, compiled during the Reggio Emilia trip, helped me compare and contrast what I observed in Italy to the observations in the three childcare centres on PEI. It also

provided first hand information from professional people who are working directly in Reggio schools.

Finally, I offer a synthesis of my findings which emerged from an analysis of themes and a comparison of experiences and literature sources. This is followed by a conclusion to the study in which I submit various recommendations to both the directors of the centres and to policy makers beyond that came out of the study. These recommendations are very much an outcome of the different approaches I have used in my study, each with their particular sources of information and inspiration.

### **Trustworthiness features**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) say that the basic issue of trustworthiness in qualitative research is to “persuade the audience (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to” (p. 290). Key (1997) suggests that in case studies “the focus may not be on generalization but on understanding the particulars of that case in its complexity” (p. 4).

I believe that this study satisfies the trustworthiness criteria through the triangulation of data collection from rich, descriptive, and detailed on-site observations, semi-structured interviews with the participants, and the researcher’s own journal. The different sources of data and the thick descriptions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) will provide a strong basis to the research being done, and strengthens the transferability of the study (Key, 1997). The same set of questions used in this study can also be used again by other researchers to conduct similar studies.

The purposeful sampling strategy taken up in this study also reinforces the trustworthiness of the research. According to Patton (2005), “what would be “bias” in statistical sampling, and therefore a weakness, becomes intended focus in qualitative sampling...” (p. 230).

Since the centres and participants chosen for this research are persons practising or involved in the Reggio-inspired approach, this then validates the argument Patton (2005) makes when he says that the logic behind purposeful sampling lies in selecting participants who have rich information about what the researcher is seeking (Patton, 2005).

To enhance the credibility and dependability of this research, I conducted a member check with all the interviewees to verify and validate that the transcripts contain data that faithfully represents what the participants wanted to say. Each interviewee was given a copy of the transcript, whose veracity was subsequently confirmed in writing or by word of mouth by all respondents. To validate this study further, interviewees were sent a copy of the themes I identified from their transcripts during the analysis, for each of them to verify if indeed those were the ideas and concepts they wanted to communicate. All interviewees confirmed in writing, that they agree with the themes, derived from the interviews. Both my reflective journal and the triangulation method add to the credibility of this research (Key, 1997).

### **Limitations**

It is generally assumed that early childhood education takes place through the actions of many people and therefore to study it well one has to use a qualitative research process to be able to uncover what and how these different people feel and think about the issue (Bryman & Teevan, 2005).

A limitation of qualitative research is that it can be seen as too subjective. Bryman & Teevan (2005) argue that such criticisms usually mean that findings from qualitative research rely a lot on the researchers' views and values about what is important or relevant in their findings (also Patton, 2002; Mason, 2002). Since high quality childcare and the Reggio Emilia

approach in particular, are concepts that I highly value, this might have affected the analysis being done in this research. I tried however, to counter balance this through my data collection by using methodological triangulation. This involves the convergence of data from multiple data collection sources (Denzin, 1978). In this particular research these include: a personal journal of my own experience at Reggio Emilia, Italy; a perusal of other documentation available at the childcare centres being studied such as children's portfolios and the daily sheet activity binder; conducting interviews; and detailed observations.

Another limitation concerns the process of the interpretation of data. As this is a situational, interpretative research, the process of interpreting 'findings' is a challenging one. Did the themes that I elicited from the collected data faithfully represent what my informants have experienced? How could I ever know for sure what my informants meant to say? I have tried to address this issue also by seeking a validation of my interpretations arising from the data by conducting a member check to confirm both the authenticity of transcripts, and the appropriate interpretation of respondents' ideas in the ensuing analysis.

Another potential limitation to this study is that I conducted the observations and interviews in three centres that may still be in the process of fully adapting the Reggio Emilia approach. It has only been four years since these centres were introduced to the emergent curriculum approach which then led these same centres in Charlottetown to become inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach to learning. Gardner (1998) contends that it takes a full ten years of daily practice for a centre or school to become fully immersed in the Reggio principles.

I also conducted my data collection at a time when the Early Childhood sector on PEI was going through a lot of changes, namely: the kindergarten moving into the school system; the sector's concern with having enough certified staff left in childcare centres still open after the

Kindergarten transition in September; the loss of certified educators as a result of this change; and the introduction of the Preschool Excellence Initiative and the Early Years Centres (Flanagan, 2010). This created a lot of pressure on the three centres in my study as they had to decide, in a two month time frame, whether they wanted to convert to an Early Years Centre, remain private, or retire their licenses. As a consequence of these events, the staff being observed and interviewed might have been unduly anxious, or might not have been acting to their full potential and this might limit the information that was collected through my research. Indeed, I planned (and succeeded) to complete my fieldwork before the end of June 2010, in order not to get caught in the heat of this transition.

## **Conclusion**

The ideas and philosophies of the Reggio Emilia approach have, for over 30 years, been reflected upon, expanded and adapted within the context of the unique culture of Reggio Emilia, Italy, “thus resulting in the creation of a singular, cohesive theory” (Hewett, 2001, p. 99). And yet, Reggio schools in Italy cannot be replicated or exported fully. However, educators can learn, benefit from their philosophy and then create Reggio-inspired settings in their communities. PEI started its first steps of the cultivation of the Reggio Emilia philosophy in 2006, so it can be considered that it is in its first stages of creating Reggio-inspired centres.

This research study explores and seeks to discover the extent to which three childcare centres on Prince Edward Island have been inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach, while being critically aware of the challenges involved in undertaking such an adaptation. If my research results suggest that the children who are in Reggio Emilia-inspired childcare centres benefit from this approach, I hope that it will serve as a stepping stone so that other centres on PEI would

consider following suit. I also hope that the three childcare centres being studied will then be able to act as mentors to the other centres. My research could also guide policy makers to implement this type of approach not only in other childcare centres across PEI, but also perhaps introduce it into the elementary school system, especially now that Kindergarten has moved into the public school system on PEI.

This chapter described the research design and strategies being used to conduct and analyze data in this study. To facilitate the reader's understanding of the methodology being used, a description of the different sources of date was provided, as well as how this data has been collected, organized and analysed. The findings that resulted from the interviews and observational field notes will be discussed in Chapter Four. Data from my personal journal will be incorporated into the discussion of the findings that will be presented in Chapter Five.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Research Findings**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter will present, and discuss, thematic analyses with supporting data collected from on-site observations and interviews with selected participants for this qualitative research study. The method used to elicit these findings was through a situational, interpretative case study using coding as described in Chapter Three. Three early childhood centres in Charlottetown were purposely chosen for this study as all of them started implementing the Reggio Emilia approach in 2006. The clientele of these three centres varies from middle to upper middle class households and each centre has a mix of single parents and couples. One particular centre had about 20% of its clients coming from other countries, at the time of this research.

Pseudonyms for the childcare centres will be used: Sunshine, Butterfly, and Sandy. Sixty hours of observations in total were carried out in the three centres, and twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted amongst the participants. Interviewees consisted of: three early childhood centre supervisors, who will be referred to as 'Sup 1, 2, 3'; three early childhood educators, referred to in the analysis as 'ECE 1, 2, 3'; and six sets of parents who had children attending these centres. These will be referred to as 'Par 1 – 6 for females' and 'Par 1a – 4a for males'. Four out of the six sets of parents came to the interview as a couple, while only the female parent attended the interview in the case of the other two sets of parents, as the male parent was unable to attend. The interviews were conducted concurrently with the observation sessions.

These interviews and observations attempt to address the following research questions:

- (1) how has the Reggio Emilia approach been adapted by three childcare centres on Prince

Edward Island?, (2) what are the benefits/challenges that these early childhood education centres faced in adapting the Reggio Emilia approach?, (3) what are the future goals for these early childhood education programs in PEI and what do early childhood educators identify as necessary support to make these happen? (Figure 4.1) An additional source of data that will be discussed and related to this analysis in the final chapter is a personal journal which I kept during my study tour in Reggio Emilia, Italy, in April 2010. This experience proved to be pivotal in helping me to me to compare and contrast the data gathered from the literature review, interviews and on-site observations.

The findings in this chapter will be divided in two sections: (a) observations; and (b) interviews. Section A will present and discuss the findings from my observations in the three centres, while the following section, B, will discuss the findings from the interviews.

### **Section A: Observations**

#### **Introduction**

The focus of my observations was to identify (a) the benefits of the fundamental principles of the Reggio Emilia approach; and (b) the challenges that are being faced by the staff in implementing these principles. To help structure and guide the observation process, I constructed an observational framework (Appendix N), based on the Reggio Emilia principles (Cadwell, 2003; Edwards et al., 1993; Gandini, 1993; Spaggiari, 1993).

I conducted my observation sessions in three early learning centres in Charlottetown which are implementing the Reggio Emilia approach. Due to ethical reasons and to maintain the anonymity of the centres, I will use pseudonyms and will be concentrating on the pedagogical environments of these centres in my analysis rather than the geographical ones. Two centres, Sunshine and Sandy, are for profit and affiliated with an educational institution. The third centre,

Butterfly, is not-for-profit and affiliated with a religious institution. All three centres pay rent for the use of their space. Each one has access to a gymnasium. Sunshine and Sandy make use of the gym once a week with prior booking, while Butterfly has daily access to the gym without any booking needed. Sunshine and Butterfly centres have an open attic (part of an open plan design) which the children can climb up to and engage in various activities there. This is called a 'loft' and under it is also a space that is used by children and staff in the centre.

All three centres have an outdoor play area that they can access. Sunshine and Sandy need permission from the educational institution with which they are affiliated for any large structural changes to their outdoor area. However, other minor changes or equipment needed is left to the discretion of the supervisor. Butterfly makes use of a public park at the back of its premises; a small section of the park was rented out to this centre, where a shed was built. This is the space where outdoor equipment and tricycles are kept. A proposal to enhance the public park was submitted by one of the staff to the municipal authorities responsible for the park. It was being reviewed as this thesis was concluding.

Sunshine has mixed-age groups and an open plan structure. Butterfly has specific age groups and an open plan structure. Sandy has specific age groups and is classroom based. All centres have a full-time cook to serve snacks and lunch to the children.

I visited these centres prior to starting my observations and spent some time engaging with the children in their activities so that they could get used to me being with them in their environment. I conducted 20 hours of observation in each centre consecutively, spending ten, two hour sessions daily, for a total of two working weeks at each centre moving on immediately from one centre to the next at the conclusion of each 20-hour block. In this way, I was able to see all activities during a regular day at each of these centres.

In the Sunshine and Butterfly centres, I was observing two to five year olds concurrently since I could smoothly move from one group to the other because of the open plan structure of these two centres. The Sandy centre, however, has separate classrooms for each age group. So I decided to observe the four and five year olds for the first week and then moved on to the three and four year old classroom during the second week. When both classes were in the outdoor area, I observed them concurrently.

I did not participate in any of the activities taking place in the centre during my observations, in an attempt not to interrupt. I knew that my presence was being felt, more so by the staff than by the children, especially in the classroom based centre, and that it might have somehow affected activities that took place while I was present in the centres. Because I was in the centre for a maximum of two hours a day, I could not be present for all of the activities each day. I tried to compensate for this by scheduling my two hour sessions to ensure that a whole day routine was observed at each centre.

During my observations, I kept detailed field notes which I then used for this analysis. To analyse the field notes, I read through them several times, each centre at a time, and coded them using categories from the observational framework that guided my observations. These were: 1) child, 2) educator, 2) documentation, 4) environment, and 5) parents. Various subsections resulted from this coding. I then colour-coded the three centres and looked for connecting or similar themes.

Quotes from my field notes will be included in this section to reinforce the themes being analysed. Figure 4.1 outlines the fifteen themes emerging from the observation sessions, organized in terms of five categories.

**Figure 4.1: Themes emerging from observations**

Themes emerging from Observations		
<i>Theme Number</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Theme</i>
1	<b>CHILD</b>	Positive, strength-building, peer interactions
2		Children engaged in genuinely collaborative learning
3		Children as competent, able and independent learners
4		Real opportunities for active problem solving
5		Creativity being nurtured at many levels
6		Thinking creatively and critically when given the opportunity to do so
7	<b>EDUCATOR</b>	Educators actively and intentionally engaging children in their own problem solving
8		A sense of real learner accomplishment through task completion
9		More choices achieve fewer behavioural issues
10		Calmng, effective educator interventions when potential behavioural challenges arise.
11		Representing children's right to choose, and trusting in their capabilities to act on their own ideas
12	<b>DOCUMENTATION</b>	Documenting children's learning
13	<b>ENVIRONMENT</b>	Varied outdoor environments encourage learning through authentic natural play
14		A variety of materials in the indoor environment engages children in experiential learning
15	<b>PARENTS</b>	Positive, strength-building, parent-teacher interactions

## **Child**

### **Theme 1: Positive strength-building peer interactions**

In all three centres I observed the children interacting well with their peers especially during free choice play and also with the staff throughout the day. The following excerpts from my field notes serve to substantiate this theme:

A group of children were sitting at the snack table and discussing a trip to Florida that one of them had just had. Some of the other children had been to Florida too so they shared experiences together. Other children were more interested in birthday parties and whom they were going to invite (Field notes, May 17, 2010).

A two and a half year old boy was parallel playing, that is playing alongside his peers but not interacting with them, with two older boys from Kindergarten who were using a train track. The younger boy kept taking the bridge off the track that the older boys had built. However these boys did not seem to mind this and they just told the younger boy to put it back on and kept on playing alongside him. Another two boys were playing under-loft which is nicely lit up with little fairy lights. They were pretending that they were workers, so one of the boys took out a measuring tape from the toolbox and started measuring the windows that are under-loft. Both boys were wearing work hats (Field notes, May 31, 2010).

### **Theme 2: Children engaged in genuinely collaborative learning**

This theme is closely connected to the first, and was also evident in all three centres. In the Sunshine centre, I noticed how the older children helped the younger ones and how the younger children observed the older ones and then modeled what they were doing. Bandura, (1977, 1986, 1997) contends that: "Most human behaviour is learned observationally through

modeling: from observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviours are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action" (Bandura 1977, p. 22). In the Butterfly and Sandy centres, I observed frequent incidents of children of the same age collaborating and helping each other out, depending on their level of development:

A group of mixed-age children were at a table working with a staff member in creating a musical instrument. There were paper tubes of different lengths on the table and a container with corn kernels in it. The educator was modelling how to cut a circle out of paper for the bottom, and then tape it at one end of the tube, put in some kernels in the tube, and then close off the other end with another paper circle. While doing this she asked children questions about what step came next. The older children started drawing and cutting out the circles and attaching them to the tube and finishing off their musical instrument. A toddler who had been observing for a time, came to the table, took one of the tubes, put in some corn kernels and lifted it up to shake it like the other children were doing. All the corn kernels spilled over the table and she looked so surprised. The educator asked: "What do you think you need to do first?" The little girl replied: "Clean up". She thought that the educator was referring to the corn on the table. Immediately her older sister came up to the little girl and said: "No you have to put this circle at the bottom first". She then turned to the educator and said: "I can help my sister do it" (Field notes, May 28, 2010).

The following story shows the child not only as being a model to her friend, but also as being competent and able, without getting any help from the educator. From what I observed, I could see that this was taking place because there were no directed activities going on and children were free to use their imagination and had enough time to do the task they set out to do:

A four year old girl found a dot-to-dot activity with the paper in the studio (art area). She decided to try it out. When she finished she cried: "I did it! I did it! It's a bunny." You could see the pride in her eyes. She was not pushed into doing it by the educator. It was her choice. Some of the other children just used it to scribble on or draw on the reverse side of it. She was then asked by her friend to help her do hers as she was having trouble. The four year old started explaining to the other girl which direction to go according to the numbers. When she saw that the other girl did not understand, she got another one herself and started doing it again. Her friend observed her and then tried to copy her. This time she could finish the task. When they finished, they both coloured the bunnies (Field notes, June 1, 2010).

For me, the next situation revealed that through collaboration and problem solving, these children managed to accomplish a task that would have been much more difficult by themselves. These four year old girls were playing in the outdoor area in the sandpit. A staff member was outdoors, supervising and interacting with the children:

One of the girls became interested in a bucket full of small rocks that was near a picnic table outside the sandpit. She ran to the bucket and tried to lift it to take it over to her friend to play with the rocks in the sand. She could not lift it so she called over to her friend to come and help her. Her friend came and they tried to lift the heavy bucket full of rocks. They soon realised that they could not carry it over to the sandpit as it was too heavy. One of them said: "I know what we can do. We can get that wheel barrow and put the rocks in it. That way it would be easier." They got the wheel barrow, and emptied half the rocks into it. One pushed the wheelbarrow and the other carried the half full bucket over to the sandpit... (Field notes June 18, 2010).

**Theme 3: Children as competent, able and independent learners**

During my observations, I witnessed several instances in all three centres where children were demonstrating competence and independence, although not all staff members were confident enough, at times, to trust in their abilities to succeed.

Among my observations there were the following:

I witnessed a 3 year old boy from Pakistan interacting with a 4 year old girl from Nepal.

Both of them had limited English language skills. It was so intriguing for me to watch them communicate, both in their own language, and somehow understand each other and role play in the kitchen area together. This really showed me that, no matter what country children come from or what language they speak, they are still competent, able and resourceful enough to figure out a way to communicate with each other without needing any help from the adults around them (Field notes, May 27, 2010).

Susan Fraser (2007) contends that children “who do not share a common language or culture will be able to engage successfully in many of the pedagogical processes such as representational work, [and] collaborative group work...in early childhood programs that embrace the Reggio Emilia approach...” (p. 21).

This scene took place in the building blocks area between two boys whom I noticed returned to this particular area every day I was there doing my observations. This particular instance shows these two four year old boys as not only being competent, but also being creative and able to problem solve on their own through discussion and sharing of ideas:

Two boys were building a long tunnel by placing wooden and cardboard blocks on top and alongside each other. This tunnel was built so that they could pass their little cars inside it. They started pushing the cars inside one end of the tunnel and waiting for them

to come out at the other end. At one point, one of the boys pushed a car inside the tunnel, but this time the car did not appear at the other end. His friend came to help him look for the car by looking into the tunnel and all around it. They could not see it so the boy that lost the car said to his friend: "It's gone". The other boy replied: "The car cannot go away on its own, without a driver or you pushing it." They talked about it a little bit more and then they decided to break up the tunnel to look for the car. They eventually found it underneath a cardboard block. Both boys had big smiles on their faces and the second boy said: "See, I told you that it was still here". They started rebuilding their tunnel again (Field notes May 28, 2010).

Both Butterfly and Sandy centres have an activity called "Show and Tell/Share". Children bring in something from home, once a week, which they really want to show and share with their peers. I witnessed one such activity at the Butterfly centre, involving both the three and four year old and the four and five year old groups:

Each child comes up one at a time and speaks about what they got from home and then their friends get to ask them questions about it, for example, why is it their favourite toy, where do they keep it in the house, who gave it to them, how long have they had it, and so on. You could tell from the children's faces and their body language that they were so proud to be able to show their possessions to their peers. This activity gave the children a sense of ownership and the opportunity to show that they are competent and able to come up and speak to their friends about something that they owned. After the activity was over, the children had a choice to either share their possession with their peers and play with it for a while or else if they were not ready to share they could go and put it away in

their locker. During this particular activity, all the children were ready to share what they got for the show with their peers (Field notes June 9, 2010).

This story was taking place during snack time in the two and four year old classroom where the children can serve themselves. In this particular case, this boy realises that he was competent and capable to pour his own milk without spilling, after having tried a number of times:

I was observing a two and a half year old boy trying to pour milk into his cup during snack time. This same boy had always spilled all or some of his milk while pouring during other instances that I had been observing during snack or lunch time. However, on this particular day, he poured his milk in his cup without spilling any. The pride in his voice and the look on his little face were not to be missed! He shouted to his educator and friends: "I did it! I did it! No spill on the table! Look, none on the table!" (Field notes, June 24, 2010).

#### **Theme 4: Real opportunities for active problem-solving**

I witnessed quite a number of instances where children problem solved while they were carrying out an activity. I noticed children who were problem solving conflicts that came about while they were playing, without relying on an educator. I also observed that children were more capable of problem solving in situations where the educator took a step back, trusted the children's capability, and let them try to problem solve the issue on their own. Through my experience as an early childhood educator working or volunteering in these three centres, I found that most of the staff were taking a step back and observing how the conflict would be dealt with, whereas before they would have intervened prematurely and tried to resolve the conflict themselves.

This episode took place in the outside play area where all the children from the centre were playing together. In this particular instance, there was a lot of discussion and problem solving taking place between educators and with the children on how best they could resolve the issue:

A group of 5 year old girls were doing some gymnastic movements while some of their friends were watching them. One girl did a handstand and the crocks she was wearing flew out of one of her feet and landed in the roof gutter. At first they were surprised at what happened but then they started laughing about it and went off to tell one of the staff. She asked them what they thought they could do to get it back. There were many suggestions from the children. A girl suggested that they get a broom and try reaching it that way. When they tried unsuccessfully, another child suggested that the educator put her on her shoulders. When this solution failed, a boy suggested bringing a cannon into the yard, placing the girl who lost the crocks in it, and then shooting her up to the roof. When the educator pointed out that that would be a hard thing to do, another boy suggest getting a long ladder to reach the gutter. It took the children quite a while to solve their problem but eventually they did on their own. (Field notes June 25, 2010).

I noticed that problem solving took place frequently while children were role-playing or being creative with the task that they were doing. The next story unfolds in the outside play area. With the help of her friends, this child found a way in which to protect her drawing:

A four and a half year old girl was trying to draw a rabbit on the paving with coloured chalk. At one point, she realised that the drawing looked more like great big pigeon so she added on some details and did quite a good representation of a pigeon cartoon character. She called her friends over and started telling them all about how it was

supposed to be a bunny but turned out to be a pigeon. Some younger children who were also outside playing at that time were running after each other, ignored the drawing on the paving and stepped onto it and kept going. The girl was quite upset and soon realised that she had to find a way that the other children in the yard would notice that they could not step on the drawing. She discussed this with her peers and they came up with the idea of putting something around the drawing as a barrier. They looked around in the yard and some went and got car tires, others got tree branches, while others got small plastic buckets. They collaborated and placed them around the drawing. This seemed to not only deter other children from stepping onto it, but also to make them stop and admire the drawing (Field notes May 19, 2010).

#### **Theme 5: Creativity being nurtured at many levels**

During my observation sessions, I observed a lot of role play in the Sunshine and Sandy centres, and creativity from the children in all three centres. However, in the Butterfly centre, children seemed to be less interested in dressing up and role playing. They seemed to be more interested in creative activities, such as building or constructing items themselves:

A group of three and four year old children were making swords out of paper and role playing prince and princess. They were showing each other how to construct a sword. Through trial and error the children discovered that, when they rolled up a sheet of paper sidewise at an angle, it would have a pointed end and then another boy suggested that they tape two or three swords together to make them longer. There were some other children who started to create a different sword which still had the pointed end but they added paper to the end of it to make it fit their hands like a mitten (Field notes May 27, 2010).

A four year old boy started experimenting with a small empty box, tape and paper. Soon he decided that he was making a guitar. He showed it to his friends and pretended to be playing it. After a while he discovered that he could use the guitar as a baseball bat, just like the one he had printed on his shirt. So he made a ball out of paper and then helped his friend to make a bat and they played baseball together (Field notes May 17, 2010).

The following story takes place in the 'daily living area' where children have access to a play home environment and a carpeted area in the middle. In one of the containers in this area they had barbequing gear together with a play barbecue. The children in this scene are not only role-playing, but also collaborating and problem solving while they play:

A three year old girl and a four year old boy were pretending that they were at a picnic and were going to barbecue some food. They set out a blanket on the carpet, and put out play food, lanterns, plates and cups. The girl wanted to start cooking the food on the barbecue so they collaborated in choosing what each of them wanted to eat. While the girl was cooking, the boy noticed that not all the food fitted on the barbecue, so he looked around the area and saw a tray. He wanted to check out if it fitted on the barbecue, so they would have more space for their food. He asked the girl if she would take off the food she was cooking so he could try the tray. The girl took the food off the barbecue and the boy tried the tray. He tried it in different ways but still it would not fit. So finally with a sigh, he turned to the girl and said: "It doesn't fit. You can cook again", and went to put the tray back in the cupboard (Field notes May 20, 2010).

In the next story, we see that the ECE initiated the activity by putting some shaving foam on a table and putting some paint shirts on the chairs that were around the table. She let the children come and experiment and explore the shaving foam. This shows that the educator sees

the children as competent, creative beings. She wanted to observe how the children would experiment with this medium:

Three girls from the three and four year old group were gathered around a table that had lots of shaving foam sprayed on it. One of the girls was intrigued by its texture and kept rubbing her hands together and saying how smooth it was. Another girl said that it smelt like her daddy and then went on to put some of the shaving foam on her hands and put it on her chin. She turned to her friends and said: "Look I have a beard now." The third girl discovered that she could make marks in the shaving foam with her fingers. She also started experimenting with drawing letters with her fingers (Field notes June 2, 2010).

The next scene took place outside, in the sandpit. The children were being creative as they explored the different properties of the sand: dry and light, wet and heavy. Role-play, collaboration and modelling were taking place during this activity. All this was possible because of the richness of materials available to the children at this centre:

A group of four children had a small bucket full of water which they were filling with dry sand. They were pretending to prepare a chocolate cake for a birthday party, and took turns to stir the mixture. One of the boys got a flat round piece of log for the cake's base while a girl started taking the wet sand out of the bucket with a spade and piling it on this log. When they had a big pile the boy started to smooth it with his hands until it resembled a cake. One of the girls said: "We need candles. It's a birthday cake". Another girl went running out of the sandpit and to a part of the yard that was covered with wood chips. She picked a few up and came back with them saying: "Look, I found candles". The others smiled, took them and put them on the cake. The boy tried to pick up the cake from the table but it was too heavy. So he called his friend over to help him carry it to the

little house at the end of the sandpit. They placed it on the table there and pretended it was their friend's birthday. Meanwhile, two younger girls who were watching all this decided to put some sand in another bucket of water. They went up to the educator and said: "We have all the ingredients." The educator asked them what they were making. "A cake soup" they both replied, and continued mixing their soup. (Field notes June 25, 2010).

**Theme 6: Thinking creatively and critically when given opportunities to do so**

Emergent learning occupies a key function in the Reggio Emilia approach for early childhood education. In this approach, both curriculum and pedagogy are created through real experiential projects based on the emerging ideas and interest of young children (Wien, 2008; Rinaldi, 1993).

During my observations, I could see various instances of emergent learning when the children started out doing one task but, through experimentation and exploration, they ended up discovering something new and different from what they had set out to do. The following episode describes how children can use their creative thinking when faced with the right opportunity:

Two four-year-old girls were at the art area drawing on different sheets of paper that the educator had left in the paper basket. These papers were light pink in colour and had carbon paper like qualities with a shiny finish. While these two girls were talking away and drawing on these papers, one girl accidentally forgot to take off the marker cap and went ahead and scribbled on the paper. To her surprise, she saw that the marker could still make marks, even though the cap was still on. She immediately told her friend about it who then tried it out herself. They both noticed that, no matter what colour of marker

they were using, it still produced a brown line. They discussed why this was happening. One child said that it was because this paper was pink while the normal paper was white and it only works on pink paper. They were really intrigued with this and kept experimenting with different markers, with caps on, and drawing various symbols. One of the girls decided to experiment even further. She looked up at her friend and said: “Look, I can do it with my fingernail too!” (Field notes May 26, 2010).

A three year old girl was drawing at the art table with her friends. She went to pick up another colouring pencil to use when all of the pencils fell out of the container onto the table. She started laughing, left what she was drawing and started putting the pencils in a line near each other. Another girl who had also been colouring joined in and told her to count them. They both started counting and went up to ten and then skipped to other numbers that they knew (Field notes June 1, 2010).

A three year old girl was using glitter glue at the art table. She was trying to decorate a piece of art work that she had done. After a while, she decided that she wanted to touch it to see how it feels. So she put some on her fingers and rubbed it into her hands. She first looked at the pretty colour on her hands. Then she put her hands together and realised that they were very sticky. She turned to another girl who was at the table and said: “It’s sticky like ‘hanitizer’ [sanitizer].” She kept sticking her hands together and giggling (Field notes June 23, 2010).

These were just a few of the recorded observations of the children at the centres from my field notes. For the purpose of this analysis, I presented separate abilities of the children being observed in different scenarios. However, all the above abilities are inter-related and should be looked upon holistically. The findings from the observational analysis show that the children in

the three centres interacted well with each other and with their educators. Furthermore, I observed substantive evidence of their competence and capability for collaboration with each other. Children in the Sunshine and Sandy centres demonstrated interest in role-play while the children in the Butterfly centre were more focused on building and constructing. Children in all three centres showed an interest in exploring and experimenting with various properties of different materials.

In the following section, I will describe how the educators in these three centres interact with the children; problem solve with them, how they resolve behavioural issues, and how they manifest trust in children's capabilities.

Most of the early childhood educators in the centres that are included in this study have at least a two year diploma in early childhood education. Each educator at the Butterfly centre has a laptop to use for research with the children, and for any documentation that needs to be done. Another computer attached to a printer is in their staff room. Educators at the Sandy centre each have a computer with a scanner and a printer in the classroom and another computer and printer in the staff room. The educators at the Sunshine centre can make use of a computer and a printer in their staff room. All educators each have a digital camera to enable them to take photos of children's activities, which would later on be included in their documentation.

Several themes came out of the coding of this section. I will try and quote from my observations and provide a sample of all the themes that turned out to be similar in the three centres. These consist mainly of how educators problem solve with the child while asking provocative questions; how behavioural issues were dealt with; how they interact with children during the day; and how some educators demonstrated respect for the children by trusting in their capabilities. These themes were based on my observational framework criteria (Appendix N).

## **Educator**

### **Theme 7: Educators actively and intentionally engaging children in their own problem solving.**

There were several instances during my observational sessions that I could see educators rising up to the occasion and problem solving with the children by asking provocative questions which challenged the children's thinking. Some of these examples have already been quoted in the 'child' section as all the observations are inter-related. The following examples are of instances when the educator felt the need to ask challenging questions so that the children could get to a solution, or learn more about the issue from their own answers. This in turn helps the children to learn to problem solve.

The following episode was taking place under the loft area which this particular group use for their morning and afternoon gatherings in which literacy takes place and where children and educator discuss what their plans are for the day:

The four to five year old group was meeting under-loft with their educator where they share their news and practise some literacy skills. This particular morning, the educator was reading a book that the children had chosen about insects. They told her that they picked out that book because they wanted to learn more about ladybugs. As she read the book, she kept interacting with the children by asking provocative questions and challenging the children to think and come up with ideas about the insects in the book. One boy said: "Look, the ladybug has two wings. The soft wings can break easily and the hard ones do not break easily." The educator took this up and continued asking the group more questions about why they thought that the soft wings would break and the others not. I also noted that the educator was not afraid to use big words like *larae* and this in

turn provoked more challenging questions. The educator encouraged the children to explore the word and get to know what it means. At one point a child asked a question about a beetle that was in the book. The educator did not have an answer for him so she told him that they could look it up together after snack on the computer [she did look it up with the boy after snack]. She then left the book on the table for the children to be able to look at it later on in the day if they so chose (Field notes May 31, 2010).

The following activity was taking place in the three to four year old section during their group time. The educator was discussing with the children about where butterflies live. They had been discussing butterflies the previous day as well, so the educator was building up on the knowledge that the children had acquired about butterflies and pushing it further:

The educator asked the children: “where do you think butterflies live?” One child said: “in the sky”, while another one said: “on the ground as they have to eat nectar”. Another child said: “in big holes”. Other children suggested that butterflies live in trees and jungles. The educator accepted all the answers suggesting that they might be true. She then asked if they would like to find out the answer on the Internet. The children all said yes and seemed very interested and excited to be going on the Internet. The educator did some research on the internet, on her laptop, and found some information. She read that out to the children while showing them some pictures of butterflies. She also listened to the children’s comments and questions and reinforced their learning by asking more challenging questions (Field notes June 1, 2010).

#### **Theme 8: A sense of real learner accomplishment through task completion**

I witnessed this happening frequently in the three centres while I was doing my observations. The adults were interacting in one way or another with the children, especially

while they were indoors. However, when the children were outside, I could not see a lot of interaction between the educator and the child. There were only a couple of instances where I saw an educator actually taking an active part in an activity that the children were doing. This could be due to the fact that all the outdoor play areas of these three centres have a lot to offer to the children so they are engaged in all sorts of activities during their time outside and do not feel the need to interact with the educators, they get more engaged in what they are doing with their peers. Another reason could be that the educators have to supervise the children more when they are in the outdoors to prevent any accidents, and so it would not be practical for them to be fully engaged with children's games while having to keep an eye on the other children in the group:

A two year old child was trying her hand at scissoring. She was pushing it closed with her fingers while holding it with her other hand. The educator, who was at the table interacting with the children during this activity, did not intervene and continued to observe this little girl. After a while the educator took up a pair of scissors herself and started cutting a piece of paper with it. The girl was observing her and then she said to the educator that she would like to try those scissors to cut her paper. The educator passed on the pair of scissors and the girl managed to cut an edge from the paper. This reinforced her efforts and she kept on practicing her scissoring (Field notes May 20, 2010).

A four year old boy came up to the educator and asked if she would help him with a puzzle he wanted to do. The educator said yes and they sat at a table and took out all the puzzle pieces. I noticed that this boy needed a lot of encouragement and direction from the educator to be able to find the pieces for the puzzle and try to fit them in. The educator was very patient and asked challenging questions to make the boy think which puzzle piece would fit where. When he finally got his first puzzle piece in place, he

looked so proud and pleased with himself. The educator continued reinforcing and encouraging this child until all the pieces of the puzzle were done and you could see the sense of achievement in this child's face as he went around telling his friends that he had finished the puzzle (Field notes June 2, 2010).

### **Theme 9: More choices achieve fewer behavioural issues**

I observed that in two of the centres there were very few behavioural issues occurring between the children, while I could observe more instances of behavioural issues in another centre. However, in all instances, the behavioural issues were either solved by the children themselves or were gently dealt with (speaking with the children in a gentle voice about the issue) by the educator. From my observations, I could see that, the more the children were engaged in an activity which was something that they chose that they were interested in the fewer behavioural issues there were. Another observation was that, the more intriguing and different opportunities and choices given to the children, the more engaged they are likely to be and the fewer behavioural problems are likely to arise:

It was the end of the day and there were only four boys left in the four to five year old classroom. The educator noticed that one boy was acting up and needed to calm down so she suggested that they play a game of cards. They all set around a table while she shuffled the cards. One boy suggested what game to play and started telling his friends and the educator what the rules of the game were (Field notes June 18, 2010).

**Theme 10: Calming, effective educator interventions when potential behavioural challenges arise.**

The following episodes took place in the outdoor play area where children aged between two and five were playing together. These two incidents show how staff members dealt with behavioural issues in a calm and gentle way, while respecting the feelings of the children involved:

A two year old boy was preparing to go down a slide while another toddler was right behind him. This toddler could not wait for his friend to go so he pushed him down the slide. The ECE nearby was very quick and caught the boy before he could get hurt. When she made sure that the boy was ok, she took the toddler aside and gently explained to him that it was not ok to push his friends as they get hurt and that he had to wait his turn before he could go down a slide (Field notes June 11, 2010).

A three year old boy accidentally hit a three year old girl while he was throwing a stone, and cut her on the forehead. It was a surface scratch and it was bleeding. The educators handled this situation calmly by taking the hurt child to the side and tending to her, while another educator went over to the boy and took him over to the hurt girl to show him what happened when he threw the stone. He had some time out in a quiet area to think about what he did and that he could join the group again, once he was ready to excuse himself to the girl and ready not to throw stones again. The older brother of the hurt girl went to see if his sister was okay and then he told her: “If somebody tries to hurt you, you should say **no thank you!**” and gave his sister a hug and a kiss (Field notes June 17, 2010).

**Theme 11: Respecting children's right to choose and trusting in their capabilities to act on their own ideas.**

I observed educator respect for each child in all three centres. The educators respected the child's right to choose and to have his/her own ideas about what to do. There were some instances where I could see children climbing up trees, sitting on tables, and standing on chairs. In mainstream North American culture, this is not a usual scene one would see in a childcare centre because of safety issues. But, since Reggio-inspired educators trust the children's competence and capabilities, these things take place with close supervision from ECEs (Edwards et al., 1998). Some educators trusted the children in helping themselves to snack and lunch while others helped the children out with pouring and spreading jam or cheese on muffins (Field notes June 22, 2010). This showed me that not all educators were completely comfortable yet with one of the fundamental principles of the Reggio Emilia approach – respecting and trusting the child. This could be due to the fact that the norm in early childhood centres is to protect children from harm, and not let them do 'dangerous' activities such as: climbing trees, standing on chairs, or pouring out their own milk. Others, on the other hand, respected the children by listening to them attentively when they had ideas to share during story telling (Field notes, May 28, 2010). Edwards (1998) contends that: "listening means being fully attentive to the children" (p. 181).

A staff member at one centre gathered the children in a group at the start of the day and asked them individually: "What is your plan for today?" She listened to all of them, respected and accepted their decision of what they would like to do that day. Since this had been the strategy that this educator used on a daily basis, the children were very comfortable and looked forward to planning their day together with their educator (Field notes June 11, 2010).

Through this analysis of my observations of the ECEs, I had a strong sense that all of them knew about the principles of the Reggio Emilia approach and viewed the children under their care as being capable and competent, and worthy of respect and trust. Behavioural issues were being treated gently and calmly by the educators. Educators interacted fully with the children in activities indoors and asked provocative questions to enhance learning. However, I also noticed that there was not a lot of interaction by the educators in the outdoor play area, perhaps because of the many explorative opportunities that the children had to engage with, and their supervisory role to prevent any accidents. I also observed that, while some of the centres had very little time restrictions around activities, others were still bound by the clock for certain routines and children had to stop whatever they were doing to get to the next activity.

What follows are the findings from the observations that will discuss documentation; the indoor and outdoor environment; and the episodes where I observed parents taking an active part in their children's learning and in the centre in general.

## **Documentation**

### **Theme 12: Documenting children's learning**

Two centres offer daily sheets to document for the parents the progress their children are making each day. These record sheets are placed at a prominent place either in the classroom or in the individual group areas and parents can freely access them and see at a glance what the children's experiential learning activities were for that day. They consist mainly of dated snapshots of different times of the day and activities the children participated in, with some text and children's conversations also provided. One centre updated these sheets each day as time allowed. The Sunshine centre was still in the planning stages of implementing the record sheets at the time of my visits.

Another method of documenting the children's learning is through portfolios. These offer richer documentation about projects that would have taken place in the centre besides other documentation of the child's representations using different media. Documentation in these binders is usually first exhibited on the walls and, once it is taken down to be replaced by other documentation, the ECEs photocopy the documentation and place it in the binders of those children who would have taken part in that particular project. These binders are started once the child joins the centre and then move along with them from one group/classroom to the next. The child gets to take it with home when s/he leaves to go into the school system. Two centres have such portfolios in their centre. The other centre is planning to start these binders in the autumn of 2010. The two centres that have these portfolios have them readily available any time the parents may wish to come and have a look. One centre sends the portfolio home twice a year and includes a feedback form for the parents to fill out when they return the binder to the centre. The other centre has them available for parents and children on child's level shelves as one comes into the centre. These portfolios are also used during parent/teacher meetings that take place twice a year (Field notes May 23, 2010).

The third method of documentation that these centres use is through posters with the children's process of learning during a particular project or events, which are displayed on the walls of the centre. These get changed from time to time according to what is going on in the centre. The Sunshine and Butterfly centres had a variety of projects displayed on their walls, while the Sandy centre had posters of one particular project that had just been completed.

During my observation sessions, I did not have the opportunity to see a big project in action. I did see some educators taking photos, especially at one centre where they have sheets for parents that are updated every day. In the other centres, I did occasionally see educators

taking photos and sometimes writing notes about what the children were saying. However, when I had the opportunity to look at the portfolios and binders of the three centres, I could see a lot of documentation of projects and events that had taken place during the year. The following episodes were either taken from my direct observations or were sourced from these portfolios and binders.

The following story was taking place at the water table. In this instance, the educator sat down by the children, observed, took photos and even recorded in writing the children's conversations which would later on accompany the finished documentation:

Two, three year old children were playing at the water table inside the centre. The educator had put some blue food colouring in the water. One child realised that when he put in the yellow cup and filled it with the blue water, the water turned to green. He repeated this process a number of times and then he decided to try different coloured containers to see if the water would change to a different colour. The educator noticed what the child was doing and so got out her camera, took some photos of the process while recording on a small notebook the child's comments as he went through this process (Field notes May 20, 2010).

The following episode was described in more detail earlier on in this chapter. The educator took note of the conversation that was going on between the two boys:

An educator was taking notes in a small notebook of a conversation that was taking place between two boys who were building a road with wooden blocks for their cars (Field notes May 21, 2010).

Here, the educator's attention was drawn by the child himself who was very pleased with what he had achieved and wanted to share it with his educator:

A five year old boy was playing up-loft with wooden blocks of various lengths. After several attempts, this boy managed to build a bench which he could actually sit on without it breaking. He called down to his educator to go up and see it. She took her camera and went up-loft. She offered the boy positive reinforcement about his achievement and took some photos of the finished bench with the proud child sitting on it (Field notes June 9, 2010).

During my observations I was in classroom/groups that either had one or two educators with the children. It is more usual to have one educator per group, but in circumstances when the adult to child ratio is above what it should be by perhaps a couple of children, the centre would still have to have another educator with the group. I could definitely see more documenting in the groups/classrooms that had two educators because, while one would be doing an activity or interacting with the children, the other educator could easily get the camera and take photos or get a note book and write down some of the children's conversations. Loris Malaguzzi said, in an interview with Gandini (1998), that: "working in pairs, and then among pairs, produced tremendous advantages, both educationally and psychologically, for adults as well as for children" (p. 71). Fero (2000, p. 4) talks about the benefits of educators working in pairs and says that co-teaching builds strong "collegial relations" and eases the stress of documentation. Here is a case in point where an educator had the intention to document during an activity but found it hard to do so while tending to the children's needs:

An educator put out some new materials for children to experiment with rubbing. At first, there were about four children at the table and the educator was modelling to the children how they can do the rubbing. The children immediately started trying it out, and when the educator saw them at work, she decided to do some documenting. So she took some

photos and wrote down some notes for later. Since the educator was on her own, she soon had to stop documenting as in a short while there were about 11 children around the table trying to get a chance to take part in the activity. Since this was an activity done during what is called 'free time' (which means that the children are not divided into groups), anybody who wanted to join in this activity could do so, which resulted in too many children for the educator to handle on her own (Field notes May 25, 2010).

From my observations, it was quite evident that to have ECEs working in pairs was more beneficial not only for documentation but also for strong interactions with the children. This increased the likelihood of more comprehensive recording of each child's learning and more one-on-one interaction with them. Because collegiality and discussion about children's learning is a fundamental belief in the Reggio Emilia approach, educators always work in pairs and maintain these collegial relationships (Fero, 2000; Gandini, 1993; Edwards et al. 1998). Another finding from my observations was that the educators still think of a project as a whole group/class activity, whereas in the Reggio Emilia approach working in small groups is encouraged and projects can be of varied duration according to the children's interest in the particular project (LeBlanc, 2009). In the next section, both the indoor and outdoor environment of each of the three centres will be discussed.

## **Environment**

### **Theme 13: Varied outdoor environments encourage learning through authentic natural play.**

All three centres have the use of an outdoor area. The three outdoor areas are quite different from each other and each offer something unique to the children. One has to keep in mind that the structural buildings of these centres have been there long before they started to

implement the Reggio Emilia approach. Several changes have been made to make the outdoor environment more conducive to learning. In winter, when these areas are covered in snow, they are still used by the children if the temperature is not too low.

The Sunshine centre has an outdoor area which has two wooden high houses, a small sandpit, wooden benches, swings, climbing frames, two huge tires and various other pieces of equipment for children to use. At one side of the outdoor area there is a grassed space where the children can play with balls or have water play during the summer months:

A group of mixed aged children were using the tires as a trampoline by jumping on the edges of the tires and going round and round...a boy picked up a stick and ran the stick along the metal railings to hear the sound it made...a girl was measuring how long the play truck was by putting small rocks near each other...some other children were drawing a rainbow on the paving with different colour chalk (Field notes May 19, 2010).

The Butterfly centre has the use of a public park which is located behind the learning centre. It offers the children both structural play by means of swings, climbing frames and see-saws, and also unstructured play in a treed part of the park, which the children call 'their woods'. Here the children can climb trees, explore the long grass, look for insects and other living things, and build pretend campfires with sticks found on the ground:

A five year old boy found a worm in the grass. He picked it up and was intrigued at the way it wriggled. He went around showing it to his friends...the grass is longer in the treed area and makes a good hiding place for hide-and-seek games, or for those children who want to just go and lie down in a quiet spot on the grass...one girl came up to me and said: "This is our woods. We love it. People litter in our woods sometimes." You could hear the pride in her voice as she told me this. For me, this observation reinforced the

value of ownership that this child had learnt about 'their woods' and about how important it was for the children in that centre (Field notes June 8, 2010).

A rain puddle in the woods attracted the attention of three children from the four and five year old group. One child got a stick and started stirring the water in the puddle when she discovered that there were leaves and seeds in the water. She pulled those out of the puddle to show to her friends, and then she searched for more. Other children joined her with their own sticks. A girl found a baseball in the grass and came running to show it to the educator who was standing near the puddle interacting with the other children. The educator asked the girl what she would like to do with the ball. The girl thought for a while and then decided to drop it into the puddle. She was surprised to see that it splashed her when she did that. She laughed, took one of the sticks, and pulled it out again (Field notes June 4, 2010).

The Sandy centre, which is a for-profit centre, has access to a large outdoor play area which has recently been renovated with the participation of staff and parents. It has two large sandpits that children can run around in, with a wooden bridge in between. There is a wooden boat and a large tire in one sandpit and a wooden play house in the other sandpit. Children can take off their shoes and go into the sandpits and dig, explore and experiment with sand. In the 'child' section, I have already mentioned some examples of how children were experimenting with the different properties of sand. At the end of the sandpit, there is a large wooden castle that the children can go into and practice their gross motor skills. At the other end of the sandpit, there are slides coming down grass banks with small car tires placed inside grooves dug up in the bank to serve as steps to go up to the slides. Another corner is covered in woodchips and in it there are various pieces of logs, all of different heights. These can either serve as stepping stones

or seats for children to sit on. There is also a paved track going around the sandpits and the castle for children to use the tricycles, or push toy trucks on. There is a laundry sink in one corner where children can get water to play with in the sand or in other basins. It also serves the teachers to water plants while they are outside with the children and to fill basins of water for the children to wash their feet in from the sand before going back inside:

A couple of four year old boys were trying their balancing skills on the edges of the wooden boat...two toddlers were filling up cups with sand and taking them over to the play house where they were role playing as parents (Field notes June 10, 2010).

A group of four year old boys were digging a big hole in the sand. The deeper they went the wetter the sand was. They noticed that the sand was now sticking to the spade and one boy commented that that was because of the sand being wet. There was a lot of collaboration going on in the sandpit as the hole got bigger and bigger and was being filled with water. Children were taking turns to shovel while others were coming and going, carrying buckets full of water (Field notes June 18, 2010).

It had rained yesterday so most of the things in the outdoors area were wet. This gave the children an opportunity to explore a different property of the sand which was all wet. The children enjoyed finding toys that were still full of rain water, and they would either go and empty them in the sandpit, or else in the grass. I noticed that the educators did not stop the children from going down the slides or inside the castle in spite of them being both wet. Through my experience in substituting in this centre as an early childhood educator, I know that this would not usually have been allowed before. Children who were wearing boots could enjoy splashing in the puddles too (Field notes June 21, 2010).

**Theme 14: A variety of materials in the indoor environment engages children in experiential learning.**

The indoor environment in each of the three centres is structurally different but they all offered a wide variety of materials to the children to enhance their exploration, experimentation and learning. Shelves with objects that the children would use are all at their level. Due to space limitations, one particular group in a centre had limited shelving, and so some of the puzzles were up on higher shelves; but the children knew that they could ask an adult to get them down for them. All three centres are changing to more natural indoor environments with natural decorations made by the children hanging from the ceiling in one centre, plants and wicker baskets in another centre, and lobster cages used as shelves for various materials in another.

The Sunshine and Sandy centres both have an *atelier* (studio art centre) in which small groups of children can work on a project or experience different media to represent their ideas. The windows in all the classrooms are at the children's level so they can see the outdoor play and other areas. The Butterfly centre has mini *ateliers* in each group which still offer different media for children to explore and work with. In this centre, each area has a sand tray for children to play with since they do not have that facility outdoors. There is also a wide and spacious up-loft area in the Butterfly centre that is used as a meeting place for the whole centre and then as a play area for the four to five year old group. This allows children to explore and play with large objects such as tractors and wooden blocks. This loft has two large windows at children's level from which they can see outside, (Field notes May 31, 2010).

The lunch areas in two centres allow children and ECEs to sit in small groups and eat together. The tables are covered with tablecloths and set by the children and their educators

working together. It is a system where children serve themselves. Food is provided by the centre to the children and to the educators as well.

In one centre I experienced the lunch process to be more hurried and less relaxed. The ECEs did not sit and eat with the children. In Reggio, school children have learned from their families to enjoy meal time together, savour the food, and to take their time eating (New, 2001; Gillen et al., 2007). Cadwell (1997) points out that teachers do not eat with the children, but instead one “teacher from each pair helps serve and supervise the meal, while the other sets up the cots in the classroom for nap time” (p. 19). However, this is done for a purpose. The teachers can then eat together in the kitchen and discuss the children’s work that went on in the morning (Cadwell, 1997).

The three centres each have an on-site kitchen which caters to all the children with all their different dietary needs and religious/ethnic choices. They all serve nutritious and healthy choices for snack and lunch times. Cooks at the three centres interact personally with the children. According to the Municipality of Reggio Emilia (2010), the “presence of the cook and the auxiliary personnel in the on-site kitchen at each preschool and infant-toddler centre is an indispensable condition for the educational quality of service” (p. 18). The municipality goes on to say that:

It is an added value that fosters an openness to listening, information, and relations with the families around the issues of diet, health, and well-being, also taking into consideration any certified particular health conditions of the child and the dietary practices dictated by the religious choices of the families (Municipality of Reggio Emilia, 2010, p. 18).

## Parents

### **Theme 15: Positive strength-building, parent-teacher interactions**

During my hours of observations, I had the opportunity to see parents dropping off and picking up their children. However, this only happened about three or four times in each centre as most of the time I was not there during these pick-up times. During my visits I observed very positive parent-teacher interactions. There was hardly ever an instance where the parent just dropped off or picked up the child without speaking to the educators. When I did happen to witness such an instance, it was because the parent was in a hurry to get to work.

In two of the centres, I observed that the parents walked the children up to the educator, who was handling a large group of children on her own, and at the same time keeping an eye on the children, which restricted the time the educator could engage in conversation with the parents. Some parents had to wait in line to get to speak with the educator. In the class-based centre, on the other hand, the children had a choice into which class they go to until 9am when the children then go to their respective classrooms with their educators. So, the parents took the children into the class room and there they could speak to the educator more freely especially in the classroom that had two educators in it as one would be able to greet and meet with the parent while the other was seeing to the needs of the children. In all three centres, parents are welcomed to stay for a while until the child settles. There were a few instances when I saw a parent actually scan the daily sheets binder, while I saw another parent looking at some of the documentation on the walls at each of the Sunshine and Butterfly centres.

There were three instances when I witnessed an interaction or involvement from the parents:

On one occasion, the parent came to pick up her two children while they were all outside playing. Her children called her over and wanted her to come and play with them and their friends. She spent more than half an hour interacting with these children (Field notes June 4, 2010).

Another time a parent came in to pick up her daughter who had just been drawing a pigeon on the outdoor area paving with colour chalk. The girl called her over to see what she had been doing and the parent walked over to see it and praised her child for the good work that she had done (Field notes May 21, 2010).

The third instance was when a mother came to pick up her son who had just been participating in building a fort in the classroom made up of chairs and plastic foam mats. He called her over and proudly showed her what he and his friends had done. She came over and even tried to go inside to sit on the chair, but it was too low for her (Field notes June 23, 2010).

### **Reflections on the observation process**

These six weeks of observations offered me a great opportunity to step back from the role of an early childhood educator, and step into the shoes of a researcher who is observing what goes on at an early learning centre in a normal day. It offered me the opportunity to view everyday events in the life of a centre from different perspectives, and be able to notice happenings that might have been there before, but in the role of an early childhood educator carrying out her daily duties, I would not have noticed. As a researcher and an educator, I could appreciate the educators' frustrations with the lack of time for observing, and fully documenting each child's learning process, especially without a teammate to share that responsibility. This

was more the case for those educators that were working alone with their group of children, as it is very hard to do all the above and at the same time supervise the children.

It bothered me that I could not interact with the children during my observations as that is something that I value very much. However, for the purpose of this study, I had to keep my distance from the children, as I did not want to influence their actions, while at the same time being amicable enough with them to make them feel comfortable with me being in their environment. Being an early childhood educator myself, I also found it hard to be in these centres observing educators and supervisors, some of whom have previously been my bosses or colleagues. It was also surprising to realise that there were items in the indoor and outdoor environments of these centres, which I either had not noticed before, or to which I had not given a lot of thought. This goes to show how difficult it is for an individual to observe his/her surroundings when they are part of them. As a person looking from the outside, I found that I could observe so much more. However, in spite of all this, I was able to fulfill my desire to observe children at play, something that I had always wished I could do as an ECE, but did not always find the time for it. Now I had managed to give myself 60 whole hours to do it in. I found this experience to be an enriching and interesting one.

From my observations, I found that each centre is trying its best to implement the emergent curriculum based on the principles of the Reggio Emilia approach. Having either worked, substituted or volunteered in these three centres, I can say that educators' image of the child is that of them being capable and competent, and that these educators have learnt to trust the children's abilities more than they used to before. The educators collaborate as much as possible with the children and work alongside them instead of being superior to them. This could be seen through my observations in all three centres as educators gave children choices instead

of telling them directly what to do, and asked for their ideas during activities. The environment is serving as a third teacher as it offers rich opportunities for the children to explore, research, and learn more. I have seen the environments in the three centres slowly but steadily change during the seven years of different opportunities I had to be in these centres. Some of the educators are starting to see themselves as researchers while working with the children. When children ask questions that the educator perhaps cannot answer, or when the children show an interest in a certain topic, educators are taking the step forward to look up answers and information through the Internet or other sources, as I have seen through my observations. Others perhaps are doing it but not acknowledging it as research. Parental involvement seems to have improved since these centres started following the Reggio Emilia approach as discussed earlier on in this chapter. However, as noted by all educators and supervisors in their interviews, more work still needs to be done in this area to actively engage parents more, and help them feel part of the centre, even more than they are at present. Documentation about the learning process of the children could be seen in all three centres.

Section B will now discuss the findings of the interviews conducted with centres' supervisors and ECEs and parents, and their relation to the research questions of this study.

## **Section B: Interviews**

### **Introduction**

Since this section of the data collection had three different sets of participants, it called for different interview questions for each group. Two common categories amongst all the three groups resulted from the coding and analyses of the interviews, while two other categories were shared between supervisors and ECEs only. An additional category was shared by ECEs and parents only. This resulted in a total of five organizing categories which can be viewed in Figure

4.2. An outline of the 30 themes that emerged from these categories, pertaining to the three sets of participants, is graphically laid out in Figures 4.3a - c. The five categories are:

- (a) The Reggio Emilia approach (shared by supervisors, ECEs and parents)
- (b) Training opportunities (shared by supervisors and ECEs)
- (c) Further supports needed to implement the Reggio Emilia approach (shared by supervisors and ECEs)
- (d) Parental Involvement (shared by supervisors, ECEs and parents)
- (e) Documentation (shared by ECEs and parents)

Quotations from the transcripts are presented in this section to amplify each theme and to suggest possibilities for their applicability to other early childhood settings (Patton, 2002). These quotations are interspersed with citations from the established literature where and as relevant. Interview questions and responses shared by more than one of the three sets of interviewees (supervisors, ECEs, and parents) will be discussed first in this section. Other interview questions and responses which were relevant to a specific group only, will conclude Section B of this chapter.

**Figure 4.2 – Link between research questions and interviews**

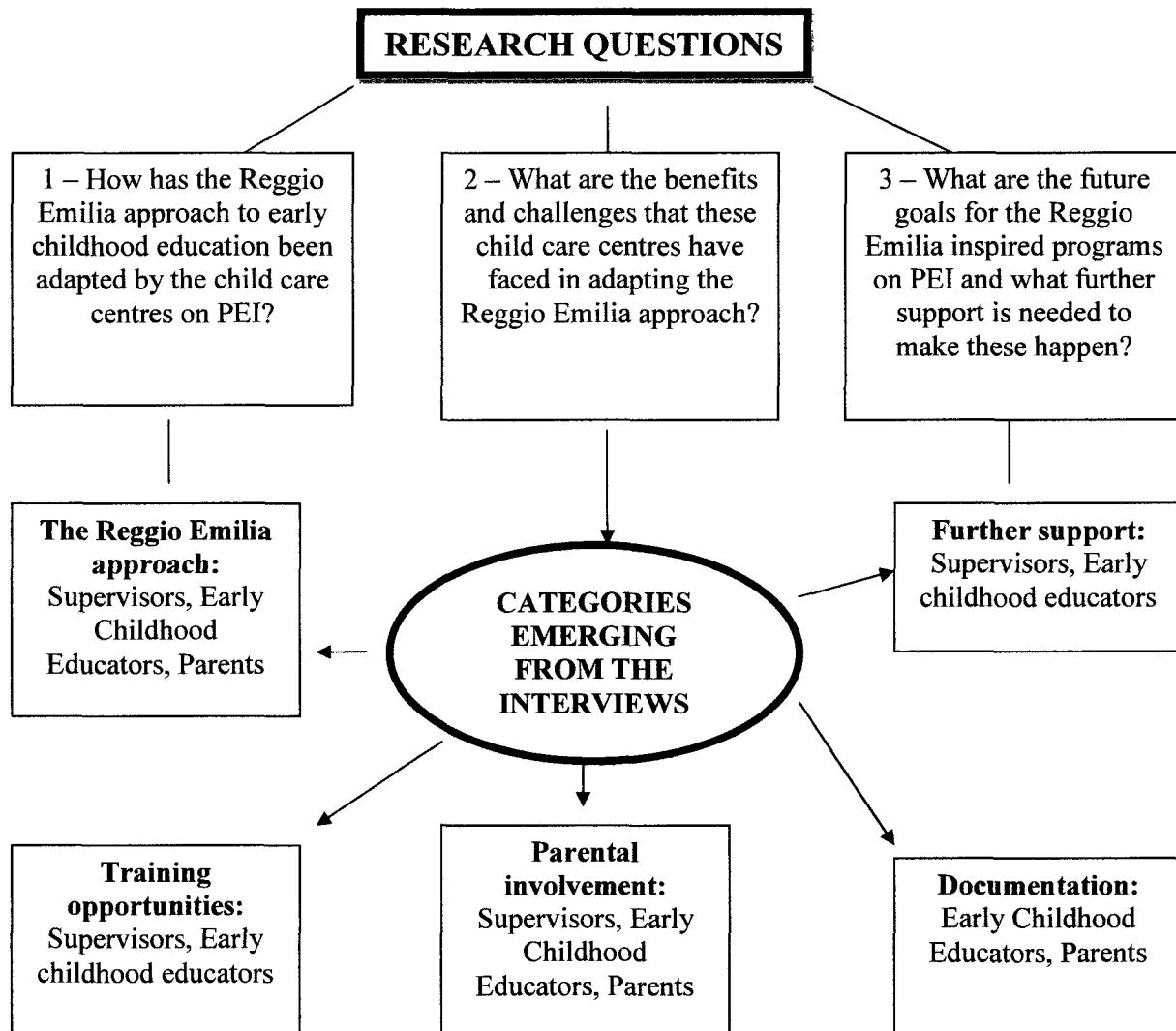


Figure 4.2 gives a graphical view of how the categories that emerged from the interviews related to the original research questions.

**Figure 4.3a: Themes emerging from interviews – Supervisors**

<i>Theme Number</i>	<i>Participant</i>	<i>Theme</i>
1	SUPERVISORS	Vital role that coaches and mentors played in achieving the commitment of the supervisors to put the Reggio Emilia philosophy into action.
4		Young children are honoured for their capability to construct and direct their own learning
5		Teachers are validated and encouraged in their role as action researchers
6		Authentic learning partnerships are nurtured
9		Overcoming initial teacher fears, apprehensions, and self-doubt
11		The value of site-visits to a Reggio-inspired centre
13		Expose centre staff to more visiting experts on the Reggio Emilia approach in action
14		Creating new partnerships with other Reggio-inspired centres
16		Engaging parents by providing documentation and a welcoming environment
26		Incremental, small steps ensure more lasting change
27		The vital role played by the early learning coach
28		Team teaching and policy changes

**Figure 4.3b: Themes emerging from interviews – Educators**

<i>Theme Number</i>	<i>Participant</i>	<i>Theme</i>
2	EDUCATORS	Balancing teacher directed and child directed activities
7		Deeper levels of ownership by both children and educators
8		Soaring children; energizing staff, learning surprises
10,23		Time demands for comprehensively documenting children's learning
12		The value of training opportunities
15		Reorganize staff to work in teams of two
17		Engaging parents more actively in their children's learning
25		Documentation gives voice and ownership to children

**Figure 4.3c: Themes emerging from interviews – Parents**

<i>Theme Number</i>	<i>Participant</i>	<i>Theme</i>
3	<b>PARENTS</b>	'We may not fully understand it: but it is working for our child'
18		Defining parental involvement to mean reinforcing at home what is being done at the early learning centre
19		Willingness to involve themselves in the centres' activities <i>if and when</i> asked
20		Attending special events is considered important
21		Relevance of regularly discussing educational issues with ECEs
22		Interacting daily with ECEs
24		Staying involved with their children's learning through documentation
29		Involvement in children's learning is beneficial but challenging owing to time constraints
30		Feeling the need to be asked by ECEs to become more involved

### **The Reggio Emilia approach**

**Theme 1: Vital role that coaches and mentors played in achieving the commitment of the supervisors to put the Reggio Emilia philosophy into action.**

Interviews with supervisors started off with a question about how and when they became interested in the Reggio Emilia approach. Two supervisors mentioned that an early childhood coach introduced them to the approach in 2006, while the other supervisor was introduced to the Reggio Emilia approach back in 1994 by a different early childhood mentor.

The role of the early childhood coach is to provide support and guidance to licensed early childhood, kindergarten and school age care programs in ways that enhance the quality of care and education the children receive. This has been done through an on-site consultation approach in partnership with program supervisors/owners. Evaluation of learning environments has

provided an opportunity to develop programs and services, identify strengths and challenges and establish priorities for change or development. This has included customized training supports, access to resources and planning processes. The supports have included: the development of the learning environment, exploring different curriculum approaches, increasing inclusion practices, and supporting team development, and staff resources (Goodine, B., personal communication September 8, 2010). On the other hand, a mentor is an ECE with experience in the field, who takes responsibility of another ECE who is just starting out in the early childhood field.

I guess the early childhood coach would be our inspiration...she was the one who inspired us more, and we do have several books. Some that the coach suggested and some that staff members had. These helped confirm, and support ideas behind the approach. Some of our staff had already believed in some of that, so it just confirmed that this is the way to go...how many years ago...now let me think of who was the president of our board...it was at least three or four years ago. I only know because I had a hard time trying to explain it to the president of the board... (Sup 1)

For the following supervisor the knowledge about emergent curriculum started earlier than that of the other two centres. However, this centre started practicing the Reggio Emilia approach at the same time as the other centres through the help of the early childhood coach.

It was many years ago, through a mentor who had gone off Island and she learned about the High Scope [program of early childhood] and then after teaching us about High Scope she discovered the Reggio Emilia approach and she came back and said: "Oh this is just amazing," and she shared her learning with us. She did some workshops for the staff at the centre at that time, and it just set so nicely with my own personal beliefs and values about how children learn and respecting their ability to explore and discover things for

themselves that I felt I really, really liked it...We opened here around '94 so it was around that time. (Sup 2)

The journey started about four years ago. I went to a workshop run by an early childhood coach and it sparked an interest in me that I wanted to find out more, so of course then I got online and ordered a couple of books so I could read the books about the Reggio Emilia approach. The more I read the books the more it felt like it was me and who I was searching for...learning happens through play was something I truly believed in and in fact that's kind of my grassroots, children learn through play. So I went through different philosophies [with my centre], and went through with my journey for about 12 years, developing things in different ways...I was always searching, and turning corners and looking, and then like I said 4 years ago...boom...went to that workshop and that's when, after reading the book, I said: "this is it! This supports my [belief in children] learning through play". It also empowers the children, and the thought of them being co-learners with us, and collaborators, building relationships, that the children are capable and competent. That is when I went: 'That is me! That is where I want to take my centre'.

(Sup 3)

Findings indicated that the three supervisors were all well informed about the approach. Supervisors 2 and 3 have also had the opportunity to go for a study tour in Reggio Emilia, Italy in May 2010. These supervisors met later on and discussed how they could move forward. They took the initiative from there to keep on learning more about the Reggio Emilia approach. One has to point out that these supervisors run a for-profit centre, while supervisor 1 runs a not-for-profit early learning centre.

## Participants' thoughts about the Reggio Emilia approach: ECEs

### Theme 2: Balancing teacher directed and child directed activities

The early childhood educators (ECE) were asked what they thought of the Reggio Emilia approach. Findings show that one ECE was sceptical of the approach. However, she now cannot imagine that she could ever go back to the way she taught before:

I was a little sceptical at first because I am a planner. I like to know what I'm doing, I like to have it ready, and so at first I really struggled with this approach. Now I can't imagine going back to our daily planning sheets and having everything planned. It's just so nice to be able to go with the flow of the kids, go with what they want to learn, and being able to tie every aspect of their learning into that...it's just nice to have the flexibility now and not have to worry so much, but still see the amazing learning that is going on in the classroom. (ECE 1)

This is reinforced in the Reggio Emilia philosophy where educators do not use formal lesson plans as this would not allow for the open-ended time necessary for “the depth of children's interpretation of content” (Wexler, 2004 p.16).

Another ECE felt that she was deprogramming herself and going back to basics:

My thoughts about it are...we are going back to basics. In a way when I lived in Quebec, before I had my training, I was the one who ran a centre there. The children would say: “let's go outside today” and we would go in the forest, or we go down to the little river and play with sticks, whatever they wanted to do. It was very much a natural “you want to do that...ok let's do it.” So that was how I did it...and then I came and got my training and that stopped. Then it was “you have to plan, you have to do this, you have to have

charts, you have to get all these curriculum areas met", and that aspect seemed lost then, and now it is getting back to the basics, to what children want to do. (ECE 2)

ECE 2 also thinks that the Reggio Emilia approach helps you to work with your heart and allow the children to take the lead:

I think that when we go with our natural instincts we listen to the children's hearts. When we work with our brains, and I do not mean that in a negative way, instead of with our heart, that's when we do the book work with the children...but when we truly work with our heart, what our gut instinct says, that's when we are meeting the children's needs and going with the flow. (ECE 2)

ECE 3 said that the Reggio Emilia approach naturally followed along with her personal values about children. She also commented on the fact that the Reggio Emilia approach promotes the use of natural materials such as: pieces of wood, sticks, leaves, petals, and small pieces of logs that the children can explore and create with. Strozzi (2006) contends that children should be provided with materials that pose questions and elicit answers, rather than materials that impose themselves on the children:

I LOVE it! I love it! Why do I love it? ... it very much follows along with my own personal philosophy before I even read anything about Reggio Emilia. I've always been a big proponent of less is more, the more raw materials you give children to work with, the more they can do with them: the more processed materials are, the less they're able to do with them...so I love when we are playing with rocks and sticks, and playing with wooden blocks, and creating...creating the things we need to make what *we* [the children] want! (ECE 3)

This ECE also commented that the Reggio Emilia approach seemed to bring about a balance between educator direction and children's freedom of choice. This is also stated in Forman (1993, p. 6) "they [the educators] seem to have mastered the balance between direct instruction and self-regulated learning."

I also really love the balance...having some things that are teacher directed but then giving the children the freedom, to take what you taught them in a more directed setting, and apply it to their every day, you know, to their every day choice, and how they make choices, and how they play or use the materials or interact with each other. I do think that there needs to be this balance in our culture. (ECE 3)

### **Participants' thoughts about the Reggio Emilia approach: Parents**

#### **Theme 3: 'We may not fully understand it: but it is working for our child'**

Parents were also asked about what they thought of the learning approach that was being implemented in their centres. This was not referred to as the 'Reggio Emilia approach' because I was not sure that everyone would know what the learning approach is called. Indeed, as it turned out most of the parents did not know a great deal about the approach and even less about its name. This could be due to the fact that, when it was introduced to early childhood centres on PEI, it was introduced as 'emergent curriculum' rather than 'the Reggio Emilia approach'. It was later that even the supervisors of these centres made the connection between the two through personal development training and their own research. This was found to be true as well in a study about parental reactions to the introduction to the Reggio Emilia approach in five Head Start Classrooms in Iowa, USA (Secrest, McClow & Wilson Gillespie, 1998).

It is pertinent to point out here that one of the parents interviewed teaches a course about emergent curriculum, so this person's knowledge about the subject far outweighed what the other

parents knew about the Reggio Emilia approach. Two of the parents said that they were uncomfortable with the approach but still thought it worked:

I still am not quite comfortable with the play base. I think if I saw it in action a little bit more, I would feel better about it. I still believe that kids should be taught that: "this week you learn about body parts, and this week you learn about rocks and this week you learn about animals," because then I think they're learning...but our daughter is thriving and clearly doing it, so I have to agree that it is good and if the whole province is adopting it [the play base curriculum], there's got to be something to it I guess. Maybe I'm just a bit old school that way, about learning. (Par 1)

Our daughters are thriving so something must be working. So yeah we can't argue with that kind of thing, but we still want to make sure they don't get pigeon holed into girls doing the girls' stuff and boys doing the boy's stuff...though some of the boys do paint their nails too at the spa. (Par 1a)

These parents were telling me that one of the centre's projects was creating a spa for the children as that was their interest at the moment. Both parents had concerns that their daughters were only being exposed to girls' stuff and boys would be more inclined to have different interests. At the same time, they did acknowledge that other learning was going on as well: such as running a business and doing payrolls:

I think it's because children are given choices, and I like the way it's done. (Par 2)

They pick an interest and then they develop upon that interest, and that's great because it's...at two or two and a half you can only hold your interest for so long on anything, and if it's something that you don't like you are not going to hold your interest at all. But

when it's something that they're interested in and they develop on that, they're going to hold their interest longer and learn a bit more. I like the way they do things. (Par 2a)

The other three parents were in favour of the approach, not necessarily because they understood it but because their children seemed to be doing well and were happy to be at the learning centres. Others commented that they liked certain aspects of it: children have more freedom, educators ask for children's ideas, and the idea of free play and learning through play:

Well, that's something that I am not completely familiar with. I know that everything that they do seems to be working. She [his daughter] has only been here for two years but the two years that she's been here she has had a great time, she always has had a great day.

She never comes back and says she's bored. (Par 3a)

Personally, I value the emergent curriculum approach and I am pleased to see that there is that transition happening. But I have heard and read that it's a 7 to 10 year sort of cycle, to move from the traditional to the fully emergent...so they are getting there, we're all getting there. In general I *love* what I've seen this year in terms of the children's access to loose materials – has been fabulous and the creations that are coming, and I'm seeing it at home, translated at home where my daughter won't tell me she has nothing to do; she'll go to her art cupboard and just pull out and create, with no prompting from us. The idea that their scotch tape budget has just sky rocketed [laughing] told me a lot. It's just scrap paper and tape...they're going to be creating amazing, amazing things and the ways their brains are being formed, with their own ideas, is irreplaceable. (Par 3)

I can see here now that they talk with the children about projects they would like to do next, and I think they are trying to get the ideas from the kids. They try to get what their interests are... even when the construction was going on they took them to see it, so that

is a little different I think that they do talk about children's ideas, kind of get their consensus. (Par 4)

...we wouldn't see a difference or contrast between teaching styles because we wouldn't have children who experienced it differently, but we've had two very happy boys that have developed...actually quite well in that approach or whatever the approach that the school has taken. (Par 4a)

Well, I totally agree on the way they teach them here. It's really surprising how much the kids learn, yet they're not being made to sit down and just be made to learn. It's done in such a playful way. Yes, I like their approach here. (Par 5)

I think it works. I know it works because my older child attended here too and when she got to school [public system] they immediately identified that she had come from this centre...so it obviously worked because she was ready for school and she was advanced in her reading and other skills. It works and they are learning and they are happy. I like that they have directed [teacher directed] learning in the morning and that they have free choice during that learning, and I like that they get to interact with all age groups in the afternoon...I like that they can move quickly [with learning] because they're all the same age, at the same stage in the morning and the one can experiment with different ages and stages in the afternoon. (Par 6)

These findings show that more information about the Reggio Emilia philosophy and principles need to be given to parents. It seems that those parents who were not familiar with the term: Reggio Emilia approach, still could feel that their children were getting a high quality early childhood learning based on the fact that their children were doing well and that they went to school without any fuss or problems. The next category is about benefits, if any, that the

supervisors and ECEs see as resulting from being a Reggio-inspired centre and discusses themes that emerged from this category.

### **Benefits: Supervisors**

#### **Theme 4: Young children are honoured for their capability to construct and direct their own learning.**

Supervisors were asked to share any benefits they saw coming out of the implementation of the Reggio Emilia approach. All three supervisors responded that one of the main benefits of the Reggio Emilia approach was the validation of the image of the child as being capable and competent. This is also referred to in New (1998) who says that: “the image of the child that is projected and promoted by Reggio Emilians is one of competence, entitlement and connectedness to others” (p. 15).

...it brings their [children's] interest in, and you are able to draw them that much further, and if you're engaged in something that you're interested in you're going to learn tenfold, whereas if it is something that you *have* to do, or you are not that interested...so with that goes less behavioural problems, less bored children or not interested. (Sup 1)

The benefit to the children is that it helps them to learn independence, it helps them to realise that they are capable and competent beings and that they have the ability and the knowledge that they need to take them to the next step of their education and where they need to be along their developmental continuum...children learn in spite of what we do, as educators and parents and adults, and I think that it [the Reggio Emilia approach] helped me to understand the value in helping children discover information on their own. Topics of interest though, not things that *I* think are important for children to know, but things that the children want to learn about, for themselves and for their friends, and I

think they can learn all of these wonderful curriculum outcomes that we think they need to know about if we let them discover and explore their environment on their own. (Sup 2)

A similar statement to that of Sup 2 is also mentioned by Gandini (2008): "all children have preparedness, potential, curiosity; they have interest in relationship, in constructing their own learning, and in negotiating with everything the environment brings them" (p. 5). The third supervisor agreed with the above and stated that:

It validates everything they [the children] do in the classroom for sure, without a doubt, which then gives them power, purpose for learning. They see that we want to hear what they have to say, that their opinion counts in our classrooms...that the children are capable and competent, and that we just have to be closer to them if they are climbing and be more observant and things like that... (Sup 3)

**Theme 5: Teachers are validated and encouraged in their role as action researchers**

The supervisors were also asked to think about what benefits the Reggio Emilia approach had provided to their staff and to their centre as a whole. Two of the supervisors replied that the Reggio Emilia approach had helped educators to either reaffirm or discover their competences. Another supervisor sees these centres as being potential mentors to other centres who want to start implementing the Reggio Emilia approach:

For the staff...again a couple of the senior staff who were really, intrinsically believed in this all along, it gives them affirmation that this was the way to go and it is vital for them.

For the program as a whole, well, if the children and staff are happy, and engaged, and learning more, then again that speaks volumes as well. (Sup 1)

...it helps us to uncover skills within ourselves that we did not realise we had – the ability to be a researcher. I think that is huge, I think that oftentimes, for myself, I say I hate research, I don't like doing research, and then I realise I'm doing research. I think that it allows us the opportunity to just step back and observe and it helps us develop skills and knowledge, and takes us on a professional development journey that I don't think we would be able to go on otherwise...For the centre, since we've started to *really* look into the Reggio approach, we've been...kind of mentoring I think a lot of educators and other centres in the sector here on PEI. So I think by opening up to centres and saying that this is the way we want to go, and encouraging professional development in our own community, it helps other centres to do the same thing. (Sup 2)

#### **Theme 6: Authentic learning partnerships are nurtured**

Supervisor 3 thought that it nurtured relationships between staff and children: something that she had not experienced so deeply before. She also noticed that parental involvement had increased since they started implementing this approach as one of the fundamental principles of Reggio is to actively involve parents:

For me, it's about the relationships with the children. I know these children better than I knew the children I was teaching 10 years ago. I know what their interests are now, when I'm working with a project with one of the children, I know what their interests are, to a deep, deep level. I know what makes them tick. I know those children so well, through my observations. I think that is probably the biggest thing for our early childhood educators. It's the relationship and the co-learning and research that happen in the class and they understand that children need those ideas, and the learning is happening. It's *so* happening every day, deeper...for my centre, I think that parents are more involved in

what their children are partaking in. So what we're doing, validating the children's work, showing their learning, has really made that connection. And we seem to be much closer to the parents. It's not just a drop off centre. They come into the classroom because they want to see [the documentation]...so it's been a real movement, and I think that's what we like. (Sup 3)

Katz (1994) contends that: "children's enthusiasm and eagerness to come to school to work on their projects have impressed their parents more than any other parental involvement strategy used" (p. 13).

Documentation is an important component of the Reggio Emilia approach (Hall et al. 2010). Gandini (1998) asserted that one of the main functions of documentation was "to make parents aware of their children's experience and maintain parental involvement..." (p. 8).

### **Benefits: ECEs**

#### **Theme 7: Deeper levels of ownership by both children and educators**

After the ECEs shared their initial thoughts about the Reggio Emilia approach, they were asked to talk about the benefits that they noticed as resulting from this approach. All three educators agreed that the major benefit was for the child. The approach gives children a sense of ownership to what they do. This is very much in step with the fundamental principle of the Reggio Emilia approach, that the child is the protagonist and that the child has the potential to construct his or her own learning (Fero, 2000). All three educators also talked about how the approach benefited the staff by helping them to work more as a team and share ideas, and by building their self esteem:

I love...just...the children, I don't know if it's their openness, they just feel free, they know that they can spend as much time or as less time as they want, and they're really

exploring more, they're finding ways to use different materials in ways that we never thought we would necessarily use in an activity. I really enjoy that...it gives them a sense of ownership. (ECE 1)

...I find that as a staff we really have come together. One educator may have a really good idea that I didn't think of and is willing to share it. It's really great to work together and share what we are doing in the classroom. (ECE 1)

Wien (2008), talks about how an emergent curriculum "wakes up schools and brings teachers, children, and administrators together in collaborative, creative processes of learning" (p. 5). ECE 2 feels this enthusiasm in her group as well:

I love that it's what the children want so the children get excited about it. I love that.

When you see the children getting excited about it you can get excited about it too and it is not a '*have to*' job then...I think it gives them [the children] ownership, it gives them excitement, it gives them a love for it when they look at something and say: "hey we are doing that because I said I like that" then what a sense of empowerment that is to them.

(ECE 2)

It's good for the staff's self esteem to feel successful as educators as well. (ECE 2)

### **Theme 8: Soaring children, energizing staff, learning surprises**

Malaguzzi (1998) insists that persons who work with and study about children "have ended up with discovering not so much the limits and weakness of children but rather their surprising and extraordinary strengths and capabilities..." (p. 78). ECE 3 speaks to this statement during the interview:

...the way there seems to be so much more representation for children in this approach, how it really, not necessarily focuses, but it seems to lend itself to having more

opportunities just to do sketching or representing ideas in different ways, it gives them more of a chance to show you what they're thinking – and it's what *they're* thinking and not what you think they should be thinking. Because most of the time they never disappoint you, and if anything they surprise you...the approach allows children to progress at their own pace, to be able to do as much or as little as they need to do to meet their needs. It really allows them to soar. (ECE 3)

The staff members are happier. It makes it easier for the person who has to supervise if everybody is kind of following along...there's a very easy flow to it. (ECE 3)

There were other benefits that were mentioned by ECEs besides the benefit for the child, which I think are worth mentioning. One educator felt that, because children are engaged in various activities that interest them, she does not have to do a lot of group activities but can concentrate in interacting and working with individual children as the needs arise:

It gives me a chance to do some one-on-one work with children. It frees me up and this allows for a nice flow in the classroom as well....I love the larger blocks of time. (ECE 1)

The following educator felt that, once they started basing projects on children's interests, the children and herself were more excited about what they were finding out and learning than before when the projects were planned out only by the ECE:

When you are out there, when you are in a project with the children, and it's their ideas, you go home energised by it. You go home excited about it and can't wait to get there again tomorrow and keep going... I think that, if the children are allowed to explore and grow, they will be happier and more successful. This will cause parents to feel happy seeing their children progress and flourish. (ECE 2)

Neugebauer (1994) says that Reggio educators are fully engaged with the child in the process of learning. "They are with the child as an idea develops, a project takes shape, and a discovery unfolds." (p. 68)

ECE 3 noted that the Reggio Emilia philosophy challenges traditional ways of teaching in non-threatening ways:

They [the children] surprise you with how much they understand but it also really makes it easy for an educator, to see where their understanding has broken down. I can also see where my teaching has broken down. Because if I can present an idea, or a concept and I think everybody has understood, or I think that I've done a great job in presenting it, and then through their play I notice that they don't understand that at all....I did not do a good job on that. So as an educator, it means that it is for me to take that ownership back, that I need to challenge myself to do things a little bit differently...for whatever reason this approach seems to make it very easy for someone to do that, for me to do that without feeling attacked or getting defensive...it's just that I did not do it in the way that was meaningful for them. I need to change...and that's ok. (ECE 3)

She also saw the Reggio Emilia approach as being a community builder within her group of children:

[The Reggio Emilia approach] is such a community building program the way that it is, it just seems to build and foster that friendship...it is not uncommon for children in my group to sit with each other and be complimenting each other's work and offering help and assistance... (ECE 3)

## Challenges: Supervisors

### Theme 9: Overcoming initial teacher fears, apprehensions, and self-doubts

Both supervisors and ECEs were asked to share their thoughts about any challenges or limitations that they could see in implementing the Reggio Emilia approach. One main concern for the supervisors was to get everyone (both staff and parents) on board. Another challenge for the supervisors was to learn to trust in themselves to move forward and make the change from a more traditional, directed curriculum. The three quotes that follow speak about these challenges:

It is hard to explain this approach to someone who doesn't understand it. So, at first, when we changed the approach, we had a couple of board members, one in particular, the chairman of the board, who didn't get it. She really didn't understand it...well she thought it was too unorganized, unplanned, less structured. She was afraid we weren't going to cover all of the materials, all of the topics that her son needed to succeed in kindergarten...it took a while to explain to those people who are highly organized and work in steps 1, 2, and then 3... it was challenging that way. There were some "old school" educators, more set in their ways that found this approach too abstract. It took a lot to train them to tune their observational skills, even a couple of younger staff – one in particular said: "Oh I feel like you don't do anything now, like the children don't even want me to participate." And you're like: "Hello!!" so that was a challenge as far as that goes. (Sup 1)

...because many educators, teachers, don't see themselves as researchers, they get hung up on that term "research" and therefore there's a fear in moving forward. I think change always brings about a certain amount of fear, a certain amount of insecurity. So I think that one of the challenges is because it is different than what we've been doing in the

past, that sometimes those fears are preventing very gifted educators from moving forward because they haven't learnt how to trust themselves. Another challenge is that there are so few centres on PEI doing this [the Reggio Emilia approach], it's difficult for us to come out of our environment and go into another environment to see what we would like to have happen here. But I think the biggest challenge really is people's own fears and insecurities. (Sup 2)

Fullen & Miles (1992) speak about the fact that change brings with it uncertainty, anxiety and difficulties. They go on to say that change is a journey of learning and understanding and that "one can be good at something new" (p. 746).

Supervisor 3 found it a challenge to get all the staff to believe in themselves and in the change that they were embarking upon:

...I had to get everybody on board with it [the Reggio Emilia approach] here, which sometimes, you know, change is hard, change can be difficult but I truly believed in what this vision looked like. The biggest challenge for us, and that we felt, was us: to be able to believe that we're able and competent. Us, to believe that what we're doing in the classroom can be validated to parents, to other early childhood educators, to the government; that we can prove it, and us feeling the confidence in us being teachers. Mostly it's believing in ourselves in what we're doing and feeling confident in what we're doing and getting other people to jump on the wagon with us. The next challenge was how to take the parents on the journey...we had to have them believe in it, so they could tell their friends, so that this thing could catch on fire. (Sup 3)

## Challenges: ECEs

### Theme 10: Time demands for comprehensively documenting children's learning

Documentation is the process where educators observe, listen and record children's process of learning during their daily activities in the centre. These recordings are later compiled in carefully designed panels making the process of learning visible to children, and parents (Cadwell, 1997). Wien (2008) contends that the "process [of documentation] is excessively time-consuming" (p. 155) if it is to be done properly. This theme emerged above all others from the analyses of the ECEs interview transcripts when asked to talk about the challenges of the Reggio Emilia approach:

...to find time to document is sometimes hard, especially in the classroom by myself, sometimes I'm doing cruise control, room control, and I know I sometimes miss the little important stuff that is happening. (ECE 1)

It's the documentation and finding the time to do it that is challenging cause if we don't have time during our day it has to happen at night and I have so many things in the evening that I cannot get it done. So unfortunately the documentation doesn't get done the way I want it to get done, or 'should' be done. So that's a challenge... (ECE 2)

One particular ECE seemed to have a misconception of how children in Reggio schools spend their day:

...a guest speaker [invited over by the Early Childhood Development Association] came and spoke to us about her trip to Reggio Emilia and some of the things that she got to learn about the program there. One of the things I had a really hard time with [about what she said] was the way the children's day looked and how children will be asked to make a commitment... maybe they would go and work in a certain area of the school for hours

without being able to change to something else. That commitment part was really hard for me to wrap my head around because the four year olds in our society, in our culture, to ask them to make a commitment to something like that for that long of a time, didn't seem ok for me. (ECE 3)

Cadwell (1997), in her book *Bringing Reggio Home*, describes a day at a particular Reggio school she had visited during her internship there. She contends that teachers gather up with the children around 9 am, and discuss with them projects they were working on the day before, and who was still working on what that morning, while others start working on something new. Here is an example of such a gathering:

Carla, you, Agnese, and Elise were working on the class newspaper you have organized. Would you like to continue? Would you like to work on the computer today? Some children have been invited to help the 3-year-olds with working with wire. Who would like to do that? Are there two of you who would like to play checkers? Two can continue to use the coloured inks at the light table to paint your plants you brought back after the summer. Bobo, Marco, Ale and Omar, you are still working on your drawings of your theories about trees with Marina [the other educator] in the mini-*atelier*, aren't you? Are there other ideas you would like to suggest? (p. 18).

Cadwell (1997) points out that "children are fully engaged in their work from shortly after 9 until sometime after 11. At this time, some children finish the morning's work and wander out of the doors of their classroom to play outside..." (p. 18).

The next question was asked to both supervisors and ECEs about training opportunities that were offered or received respectively, about the Reggio Emilia approach.

**Training opportunities offered to staff members by supervisors****Theme 11: The value of site visits to a Reggio-inspired centre**

The supervisors were asked what training opportunities have they offered, or planned to offer, their staff to better implement the Reggio Emilia learning approach. The two supervisors that had the opportunity to go to the study tour in Reggio Emilia, Italy, said that they were looking forward to sharing the information they got there with their staff and planning workshops around that. These two supervisors also mentioned that part of the training they offered to their staff members was the visit to Peter Green Hall children's centre in Halifax, Nova Scotia. This centre has been Reggio-inspired since 1997 and served as a model for these two centres:

We've done different things...when we first started talking about emergent curriculum, we talked about the project approach and what that was like...that was a good starting place because it had structure in it and coming from an old way of doing things that was structured, it kind of helped bridge it into the more emergent Reggio way of doing things. Then we explored Susan Stacey's book – Emergent Curriculum in Early Childhood Settings. When we did that book and we [all the staff] were able to take it chapter by chapter and each person was able to present a chapter [during a staff meeting] and then they became sort of the expert in that chapter. In October 2009 the team went to Peter Green Hall Children's Centre in Halifax. Our goal was to see firsthand emergent curriculum practices. This was an invaluable learning experience for everyone who was able to take part...we then were able to come together in our groups and present to each other what we observed and learned. Then of course I went to Reggio Emilia myself recently, and I'm hoping to take the information that I gained from there along with the

people who were there before me or with me, and put on something for the team. My colleague and I are also looking at another book for all the team to go through. (Sup 2) Supervisor three also shares the importance of visiting another Reggio-inspired centre to help her staff see firsthand how this approach was being implemented.

... I contacted Peter Green Hall Children's Centre in Halifax and we, as a staff, went there. We went to different groups and then we met with the teachers at the end of the day and it was very powerful for the girls to see. So we got some cool ideas, came back, started to implement them into our centre...we met every month during our staff meeting and designated an hour, half an hour to the Reggio approach...and then I went and took two staff with me to Peter Green Hall again for three days and in those three days we worked with the children. We did not go as observers... For the future, we plan to connect with the centre from Halifax and the two from PEI and have a big weekend on Reggio... each centre taking a different component of Reggio and talking about that and sharing with all the centres. (Sup 3)

The other supervisor mentioned that she would love to be able to go to Reggio but it was financially impossible to sponsor herself and some of her staff members to go:

Going to Reggio...that would be my dream...I cannot imagine how I could afford to go...it can't even cross my mind. Anything that comes up [learning more about Reggio] that we can go to, we're on board. (Sup 1)

### **Training opportunities received by staff members**

#### **Theme 12: The value of training opportunities**

The three early childhood educators were asked what kind of training opportunities they had been exposed to about the Reggio Emilia approach. All three ECEs mentioned that their

supervisor had read about the Reggio Emilia approach and then shared that information with them. Two educators mentioned their visit to Peter Green Hall children's centre:

When we first started, our supervisor had read a book about Reggio and she was really taken with it, and she thought it might be something interesting and worth trying. So then we went to Halifax at Peter Green Hall and that was *amazing*. We were all on board. We were like: "We need to do this, we need to start this journey" ... so then we got everything going. The supervisor then picked me and another ECE and we went over and spent three days at Peter Green Hall. So that was a *phenomenal* experience and then after that we just...I can't imagine doing it any other way now. (ECE 1)

As for the training I got...I visited Peter Green Hall with the staff and, as well, as a staff we read through Susan Stacey's book – Emergent Curriculum and each presented a chapter during our staff meetings. (ECE 2)

ECE 3 mentioned attending workshops organised by the Early Childhood Development Association (ECDA) and by the early learning coach, who was supporting them through this change:

We've had... there's several resource books in our centre and I do a lot of reading on the computer and we had, I couldn't tell you the names of the workshops, but there were several presenters through the ECDA, who have been brought in over the last couple of years, probably three or four years. Our early childhood coach, she has brought in lots of resources and lots of reading of articles and things like that...I haven't had any specific Reggio training other than presentations of other's people's experience and their journey, and those kinds of things. (ECE 3)

What follows are the findings from the next question: what further support is needed for the early childhood centres on Prince Edward Island to better implement the Reggio Emilia approach.

### **Further support: Supervisors**

#### **Theme 13: Expose centre staff to more visiting experts on the Reggio Emilia approach in action**

When supervisory and teaching staffs of the three centres were asked what further supports they needed to implement the Reggio Emilia approach more effectively, they were clear in their vision for immediate and long range calls of action. Two of the supervisors agreed that getting some financial support to get the staff members to travel to Reggio Emilia for a study tour would be a great help. Supervisor 1 said that having early childhood coaches more available would surely benefit the centre. She also noted that since the director is now out of ratio (does not count in the child to staff ratio) in the Early Years centres according to the Preschool Excellence Initiative (Flanagan, 2010), support for additional staff might be possible.

Well there is the literacy person, she has some good ideas...I'd love to have her and the early childhood coach here full time but it's hard...there are some good ideas at the end and even around, like I said, when the literacy person gave ideas on parents' sessions, there were two or three there [ideas], and I thought: "Oh I'd love to do that!" Once I get those ideas then I can think of: "well if you could support us this way, then I could follow through on this idea", so I have two or three (ideas) written down but it didn't get any further than that. With this new childcare initiative I think that will help too because now we are going to have a director out of ratio and that will lighten my load somewhat and also lighten everyone's, so I think that's going to help in that for sure. You know I'd like

to go to Reggio but there's no way I could do it on a personal level, and there's no way I could take any money out of the centre from the children. I couldn't justify that in my head to take money away from what we're doing with the children, for me to go there...I feel very responsible with the parents' money, so if there was support there, I'd *be* there [in Reggio Emilia] and would love to take a couple of staff with me. Definitely... (Sup 1)

Supervisor 2 thinks that getting more experienced speakers to talk about the Reggio approach would help support the implementation of the Reggio philosophy, and receiving more support from the provincial government or municipality like the people in Reggio Emilia, would also help:

I need to get everyone on the team over to Reggio Emilia (chuckling) to see it firsthand because for myself there were something that I think I formed my own ideas about, and they were kind of misconceptions, and going over and seeing it and hearing it and talking about it with like-minded people was *amazing*... I think if the team could get to do that it would be wonderful. It would be great if there were a lot more workshops and speakers coming to PEI like they are able to get in Ontario. If they could bring that quality of speakers here, and put on the workshops so that we can experience it, I think that would be absolutely super fantastic, because I don't think we could get everybody over to Reggio...I think we need the ECDA to not only advocate for those types of changes to happen but I think they also need to look at the type of speakers they're bringing in...let's bring in Amelia Gambetti, let's bring in Carol Anne Wien again, let's bring in [Dr Stuart] Shanker, let's bring in some of these people who know firsthand about Reggio...and get them here and do it in a way that everybody should go, make it affordable for everyone to attend...if we could get some type of support from our provincial government or even our

township, that Reggio Emilia have from their community, it would be absolutely phenomenal because we could do wonderful amazing things. (Sup 2)

**Theme 14: Creating new partnerships with other Reggio-inspired centres**

One supervisor said that she does not think that she needs any further support as she has her own support system and because she thinks that the ECDA and province are lagging behind in the Reggio Emilia approach and so they cannot be of help to her centre:

For me, I don't think I need support from the ECDA or the province because of the fact that they're behind us. You know, if they started this journey, I might need them...for us it's to keep moving forward and partnering with other strong centres that have the same, truly the same belief that we do... I have ideas that I want to do with the staff because of my visit to Reggio, so I will have my own itinerary, but they [the staff] will have their own thoughts and concerns....And if it means going to Peter Green Hall, or it means whatever, then I'll do it. If I need to contact the early childhood coach, I have no problem doing that either. I also want to do something on the children's rights and how governments need to know... because it is time we start advocating, you know, if they're going to make changes and frameworks and things, we should be heard and listened to about what the Reggio Emilia and integrated curriculum in our centres, because we know now that it works. Not that we're experts by any means; but we feel pretty confident that we can prove that learning happens this way and that's something that we feel the government should be looking at, and listening to. (Sup 3)

Supervisor 3 thinks that she cannot really get any support from the provincial government or the ECDA since none of these two practices the Reggio Emilia approach. At the time of this interview, the Preschool Excellence Initiative (EECD, 2010) had not yet been announced and

there was no set curriculum for preschools on PEI. This new initiative speaks about looking at the child as a whole, as being the focus of learning; that Early Years centres are going to be opened; and that a new preschool curriculum is going to be set for these centres (EECD, 2010).

### **Further support: ECEs**

#### **Theme 15: Reorganize staff to work in teams of two**

When the ECEs were asked what further support they thought they needed so that they could better implement the Reggio Emilia approach, some of their answers differed from those of the supervisors in that a couple of the ECEs think that they need more time so that they can get the documentation done, they need more staff members, and would appreciate less time restrictions:

Right now, things are working; I think it would be beneficial if we all had at least two staff members in each room... two in each classroom will make a big difference. I shared a room last year [with another ECE] and we found that much easier to document. One of us would be kind of doing room control, while the other one was taking the children aside, or we could go to the art studio, so without that support I find a whole lot of limitations this year for myself, being by myself in the classroom. During my program time, I want to get my documentation but that does not leave me with enough time to do other important things...so more time for documenting would be a help. (ECE 1)

While ECE 2 agrees that more time is needed for documentation she also points out that she thinks it would work better if they had less time restrictions.

Time for documentation...I do not think that we have any other problems with the exception that we are too glued to the clock...now, when I worked at the other place [in Quebec] and I ran the centre there, there were only two things that were set in stone...the

children came in at this time, the children left at that time, these were the only times we had set. Here, we have to have certain things set in stone like lunch time, but that's because of the cook or the other groups, but that would be a neat thing to be able to do away with not having clean up time now, because it is going to be outdoor time in five minutes. I think there might be a misconception out there that it's [the Reggio Emilia approach] is a hard big thing to do and that you have to have 50 courses on how to do it. It's like: "No you don't" – you just have to simplify it...I think if we could all get a glimpse of what it truly is, then some of the stress of trying to implement it would be lessened. (ECE 2)

ECE 3 wanted more hands on experience and not just hearing or reading about how it is done in Reggio Emilia:

I think just more learning about the Reggio Emilia ways. My only thing is that a lot of the Reggio training or information sessions, has been very much the broad stroke. And I'd like to hear more about the nitty gritty. So, I know: it's lunch time, and they have a lovely set table, and real glasses, and china, and knives, and forks, but I want the nitty gritty. What are they eating? How does it get on their plate? Who puts it on their plate? You know, like some of those real, more practical, mundane aspects of it as well, and if they are doing a documentation that's going to be a large art piece, for example, how do they start that, right down to the smallest detail? ... Because I think we've had a lot of the broad strokes now that it's just enough to get us really excited, but now we need some of the tiny little details, so that we know...well the theatre curtain project, for example, if we know this took six months or a year, you would feel like that's very achievable, but when

you hear about it, it sounds like it took a week, you know, and it was hanging up, so it's to have more of those kinds of details, the really small ones. (ECE 3)

The findings that follow were derived from the question asked to the three sets of interviewees about parental involvement and what it meant to them.

### **Parental Involvement: Supervisors**

#### **Theme 16: Engaging parents by providing documentation and a welcoming environment.**

The Reggio Emilia approach emphasizes parental involvement and insists that parents are vital to the development and education of the child (Gandini, 1993). The question about parental involvement in the child's learning was asked to supervisors, ECEs and parents. It was interesting to see how each group answered the same question in different ways, from their own perspective. The answers were varied and it was difficult to find common themes. For the supervisors, it seemed that making parents feel safe and invited, documentation, and using the parents' expertise were among the important points mentioned:

That's one thing I think we need to work on more and that's one thing that the staff really weren't on board with as much. We certainly have our fundraisers and we have family involvement in lots of things like that. We have a parent night where we put some parents...say if your child is in preschool, you go in that classroom and they kind of draw and do stuff like that, so we have two for sure activities like that each year...so we have to do more of that for sure. And it is kind of...because we do fundraising or we ask a lot of parents, and lots of parents are working, that's kind of why we've not done as much. We feel like we ask enough of them to participate. Those who are interested...they will come

and volunteer. But, as far as reaching every parent and offering something to every parent, we could do more of that. (Sup 1)

Supervisor 2 acknowledges that parents should be involved in their children's learning, that documentation will help parents see what their children are learning, and that parents should always be encouraged to come into the centre and share their skills or talents with the children:

I think that the parents and guardians are partners with the educators and the children on their learning journey, because you can't just take the children out of the home and fill their head with all this knowledge and then send them back home, it doesn't work that way. When we put out our documentation, our learning stories, or we invite parents in to see what we've done, then the parent and the child together take that home, they talk about it...I think of when kindergarten did the lighthouse project a couple of years ago and I think of how much, how involved the parents were, how what was happening at home, came into the centre. What was happening within the centre went back home. How we were able to bring families in who had experiences with lighthouses, share their stories with the children and the educators....I think that when parents know that they are able to come in and talk about things, and they take time with their child to read what is happening, the conversation carries on and it's not just the child who is involved in the project... (Sup 2)

Supervisor 3 thinks that parental involvement is working in her centre because she can see parents being interested in the daily sheet binders that are available for them at the centre. She too believes that parents can contribute to their children's learning by sharing what they know with the children in the centre:

...Feeling safe and invited. So for me when I look back I ask: "Is it working? Are we getting the parents into the classroom more so than we did four years ago?"

Without a doubt. So that tells me that they are finding it interesting and they're learning or they wouldn't be going in. So by keeping our documentation simple and quick for them to look at, that I think is the key too. They come in and don't have to spend an hour, they can go in and read something in 10 minutes and then at home they are connecting what they saw to their child's learning... lots of times the children are interested in what the parents know. Like, if the parents are gardening or if the parents have a job, you know, at the vet college. Well once we know that, we have them come in and be guest speakers...so we're utilizing our parents more. We did the back yard. Parents were digging up flowers at the neighbours, or at grandma's house to bring in, so it even went beyond the immediate family. Our playground is definitely a work from the community [including parents, grandparents, and staff] and it's our community. And when we did the spaceship project in the preschool - that was a big deal. The parents were going in there. Parents helped out. It was a great opportunity. They saw our documenting as visible for them and it's strongly done so that they can make that connection... (Sup 3)

#### **Parental involvement: ECEs**

##### **Theme 17: Engaging parents more actively in their children's learning**

The ECEs each had different perspectives about parental involvement. ECE 1 said that she could see improvement in parental involvement since the Reggio Emilia approach was

introduced in her centre. She also sees that, keeping parents informed through the daily sheets displayed in the centre helps them to feel a sense of welcoming and belonging:

I find it has really improved with the Reggio...parents can see what their children are doing, so they're asking a lot more questions [to the child] where before they'd ask: "What did you do?" "Nothing" and sometimes they really had nothing to show for it. So now they have our pictures [in the daily sheet binder] and they are more than welcome, and we put pictures on Facebook too so parents could see them that way as well...If they have any expertise...the children were learning about doctors, we had one child's mum come in, and then we were learning about dentists so another parent came in. So we have been able to really pull our parents in and get them to come in and share their experience with us as well....It's hard because of legal issues, taking them [the children] off campus. Even to walk on the trail they need to have a form to fill out [by parents] and the trail is just behind the campus so that part is hard...We had one doctor who brought in some snakes. We've had them bring dogs... (ECE 1)

ECE 2 thinks that parents are being involved through emails when the staff ask for something needed for the centre. But she thinks that they should be working on getting parents to get more involved and that they (the educators) need to ask parents to help out more. However, she does mention instances when parents drew on their own skills and shared those with the children in the centre:

We have pretty good parents' involvement in the sense of, like, if I send out an email to parents "we need this" we are going to get replies, but if you mean parental involvement as like, do we have parents in doing stuff? ...no, rarely, I mean sometimes, just on occasion they come in, if they have bunnies at home, they come in and get the bunnies to

show the children, or like on special occasions, something like that...Using their skills, that would be really cool because we have some great parents who can do wonderful things. We should be really using them more as resources and I am sure the parents would love that. The problem is though that they [the parents] all have jobs and it's tricky to pull people away off their jobs...maybe it is a question of just asking...well, have we built up a wall of resistance because we have never asked the question: "would you be interested?" We have a parent who teaches dance for example, so if she would come in and show the children, if they showed an interest in dance...would she come in and do that? And it's to get into the habit of saying we need help, we need help with this, or even if it is something that we can do ourselves, if we'd say: "listen would you like to come and join us and have fun with us? This is an enjoyable thing." And I'm sure the children would love that, to see their mum and dad in here, you know, helping out with something.

(ECE 2)

ECE 3 spoke to the fact that their centre is run by a parents' board and that they have a good rapport with the parents. Parents feel welcome and respected in the centre. They are a means of support and a great resource to the educators and the centre in general:

Well, our centre is run by a parent board. A voluntary board of directors. So they take care of a lot of the administrative part of it and a lot of the decision making, and they are very supportive to the staff here. We seem to have a real rapport with all the parents who come in. We have day-to-day contact with each family and parents are very interested, they feel very welcome here and we do welcome them in. It is very rare that we get a family that runs in the door and runs out again. Parents *want* to be here and they have a lot of respect for the staff, they value what we have to say as we respect them and really

value what they have to say, as being the most important in their child's life...they are experts and we really acknowledge that here, so the role of parents here is that they're a tremendous support, they're a great resource for us for things that are going on in the community, for paper, for all different kinds of things, for information... (ECE 3)

A study by Williams & Chavkin (1989), talks about the benefits that parental involvement has on children's achievement. It shows that, the more parents are involved in a meaningful way in their child's learning - such as: advocacy, fundraisers, volunteering, or home teaching, the better it is for the child's achievement (Williams & Chavkin, 1989).

### **Parental Involvement: Parents**

One of the hallmarks of the Reggio Emilia approach is the active engagements of parents in the formation of school policy, playing an active part in their children's learning and bringing their ideas to the educators to ensure the children's welfare. A key question to parents for this research investigation was their assessment of the ways they are currently involved in their children's learning and their suggestions of how this could be enhanced and enriched.

### **Theme 18: Defining parental involvement to mean reinforcing at home what is being done at the early learning centre.**

The parents' first response was that they work with their children at home and try to reinforce the learning that is going on in the centre. Not all parents could connect how being involved in the child's centre would benefit the child's learning. I found that I had to use a number of prompts or cues to get additional information about their involvement. With the help of the cues, the parents then talked about volunteering at the centre, attending special events that their children have at the centre, discussing educational issues with the ECEs, and their daily interactions with the educators. Since these answers were varied, I will divide the quotes from

the transcripts according to the cues I used during the interviews. These were the first reactions of the parents to the question about what ways do they feel they are involved in their children's learning:

Currently she [daughter] is doing a project which she has to bring home and actually do the project, so we are involved in helping her complete that project, picking photos, discussing them, while she creates part of the project. She also tells us about her day and what she's learned. (Par 1a)

McClow & Gillespie (1998) conducted a study amongst parents attending a Reggio-inspired Head Start program. One of the principles of a Head Start program was to have parents involved in the program as much as possible (McClow & Gillespie, 1998). Among the concerns voiced by parents was "whether or not the children are effectively learning...and worried their children would not succeed in kindergarten or learn how to read and write as well as other students" (p.134). This concern was also voiced by parents taking part in the interviews:

I guess, I don't think we have that much involvement though I'm kind of old school and like the idea of that you get taught about the body one day, and so I have trouble with the play based learning, so I sometimes feel like: "are they learning?" But I understand that it's a whole different philosophy and that they adapt what they're interested into learning. But I feel quite hands off other than helping them with this project. I don't feel like we have that much involvement. (Par 1)

Yes, not unless our child actually brings it to us and asks us questions or like, she likes to read, so we read books, but she usually brings that to us and then we engage in it. (Par 1a)  
I know I talk to the teachers on a regular basis, both when I drop him [son] off and when I pick him up, and they've got the sheets that say what he has done through the day, and I

get a little slip that says what he's eaten, if he's had a nap...because his speech is so limited...he is only two...so I can't get, like, what he did for the whole day, so it's nice because I can take from that and prompt him for stuff. (Par 2)

Well, it means an awful lot to us...she is our one and only daughter, but the way I feel I'm involved? I hate to say it – more electronically than anything. They [the ECEs] are always forwarding messages back and for to us, to everybody, about what is going on in the centre, and things they may be doing, upcoming events and that sort of stuff... (Par 3a)

...definitely at the end of the day in particular when we pick her up...there is always that time with the educator present to fill us in about what is going on, not necessarily just what our child has done that day but sort of what kind of things were happening in the centre. At home we are definitely involved. Her materials and things tend to take over the house [laughing] in a good way, you know. She has an art area that becomes her creative area and we're both involved in that to the degree she wants; her kitchen is in our kitchen, her play kitchen, so she is feeding us and she is always bring out things from her playroom or from the living room to share with us or inviting us in for tea and those kinds of things, so I mean those are all part of her learning. (Par 3)

In my opinion, this is a powerful quote, especially the second sentence. Here clearly is a parent who knows the importance of the link between honouring the child's creative efforts in the centre and doing the same at home.

These three parents feel that they are involved in their child's learning by reinforcing learning at home:

Well...we do...it's still quite early, they're so quite young but, like with the books, the reading, we get some sent home and we read every night anyway. We do a lot of that at home and I think it gets reinforced at the centre as well. I think we are quite involved in that way... (Par 4)

Yeah, in the sense of what they bring home as well. That gives us an idea of what they're working on...that would be our key to what they would be doing, informally. (Par 4a)

I am very involved. Learning needs to start at home, long before they go to any centre or school. (Par 5)

This parent thinks that she is very much involved not just in the child's learning but also in the running of the centre since she is a member of the parents' board in that particular centre:

I feel that I am informed of what they're learning, when they're learning it. I feel encouraged to participate as a parent and I am also a Board member so I'm involved in that way...involved with how the centre runs and other ways. (Par 6)

**Theme 19: Willingness to involve themselves in the centres' activities *if* and *when* asked.**

When I asked the parents if they are involved in volunteering at their child's centre, some parents answered that they have volunteered while others said that they have not been asked by the centre to do so. The mothers seemed to take more part in fundraising activities while the fathers helped out with any maintenance needed in the centres:

We did in the past. We didn't get asked to do anything like that this year. We have volunteered for field trips and things like that. (Par 1)

We volunteered to upgrade their playground or their play space. We did that for one day.

But other than that there haven't been a lot of requirements, or needs, or asking us for volunteering. (Par 2a)

We've never been approached though by the centre. (Par 4)

I do when there are events. I help with the set up and the clean up or provide whatever they need provided in order to have the event. (Par 5)

Yeah, I volunteer. Sometimes, I come in and read to the children or do a craft with them, or depending on what project is going on...also in teaching. I have been invited to substitute when some teachers were going to learning opportunities and I've been also asked to come in and substitute with them, so I've gotten to participate in that way. (Par 6)

It seems that parents want to volunteer and help out in the centre, but sometimes they are waiting to be asked by the educators. As we have seen in the responses of the ECEs about parental involvement, this was an issue that one of the ECEs talked about: that perhaps the educators need to encourage and invite the parents more into the centre and to get more intimately engaged in their children's learning.

**Theme 20: Attending special events is considered important.**

All ten parents said yes when I asked the question about whether they attend the special events that the centre organizes for them and their children. Both males and females thought that it was very important for them to be present for these events, as it meant a lot for their child to have them attend:

“We go to all of them, both of us” (Par 2a)

We take part in her special events, the Christmas and all that stuff and the fundraiser for Haiti. We participate in those kinds of things. (Par 3)

Yeah we go to those, the Christmas concert...we are always there and any of the interviews, assessment at the beginning of the year, you know, we are always there. (Par 4)

Yeah...family fun night, the barbecue, things like that I attend those as a parent and as a volunteer because I am on the board. (Par 6)

**Theme 21: Relevance of regularly discussing educational issues with ECEs**

The next cue to the parents was about whether they discuss educational issues with the ECEs. This is supported and encouraged by educators in Reggio schools in Italy (Gandini 2008). Some parents said that there used to be more discussions in the past. It seems that, in one particular centre, there used to be an active parent committee which has since become dormant:

There used to be more of that. There used to be an active parent committee at the centre and there was a lot more discussion in terms of what was going on. I found that, this past year though, there hasn't been a whole lot of discussion. They had a couple of information nights this year, where they kind of talked to us about the philosophies of Reggio and examples of how they turn something from plain interest into learning and how they make it happen, science and everything else. (Par 1)

Not this year, no. Not as much. Like questions about education or, like, other than information sessions, there has not been much interaction. (Par 1a)

He's two and a half...I don't think it's our focal point [to discuss educational issues] right now. (Par 2a)

As far as the educational part goes I may not be, probably I am not asking enough questions about it. I know that they do a lot of play time that's learning motivated...the reading...the story time and the touch and play sort of thing. I know that all that happens there but I don't exactly ask how that is working for her [daughter] specifically. (Par 3a)

Some parents, however, report that they do discuss educational issues with the educators, apart from other matters, and not just at parents-teacher nights:

...not even just necessarily about education in the academic sense, but behavioural and social things as well. Is our child socially getting along or if there's some other issues with other children around behaviour, so we talk about that... (Par 3)

Yes, every once in a while I ask teachers how she's doing. I make sure there isn't an issue that I don't know about and that I could be working on more at home since they may not have the amount of time required to work on that particular issue. (Par 5)

### **Theme 22: Interacting daily with the ECEs**

The last cue to this question for the parents was about whether or not they have daily interactions with the ECEs. Most of the parents said that they did, either at drop off or pick up time:

Oh for sure, more of a social thing, and even at the end of the day. We don't often drop them off or pick them up without at least having a good five minute chat. (Par 1)

But rarely about education. Now maybe, our daughter, she thrives pretty well in their learning, like reading and writing, so maybe she does not have any problems that they would address to us or bring up like that educational aspect of it. (Par 1a)

It's normally me that drops him off, and yeah I usually talk to at least one of his teachers before I go...other than that he goes in and he either goes to the infants' room or to his

room...any concerns or comments or anything like that I can tell them, no trouble. If I forget something I can send them an email. (Par 2)

Yeah, the drop off and if there is any kind of concern we just have a word with the staff, you know. (Par 4)

There's good communication with them all. Every one of them is really friendly and they're good at informing you about things that your child may have done that day or if you have something to tell them about your child, for example. (Par 5)

The findings about parental involvement indicate that supervisors, educators and parents all have different perspectives as to the meaning of parental involvement. For the supervisors, making parents feel welcome, using their expertise and documenting children's learning to make it visible to the parents seemed to be the most important aspects of parental involvement. On the other hand, the early childhood educators think that parents should be more involved and that perhaps they (the educators) should be asking and involving them more in the centre's activities. One of the three ECEs saw parents as a great resource and a means of support to the educators in her centre. The parents' first thought of parental involvement was of how they can continue to reinforce at home what was being taught at school. When more cues were given to them, they expanded their responses to volunteering at the centre, attending special events, daily interactions and discussing educational issues with the educators.

Documentation was the topic of the next question in the interview process. This question was asked to both early childhood educators and parents.

## **Documentation: ECEs**

### **Theme 23: Time demands for comprehensively documenting children's learning.**

### **Theme 24: Documentation gives voice and ownership to children**

Documentation is a vital part of the learning process in Reggio Emilia. Staff members document the process of learning in schools so that students, parents, community members and educators can reflect and revisit it later. It is a means by which educators can further challenge children to have a deeper learning of what they are interested in. Documentation gives value to and makes explicit, visible and accessible the nature of the individual and group learning processes of both the children and the adults. These processes are identified through observations and later documented by the educators.

What are your thoughts about documentation? What are its challenges and benefits?

These questions were asked to the three ECEs and there was consensus that the main challenge was lack of time. Some of the benefits of documentation mentioned by the ECEs are: the process of children's learning is made visible to parents and the excitement of children when they see their documentation on the wall. Kroeger & Cardy (2006) contend that documentation "will allow young children to construct their own knowledge and curiosity, making learning more meaningful to them and more visible to others" (p. 389). All preschools in Reggio Emilia have a full time *atelierista* who helps educators to finalise their documentation and helps to put these up on panels in the schools to make children's learning visible (Vecchi, 1993). Besides this, all Reggio educators work 36 hours a week, 30 of which are contact hours with the children and the other six are for educators to get together and discuss projects and documentation, have time to finish off any documentation started during an activity, meet with parents, have staff meetings, and meet with the *pedagogista* as the need arises (Gandini, 1993). Reggio Emilia educators work

in pairs and this facilitates their role to observe and document, as one educator can be carrying this out (observing and documenting) while the other one would be supervising the children (Edwards et al. 1998). So it was no surprise that a challenge voiced by the three educators is lack of time to document:

Oh, I love seeing it when it's finished, just the story of their learning and being able to see where they started, the questions that they had, and the process that they had to take to get to their final product. I love that aspect. Time to document can be difficult. There's so much that you want to say and so little time to get the documentation done. We have a daily sheet so we write down the activities that we have done that day and then we just post pictures and then the parents will come at the end of the day and see what their children have done. (ECE 1)

I love documentation...I don't love that I do not have the time to do it...the challenge is finding time because during the day there is no time. We get an hour planning a week and in an hour you get such a little amount done. So, in my head I have wonderful documentation and I have taken great pictures and stuff, but it is just to get the time to get it done that I feel overwhelmed by it because I feel there is so much that hasn't been done and even not necessarily the documentation that goes up on the wall, but documentation that goes in their binders...it is almost like a stress...Documentation I think is beautiful and when I look through the binders and see the documentation that I have done I feel proud about it and I love that the children will go up and take it [the portfolio] and sit and look through it and are very excited...and when you see a parent looking at it, going: "Oh you had a fun day. I can see that you did". That I love...but what I don't love is the

challenge to get it done. I don't like that I feel stressed having to get it done. I want the time to leisurely sit down and do it the way I want it to be done... (ECE 2)

ECE 3 showed interest and said she was going to take the initiative and challenge herself to not only document through photos, but also through children's work, using different media, which would be a legacy that her group could leave in the centre for future children who come to that centre:

I love documentation. I think our centre has started to do more documenting this year and the centre did put in some energy and some resources into getting more computers so the staff can access, you know, more photography, that type of documentation...I like when you can take pictures and it's an easy, very direct way of sharing some of our experiences with parents so they can really see...but I also would really like to be exploring more, a Reggio style documentation. Documentation isn't necessarily lovely photographs with some captions underneath...that is one kind of documentation. But I like the idea of children leaving something behind that they can revisit, whether it is a piece of sculpture or a big art project or a large painting, or a mat or a rug or something that they created that tells us a bit of a story, that talks about their learning and that's kind of the challenge that I set up for myself this year, to do more of that type of documenting so that, if these children come back in a year and visit, they can go to that and say: "This was me" and "my friends and I we did this" and "this is why we did it." The challenge is, of course as always, time, and some days are better than others. Some day you can dash off a few documentations really, really quickly and get them up and display them so parents can see them, and other documentation I find you have to be very thoughtful of how you present them and you run out of time before you have them completed. (ECE 3)

## Documentation: Parents

### Theme 25: Staying involved with their children's learning through documentation

A similar question about documentation was asked to the parents. Most of them agreed that it is a good way of keeping them informed about what goes on in the centre and about what children are learning. The daily information sheets seemed to be more practical for most of the parents interviewed:

I like the binders [daily sheets binder] that are there, so at the end of the day you can see what they did today. I think that is helpful, and I do like the possibility of getting on Facebook and you know what's going on, and they have posters on the wall. There's apparently, and I guess I don't do a very good job at looking at this, but I think each child has a folder there too, but I must admit that I don't do a good job of knowing where to look for that to see how they're doing. But I do like the daily binders. I think that's a really good thing. (Par 1)

Yeah, and I mean the report card [which parents get before teacher-parent meetings] does give the progress of what they're doing but yeah, like my wife said, it's more the daily binders usually or what they put on the wall that we see most often. (Par 1a)

Well it is great, because it is a way to find out something that you wouldn't think of. He [their son] started there at the end of last June and because he's our only child, we wouldn't know what was in the work, what was coming and it's a nice way to actually say ok, this is what he's done, this is what they're doing...I think we are kept well informed. As for the binder that comes home, that's our only chance to see it together. And it gives us a chance to go through it. (Par 2)

LeBlanc (2009) agrees that documentation informs parents about children's work that would be going on in the centre:

I know there is always stuff on the wall and she [daughter] is always talking and pointing to her item or whatever, and it's always great to look at...the pictures as they say are more powerful than words. I know that there is a book that, as she is going through the whole three or four years that she's here, is getting filled and I haven't stopped and taken time to actually look at it yet...I think it's fantastic. It's gonna be great to look back at, you know...I can't wait. (Par 3a)

I love the portfolios and I think that it's probably a much more realistic and individual way of documenting learning than a checklist [a standardized testing of children's ability]. I like sort of having both, because the checklist is standardised. It gives an overall picture of everyone's learning but I really like the portfolio aspect of capturing the child's development over the year in an individual way. I appreciate that every educator is in that development phase [of documenting], that is growing and incorporating that because it is more difficult than taking a documented form already prepared ticking "yes I see that, yes I see this" but to say why is this piece of work important and how it is representing development is a lot harder, but I am pleased to see that educators are really trying, in their growth with that. I would like to see more in some of them, so that when I look at it as a parent it is more than a scrapbook, it tells me about development...but I am pleased to see that they are incorporating portfolios for sure. (Par 3)

Oh yes they [their children] like to show us. They would tell us if there's something new up there, even of their friends, what their friends did do, and also what they have up there. (Par 4)

I think you get to see what they do on a daily basis. Sometimes, you just don't have enough time to stop and talk to the teacher on a daily basis to get feedback from them. So it is great to be able to walk around and look at all the displays of the activities they have done. They have the children's' work well displayed or activities captured in photos which are also displayed. (Par 5)

I know it's well documented because I take the time and read all the posters that they put up for them about the different things that they'd done with them and ways that they've interacted...so I know what they've been doing. (Par 6)

Findings about documentation show that the educators are all in favour of it and acknowledge the benefits it brings to children as they revisit their work and feel a sense of ownership, and to the parents who can see for themselves the process of their children's learning. The main challenge mentioned by educators was the lack of time that they feel they have to carry out documentation as it should be done according to the Reggio principle of making children's learning visible.

What follows are the findings from some interview questions that were asked only to specific groups of interviewees. First I will share the findings of the supervisors' answers, followed by the findings from the parents' responses. No other specific questions were asked to the early childhood educators.

#### **Other themes and/or variations that emerged: Supervisors**

##### **Theme 26: Incremental small steps ensure more lasting change**

The supervisors were asked: what kind of staff conflicts have you encountered, if any, when it came to the implementation of this approach? Two main topics came out of the answers: (a) not all staff members move at the same pace, and (b) lack of staff confidence. McClow &

Gillespie (1998) similarly contend that, since the Reggio Emilia approach is not just a curriculum but a philosophy, it takes longer for educators to adjust. They argue that “for a teacher to change the physical environment in her or his classroom is fairly simple; but to change one’s belief system about teaching and interacting with students is much more difficult” (p. 133). Penn (1997) insists that: “New ways of working require a long, sustained and participatory effort” (p. 120).

If you have someone who is really good and just running with it [the approach]] and reading the books and implementing it, a star employee, can be intimidating to those who are struggling with it. So there was a challenge that way, and at the same time, this person is on the right path and the others should jump on board and follow, or not follow, but be engaged as well. Educators had to learn to trust to go with it [the approach], to go with the children as fellow learners...so it was a struggle that way. (Sup 1)

Not trusting in their process and in their own ability – have been kind of hanging back and really trying to keep the old ways but I think, for the most part, once you talk to them about it, once they get over those little hurdles and they start to see other people doing it, it would not be that scary...So I think when they take it and chunk it down into little pieces, they’re ok. It’s when they look at the big picture that people get overwhelmed and that’s when people will start to dig in their heels...I think that’s why we’ve been taking our time because we have some people who really don’t like change and they need to see it in little bits and pieces...so it gradually comes, and they’re a little bit more willing to come on the journey. (Sup 2)

Well the staff conflicts that we encountered were more so on confidence. It’s that somebody would say: “Why is she [another educator] taking so long, why can’t she just

figure it out?" Some of them were bored waiting for others...it was just like there was a panic...I realised it's not about where the teacher is at, at this particular time, it's how the teacher is feeling about the approach. Feelings are very important to teachers you know: feeling confident, overwhelmed, capable and competent, and co-learners. And it's a different way of teaching, right? You're working almost backwards than what we did before. Now we view each other as co-learners and as a team. Four years ago, we were individual teachers working on our own path; so that, although there were conflicts in the beginning, these made us stronger now, today. (Sup 3)

### **Theme 27: The vital role played by the early learning coach**

Another question asked specifically to supervisors was: how did the informative sessions, held in your centre by the early childhood coach, help you to better understand the Reggio Emilia emergent curriculum approach? The three agreed that it was beneficial to them and to their staff members as it offered hands on experience, and support to make the changes necessary:

Unbelievable! The coach presented it in such a...she did it hands on. Because of the whole hands on and the concept of doing it, exploring, like the children, it was amazing. And I think that was the turning point as to really buying into it [the approach] to those who were kind of questioning. (Sup 1)

I think that, when you read something, you get from it what you need to at that time, so the knowledge kind of floats around in there and you know it's kind of not really doing anything. But then when you go and you have the workshops or the coach comes in to do it, you've got a little bit of the theory, you get to see it and talk about it with other people, then it's like: "Oh that is what they meant in the book when they talked about that...and

then by dialoguing back and forth, perhaps even from examples of what other people are doing, talking about it with the rest of team in an atmosphere of learning without interruptions from the children, but you are all there to learn, and to process the information together. I think that's very beneficial because it's almost like a meeting of minds, so you come in at one level but you come out with a little bit higher level of knowledge. (Sup 2)

Supervisor 3 also said during the interview that the early childhood coach helped her and her staff to transfer theory into practice:

...that really was a good starting point, working on the environment with the coach and then the philosophy and the theory became entrenched in us, so to speak. We couldn't have gone from theory to practice right away, so the first step that the coach talked to us about was the environment...she was really an important step for us to get us thinking. And we take time to reflect now. We take an hour a week and we call it our reflective time...the girls have that time to go and observe their own classroom or do some extra work or whatever because we feel that reflection is a big, big component to this, because it allows us time to think deeper and to scaffold where we want the children to go. So, by the coach starting that and planting that in us, it was just the right place at the right time for us. (Sup 3)

### **Theme 28: Team teaching and policy changes**

One last question was asked to two of the three supervisors who had the opportunity to attend a study tour in Reggio Emilia, Italy: 'now that you have had the chance to visit Reggio Emilia in person, what changes, if any, are you planning for your centre?' Supervisor 2 said that

her centre will be focusing on team building and team teaching, which might help the staff to have some more flexibility to observe and document children's learning:

I think with Kindergarten leaving [to the public school system] in the fall, we have a really unique opportunity to really implement the team teaching component...I think the next step, we'll have someone come in to do some workshops on team building, working as a team, helping us look at our day and structure our day so that people are truly working together and help them structure their day so that everybody gets an opportunity to experience different things. They have an opportunity to actually sit down and meet as a team and go over their observations, documentations, recordings, to see where the children are...there's not a lot of sitting down right now and connecting with the children and picking up on those little incidental moments, that's being lost I think. If we can get people thinking 'team'...I think we'll be a lot further ahead. (Sup 2)

Meanwhile Supervisor 3 said that she hopes to build more confidence in her staff members and make some policy changes in her centre:

My changes are...again it comes back to the basics, going back to the important job we do. And that we are co-learning and need to collaborate with the children and involve the children in our classroom. That's really the biggest thing I got from Reggio. There are lots of great ideas, but it's to extend on that inner belief that I need to make sure that we never lose sight of. The other thing too that I really learned in Reggio is that it always upset me when I went to visit centres [in Reggio] and they would never let me take pictures. In Reggio they told us: "no pictures...sit back and take it in". Then I realised that when I visited the centres, I was watching and taking notes and it was more sketched into my brain, the image of this centre than if I had taken pictures. So that is one thing that

I'm changing in my centre. Nobody comes into my centre to take pictures anymore because you can't get the belief and the whole picture. If you're busy taking pictures, then you don't really remember it. If it is something important to you, it is sketched into your mind...if somebody truly wants to learn the Reggio approach, they need to be in here, immersed, and observing it and feeling it. (Sup 3)

It seems that both these supervisors came back with ideas and initiatives after their study tour in Reggio Emilia where they experienced for themselves what the Reggio philosophy is all about.

Next, are two questions that were addressed to parents in which they were asked to comment about whether they thought it was beneficial or challenging to be involved in their children's learning; and in what other ways could parents or guardians, in general, become more involved.

#### **Other themes and/or variations that emerged: Parents**

##### **Theme 29: Involvement in children's learning is beneficial but challenging owing to time constraints.**

Parents were asked if they feel that being involved in their children's learning was beneficial or challenging to them and their children, and why. The majority of parents thought that it is beneficial but most of them also expressed the fact that it can be challenging because of time constraints:

Yes I think so, absolutely, because then you know what's going on and then when you have questions that come up at home you can then figure out where they may have come from and you can help to extend what they're learning at the centre. (Par 1)

Yeah and we get a better sense of where they're at like that. For example, our daughter just started reading like, a chapter book one day and we did not realise she was at that level...by being involved I learnt how far she advances. (Par 1a)

I think it's beneficial, I don't think it's challenging (Par 2)

Parenting itself is challenging but, being involved in his education, at two and a half, I mean we can be involved as much as we want but he's still at that early stage... (Par 2a)

Challenging in terms of finding time to talk to her educators and that kind of thing and sometimes it's challenging at home just finding the time to be able to stop what you need to do with life and enjoy and learn together, but it's more beneficial to be a part of her [child] learning. It's more beneficial because, I mean, especially being a part of the education system myself, I know the value and I know the importance. But, as a parent, it's part of what brings us together as a family. (Par 3)

Probably both, it's absolutely beneficial. It can be challenging because we don't have...we only see them [our children] a couple of hours a night before they go to bed. We try to reinforce as best we can, find out what they are doing and help them improve with some of the stuff that they are doing so it would be I'd say, yes on both being beneficial and challenging. (Par 4a)

A little of both I guess. I mean it's definitely beneficial because you will know what level they are at...being involved you see when there are issues, regardless of whether it's education or other aspects of their development. The challenge is finding the time to spend quality time with your child...sometimes you just have to find other ways to spend time with them other than sitting down and directly working with them on something. You can teach them in a playful way. (Par 5)

I believe that it is beneficial, but I believe it also has lots of challenges to it. (Par 6)

**Theme 30: Feeling the need to be asked by ECEs to become more involved**

Parents were then asked to share in what other ways they thought that parents/guardians, in general, could be involved in the everyday learning of the child and in their centre. Their first reaction was working with children at home about what they had learnt at the centre. So I used some cues to elicit more discussion. The cues I used included suggestions that parental involvement could also mean: coming in to give a talk to the children; helping out in any maintenance needed in the centre; and taking an active part in projects/activities the children might be engaged in at the centre.

For the first cue, most parents said that they knew that other parents at their child's centre had been in to talk to the children about their skills or interests, but they themselves had not been asked to do so. When asked about taking an active role in projects/activities, some of the parents expressed that they wished they were more involved, but were either not asked or did not have the time:

I think that parents' committees should be re-established to give parents some input into what's going on. Especially when there's big changes in the curriculum that maybe we all don't understand and see the benefits of as easily as those educators understand how it works...I know they had lots of guest speakers this year in different areas. And as far as I know, there are a lot of parents at the centre, professional or whatever, that do have really unique expertise that do come in and do some interesting talks to the kids. (Par 1)

While acknowledging time constraints, Par 3 also had some suggestions as to how parents can perhaps be more actively involved:

I know it is difficult for parents, especially those that work full time, to find ways of being involved. There could be more social things coordinated so that it will give the parents the message "this is your space as well" which is really important....I haven't been asked to volunteer to do anything this year, fundraising in any sense, not just me but there hasn't been any sort of engagement in that way which often they [the educators] worry about imposing on parents that way...No I have never been asked to talk to the children...not even necessarily something to do with a skill, but even story reading.

Parents are the experts in life in general. It doesn't necessarily have to be their work, but I mean he [pointing to her husband] has tons of things that he can bring in for sure. It's a way of highlighting the family as a unit, but also I would love to see some sort of a rotation of family story time or something like that. I think if there were certain opportunities for him [her husband] to be involved, he'd be right there and I think that is very typical of parents. Parents don't seek out necessarily, because it has not typically been their experience with education anyway...so I think as leaders, these centres that are leaders in helping our province understand Reggio, that is really one way that they could lead, how to involve parents in really unique ways in our centres... (Par 3)

They have had other parents come in to talk to the children about their occupations but I have not done this. I do not feel my occupation would be of any interest to this age group. They are always looking for volunteers to come in and help with cleaning toys, maintenance to the equipment or toys, or whatever someone can help out with. I haven't had the time to come in and do that. (Par 5)

Yes, I've seen that [parents coming in to talk to children] done here and I think it's a great opportunity, a great way for people to be involved. I haven't done that myself

though...with maintenance...my husband is the Information Technology expert they go to.

(Par 6)

Some of the parents responded that they had helped in the maintenance at the centre in one way or another:

I helped with the yard when they were building that. We helped again, in field trips and internally they don't ask too much but I know that one parent built a spaceship inside the class once...they'll definitely ask parents for help if they need it. (Par 1a)

Well, one of the other parents volunteered and actually helped built that spaceship. It was fantastic...Talking to the children – that was put out there if anybody wanted to, they could but we haven't done that ourselves...We helped with the playground. Everybody [parents] had a vested interest in doing it, and a lot of things were donated, and it was just time, so I mean that was a no brainer for us because we were like, sure, we will come in and do it. (Par 2)

They've all along asked for items that we can bring in and one thing for instance was: my daughter's group was involved with hairdressing and so I had access to this play table hairdresser set so I brought that in... but I guess what I need to do is ask what they need more from me...as far as maintenance, there was a project that was to do with a little cubby area. They had asked me to help build a little sort of cave you could call it...but it didn't come to pass because they changed their mind because they were going to use the space for something else (Par 3a)

The analysis from these in-depth interview findings will be linked to the observational data, and discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.

## Conclusion

These three centres in Charlottetown are being inspired by the Reggio principles, and then making them work as best they can for their children in their centres. This is in line with the pragmatic thinking of Gambetti and Gandini (2006) as quoted in Wien (2008) who warns: “Reggio schools are in Reggio Emilia” (p. 6) and cannot be transferred in their entirety to other countries. As Wien (2008, p. 6) contends: “what we create...may not look at all like what we would see in Reggio Emilia” but this could still mean that the centres or schools are nonetheless inspired by the Reggio Emilia principles, which are then integrated into the existing cultures of these centres or schools.

That being said, all three centres have their own unique ways of doing things depending on their particular structural, financial, cultural, and other factors pertaining to the centre. I also observed that the three centres seem to be strong in different areas. One centre is strong in documentation, one in outdoor environments, while the other one in being more trusting and looking at the child as being competent and capable. The reason for this could be that each centre is working on different aspects of the Reggio Emilia principles at different times. Eventually, as time goes by, each centre could be confident and competent enough to integrate all the fundamental principles of the Reggio Emilia approach.

Chapter Five will next discuss and link the findings that were derived from the observations and interviews keeping in mind the research questions of this study, the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, and the reflections in the personal journal I kept while I visited Reggio Emilia in Italy. Finally, a summary of my research findings, some key insights that they provide to my research questions and number of suggestions about future research that resulted from this

study will be discussed. Some recommendations that have emerged from this research will be outlined and comprise my conclusion.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Summary of findings, recommendations, and reflections on the research process**

#### **Introduction**

This thesis set out to explore in some depth the practices of three early childhood education centres, in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island which are currently adapting the Reggio Emilia philosophy to their programs. This study explored the benefits and challenges to children, staff, parents and the centres in general that the cultivation of this particular philosophy has brought about. It also attempted to uncover the extent of parental involvement through interviews with parents and staff and on-site observations. This research suggests that, if the benefits outweigh the challenges, then (1) other centres on PEI also take the lead in researching the Reggio Emilia approach and become inspired to take action; (2) the three centres take on the responsibility for serving as mentors to other early childhood centres that may be interested in following suit; and (3) the municipal and/or provincial governments commit to supporting more centres on PEI in their renewed efforts to elevate the quality of their curriculum and pedagogy. The importance of the cultural context for meaningful change was also identified as a significant factor in the course of this research and this will also be discussed in this concluding chapter.

Three early childhood education centres on PEI took part in this study. One supervisor, one staff member and two sets of parents in each centre were interviewed, making a total of 12 interviews. A total of 60 hours of observations were carried out successively in the three centres, comprising a 20 hour block in each centre.

As highlighted in Chapter Four, various themes related to the research questions emerged both from the interviews and the observations, and this chapter will discuss these themes in the light of existing literature on the Reggio Emilia approach summarized in Chapter Two, and my

personal journal kept throughout a study tour in Reggio Emilia in Italy in April 2010. Themes will be discussed and include these major topics: the image of the child; the educator as a partner, guide and researcher; parents as partners; documentation; and the environment. Other topics whose relevance emerged from the interviews include: the benefits and challenges of being Reggio-inspired, future goals that the three centres have to better implement the Reggio Emilia philosophy, and what further support if any are needed, if any, for the centres to enhance their current curriculum and pedagogy. The limitations of the study and implications for further research will also be discussed in this chapter. Overall recommendations emerging from the study and a reflection on the research process itself will bring closure to the thesis.

### **First Research Question:**

#### **How has the Reggio Emilia Approach been adapted by three childcare centres on Prince Edward Island?**

To answer this research question, I will discuss to what extent the three chosen centres are implementing the five fundamental principles which lie at the heart of the Reggio Emilia approach (Cadwell, 2003; Edwards et al., 1993; Gandini, 1993; Spaggiari, 1998). A concern with the cultivation of these key principles has favoured the basis of both my observational framework and interviews throughout this study. While each principle will be discussed separately, these should, however, be considered as the interlocking and overlapping components of one, holistic philosophy (Gandini, 1998). In the following sections, I will include critical reflections and suggestions that came up during the analysis of this research.

#### **The image of the child**

In Reggio Emilia, the child is viewed as “strong, powerful, rich in potential, driven by the power of wanting to grow, and nurtured by adults who take this drive towards growth seriously”

(Wurm, 2005, p. 16). The natural curiosity of the children makes them question and look for reasons for all that is happening around them. According to New (2001), “children are, in fact, regarded as citizens, fully entitled to the social and economic benefits that citizenship implies” (p. 3). The image of the child that is projected and promoted by the Reggio Emilia approach is one of competence, entitlement and connectedness to others (Rinaldi, 1993).

In the three centres that I have observed, I could see that the educators were showing respect to the children by offering them choices and asking their opinion about what they want to work on during their day at the centre. There were various instances during my observations in which I saw the child being competent, resourceful and connecting with others. This is stressed by Rinaldi (2005) who argues that, when teachers believe that children have their own theories and questions, and are protagonists in the process of building knowledge, listening plays an important role in educational practice. I could observe that educators in all three centres made the time to listen attentively to what the children had to say. During interviews, the issue of the image of the child came up as well:

It's just so nice to be able to go with the flow of the kids, go with what they want to learn with and being able to tie every aspect of their learning into that. (ECE 1)

Another ECE pointed out that there was one particular aspect that she liked about the Reggio Emilia approach was:

The way the approach seems to give children more of a chance to show you what they're thinking, and it's what they are thinking and not what you think they should be thinking.  
(ECE 3)

From my observations, I felt that two of the three centres believe more in the capability of their children and thus were trusting them in doing more challenging activities. Perhaps the

other centre still needs to work on learning how much to trust children's capabilities and not be afraid to let them try out their ideas.

Kim & Darling (2009) contend that teachers in Reggio schools are able to produce a context in which children's curiosity, theories and research are legitimated, and where children feel comfortable, confident, and respected in their learning processes. This was evident in the three centres through the rich variety and choice of materials available for children to explore, experiment, and create with. However, not all the educators at these three centres have yet come to terms with the idea that the process is much more important than the end product for the children's learning. As evidenced during my observations in one centre, during an activity where children were planting seeds, the educator was more concerned with the end product, than with what the children were learning from this experience (Fieldwork, 2010). For example, she was limiting the children's exploration of touching the soil and feeling it, which seemed what the children wanted to do. The educator was more interested in getting the activity done. This could be because she was working with a group of ten children, all doing the same activity at once, and she was on her own in the group at this particular time. Perhaps if the educators took children in groups of three or four and did the activity with one group while the others played in the area, she would have been able to handle the situation better, and would have perhaps had more time to let the children experiment and indulge in their own interests during the process.

Young children in Reggio Emilia are encouraged to explore their understandings of their experiences through different modes of expression considered natural to them. These are referred to as "the hundred languages of children" (Malaguzzi, 1998). They include words, gestures, discussion, mime, movement, drawing, painting, construction, sculpture, shadow play, mirror play, drama and music (Rinaldi, & Moss, 2004). These different media are necessary for children

to explore their creativity – one medium may be more appealing or more manageable than others for a particular child to explore and experiment with his/her ideas. The results of my observations suggest that not all the above methods of representation could be witnessed in the three centres; but that assessment could be an outcome of the limited timeframe of observations involved in this study. I was observing in two hour blocks, so it could have been possible that centre activities and media were offered to the children when I was not in the centres. I did however have the opportunity to go through documentation binders of various children in two centres and the daily sheets binder in another centre, developing an idea of what kind of activities went on during the year. From these documentations, I could see that various modes of representation were in fact being used, such as paints, movement, words and gestures, drama and music; but some media that I witnessed in Reggio Emilia – such as sculpture, sketching and experimenting with light and mirrors – were still missing (Personal journal, 2010). These are other form of representations that could help the children express themselves.

When I compare what I saw in these three centres to what I witnessed during my study tour in one of Reggio's schools in Italy, I would say that the educators in the three childcare centres here on PEI have come a long way in adapting to the new image of the child that is fundamental to the Reggio Emilia pedagogy. However, cultural differences play a crucial role in every society. Many parents and teachers in many cultures view themselves as the protectors of the children in their care. Safety is a very important and integral part of childcare settings in PEI, as in most of North America (Legislative, 2005). Educators have to operate within guidelines that insist that every child be in sight at all times “thus reducing the possibility of accidents” (Inman Linn 2001, p. 334). This of course limits the independence and privacy that PEI children are offered, compared to those in Reggio schools. Early childhood centres on PEI have to

observe rules and regulations set out in the Child Care Facilities Act (2005), and random inspections can be carried out by Fire and Safety inspectors (CCFA, 2005). This is not to suggest that there are no health and safety regulations in Reggio: but, as I found out during my study tour, such regulations are only intended as guidelines (Personal journal, 2010).

The four to five year old group in one of the centres that was included in my research has actually moved away from such limitations. I could observe children playing on their own, without any educator to supervise that particular area. My observational findings suggest that this has led the children of this particular group to become more independent and capable in their thinking and self-directed learning when compared to the field notes of the other two centres. I observed that children in this group were able to problem solve their own conflict without the educator having to get involved; they had more opportunities to follow their own interests in what they wanted to learn through the collaboration of the educator. From what I observed, this was due to the fact that one of the two educators of that particular group firmly believes that children had the right to play and get dirty, to try out their ideas, and to be listened to and respected; and that they were competent beings, and so they could be trusted on their own in certain areas. As an early childhood educator points out:

Children have the right to progress at their own pace, to be able to do much or as little as they need to do to meet their learning needs, on their own...whatever they want to take away from something [the experience]. (ECE 3)

However, during some observational sessions I could see some educators who were still finding it hard at times to believe that they could collaborate and learn with and from the child and that they are both growing and learning together through this process (Field notes, 2010; Personal journal, 2010). For example, there was an instance when an educator put out some

materials on a table for the children to use. However, instead of stepping back and letting the children experiment with the material available, she went to the table and showed them that the materials on the table were there for rubbing. In my opinion, if the educator had left the materials on the table and allowed the children to experiment with them, she would have been able to observe different ways usage rather than just for rubbing. In that case she too would be learning about how to use the material available differently (Field notes, 2010).

In one of the presentations I attended during my study tour in Italy, Tiziana Philippini pointed out that, when Reggio educators say that the child is competent, they are in no way saying that there is no need for the educator's role. Instead, they believe that the teachers should collaborate with the children in their learning and be open to learning from them as well (Personal journal, 2010).

#### **Educator as a partner, guide and researcher**

An educator in Reggio Emilia schools fills the simultaneous roles of guide to the children; partner with the children; colleagues and parents; and researcher to discover further information about queries that the children might have (Edwards, 1998). It is essential that teachers see themselves as partners in the co-construction of knowledge with the children. Teachers do not view themselves as leaders who are superior to children; rather, they work with the children, exploring, discovering, and learning together (Gandini, 1993).

Most of the PEI educators I was observing for this study did not view themselves as leaders or superior to the children. I observed that most of the time they were working with the child, encouraging and following the child's ideas and way of thinking, rather than telling the child what to do. I also observed that they were researching with the children when issues arose; but they still do not consider themselves researchers, as in their minds researchers are scientific

individuals with high levels of education, and usually that word is associated with persons who are doing serious funded work and scientific studies. As one supervisor pointed out in her interview, it was still hard for her and her staff to think of themselves as researchers:

The staff still do not think of themselves as researchers...they are now uncovering skills within themselves that they did not realise they had. (Sup 2)

However, she does acknowledge that, looking back at what she and her staff members do with the children; she can see how being Reggio-inspired has helped them to develop these skills:

It allows us an opportunity to develop skills, and knowledge, and takes us on a professional development journey that I don't think we would be able to on otherwise. (Sup 2).

Of course, as Fullen & Miles (1992) point out, a change in one's beliefs takes time to accomplish. One early childhood educator pointed out during her interview that:

The hard part is having to deprogram what you already do with children, and that it is really hard to do. (ECE 2)

This was in fact one of the challenges faced by supervisors as voiced in their interviews, and which will be discussed below. In my opinion, educators have to be offered more hands on training to be able to see for themselves how other Reggio-inspired educators are interacting, collaborating and working with the children.

Teachers work in pairs in Reggio schools and maintain strong, uncompetitive relationships with all other teachers and staff (Cadwell, 1997; Municipality of Reggio, 2010). This was not always the case in the three centres that participated in this study. The Sandy centre had one classroom for the three to four year olds with two educators, while the four to five year

old classroom had one educator. The Butterfly centre had two educators in both the three to four, and four to five year old groups; while the Sunshine centre had three educators with about 32 children ranging in age from two to five year olds. These would be in a big group for part of the morning and then split up into smaller groups of 10-11, with one educator in each group, for group-time activities. The challenge for these centres is that the number of children determines the number of educators in each group. So every year these numbers can go up or down, depending on the number of children registered in the centre. If numbers go down, supervisors might not be in a position to employ an extra staff member to have two teachers in each group. However, this was a concern expressed by all three early childhood educators I interviewed, and who say that working in pairs would benefit both the children and the adults. For example:

Two in a classroom will make a big difference. I shared a room last year and we found that it was much easier to document. (ECE 1)

From my observational sessions, I could see that when two educators were in the group or classroom, more documentation and interaction with the children could take place because one educator may be interacting with the children while the other educator would be able to keep an eye on the children and take photos or record in writing children's conversation to be used later in documentation (Field notes, 2010). Educators who work in pairs "engage in continuous discussion and interpretation of their work and the work of children," (Cadwell 1997, p. 6). Through their discussions, teachers can see what the children's interests are and build their activities around them. Working out a system amongst the staff where they would have time to meet some time during the day to discuss the children's work together and plan more provocative activities for the children could be a way of facilitating educator collaboration, if not pairing, on PEI.

During my study tour and in various literary sources about the Reggio Emilia approach, one is often reminded that there is no hierarchy between the staff members (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis 2006; Edwards, 1998; New 2001; Personal journal, 2010). This is another school culture difference, since all childcare centres on PEI have supervisors who manage the administration and running of the childcare centre. Supervisors used to be counted in the children/adult ratio and that meant that the supervisor was acting both as an early childhood educator and a manager. This has changed with the introduction of the *Preschool Excellence Initiative* proposed by the provincial government in May 2010, in which it is stated that the supervisor will be taken out of ratio (Flanagan, 2010). This works much better for the whole centre as this means that the supervisor can now be a full time manager/administrator (not being in the classroom); while at the same time it also means that there is one extra staff member (the supervisor) who can cover for an educator in a classroom or group if necessary.

All three centres offered children a variety of choices during the day for them to explore and experiment with. Due to safety issues, some tools and materials (such as sharp tools for carving clay; bits of metal, wire and glass) that are usual items in Reggio schools, are very exceptionally used in the three studied centres, since educators on PEI would be hesitant to offer them to children, fearing the worst. During my study tour, I also observed that infant-toddler and pre-primary schools in Reggio Emilia offer big slabs of clay for the children to experiment, explore, and work with (Personal journal, 2010). It is one of the hundred languages of children used for symbolic representation (Edwards, 1998). Schools also have kilns on the school premises proper in which to bake the clay sculptures that the children produce (Cadwell, 1997).

Since all childcare centres on PEI are privately owned and some of them are not-for-profit centres, these kinds of items could be above their budget allowance. Another disadvantage

of using natural clay would be that it has to be constantly replaced since most of the children would want their sculptures baked and saved. In Reggio Emilia, this can be done more easily because infant-toddler and pre-primary schools that follow the Reggio Emilia approach are subsidized by the municipality. Nevertheless, in my opinion, educators here on PEI could still offer children air drying clay once in a while, exposing them to the changing properties of this versatile medium. They may also consider offering them real tools to work with. This would mean that the educators have to be more vigilant and observant to prevent accidents. A supervisor made this comment in her interview when the staff in her centre started trusting children more and so now they can be seen sitting or standing on chairs and tables; something that was unheard of in the past:

It was really a big turning point for us once we grasped that the children are capable and competent. And that we just have to be closer to them if they are climbing and be more observant... (Sup 3).

### **Parents as partners**

Children, teachers and parents are three equally important components in the Reggio Emilia approach. Parents are encouraged to be active contributors to children's activities in the classroom and in the school. There is a sense of collaboration between parents and teachers in Reggio schools. This starts with the "insistence by teachers that they are not substitutes for parents; but rather, share with parents the challenge and responsibility of educating their children" (New, 2007, p. 8). At least one supervisor agrees with this and says:

I think that parents are partners with the educators and the children on their learning journey, because you can't just take the child out of the home and fill their head with knowledge...it doesn't work like that...it is a journey. (Sup 2)

During my observations, I did not have much opportunity to observe parents taking an active part in their children's learning, either because it was not taking place while I was at the centre or because it was not taking place at all. I know however, through interviews with supervisors, ECEs and parents themselves, that there is some degree of involvement of parents in these centres, as described in my findings in Chapter Four.

The first preschools in Reggio Emilia were built with the insistence and direct involvement of parents and the community. This was a powerful indication of the motivation these community members felt to be part of these schools. There is no such history in the building of childcare centres on PEI. Therefore, one cannot expect that the parents and community commitment to these centres would be as strong as that in Reggio Emilia. My interviews with the parents suggest that parents want to be involved in what is going on in the centre, to know what their children are learning, and attending special events held by the children in these centres. However, the involvement seems to stop there. It did not go deeper, in that the parents felt the need to be part of what the children were doing in the centres (by, for example, coming in and talking to the children). The parents that took part in the interviews said that they knew of someone else who had come in to talk to the children at least once, but not themselves personally. In one centre, parents did help to renovate the outdoor area and to build a model spaceship which was part of a project that the children were interested in. In another centre, parents helped in a project about lighthouses.

New (2001) speaks of her visit to a Reggio-inspired school in Naples, Italy, and how the educator there involved parents - and even grandparents - through a growing interest that the children had of how to make wine. Perhaps such a project is not so likely to take place here on PEI due to cultural and climatic differences; but perhaps a possible solution would be that

parents could be similarly involved in picking berries (which are plentiful on the Island) together with their children. Educators can then research and investigate in collaboration with the children how berries grow, where they come from, and what are the various ways in which these berries can be used. Some parents can come in and share their knowledge about berry picking, while others can be invited in to talk to the children about the process of making jam, jelly, pies or preserves, and even help the children in preparing some themselves. Children in PEI might not be learning how to make wine like the children in Naples, but they can certainly learn more about different uses of berries which they would come across in their daily family lives. Similar ideas could be developed in relation to other fruits, vegetables, and other naturally available products on PEI: examples include rhubarb, mussels, and potatoes.

Most of the parents I interviewed were in favour of parents' advisory boards. Butterfly centre is run by a parents' board since it is a not-for-profit centre, and is part of a childcare program that has a parents' advisory board as part of its policy. The other two centres do not have this advisory board as a requirement in their centre's policy. With the new provincial initiative that came into operation in September 2010, all the centres that have applied, and been accepted as Early Years Centres, will be required to establish a parents' advisory committee to ensure a parent voice in the centre's operation (Flanagan, 2010). Since this is a new initiative, one still cannot be sure of the outcome and impact of such committees. During my study tour in Reggio, Paola Cagliari, the director of early childhood education in Reggio Emilia, spoke about how parents were seen as partners to professional educators and not threats to the latter's authority and discretion (Personal journal, 2010). The skills and ideas that the families bring to the school, as well as the exchange of ideas between parents and teachers, favour the development of a new kind of education. Spaggiari (1993) also points out that parents'

participation is considered essential and can take many forms. It should help educators to view the participation of families not as a threat but as an intrinsic element of collegiality and as the integration of different wisdoms.

A primary motivation of parental involvement is an invitation from significant others such as educators and schools (Bandura, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Sandler, Whetsel, Green, Wilkins & Closson, 2005). My interview analysis similarly suggests that parents expected to be asked by educators for their involvement especially in the centre's activities with the children. The parents' perspective of parental involvement, resulting from the analysis, was more of them reinforcing at home that learning that went on at school, rather than seeing themselves being actively involved with the children in the centre to enhance the children's learning. Since the Reggio Emilia approach is so different from those that most parents experienced in their school years, they feel that they might be intruding if they get too involved in the children's learning at their schools (McClow & Gillespie, 1998). This was also mentioned by one early childhood educator during her interview when she told me that she feels that perhaps they (the ECEs) were not asking the parents enough to be involved in the children's learning and were only asking for their help when needed:

Maybe it is a question of just asking...have we built up a wall of resistance because we have never asked the question: would you be interested? (ECE 2)

As parents begin to build their confidence in parental involvement and feel more welcomed and better appreciated at the childcare centres, the greater the chance that they can "exert influence on their children's learning and become empowered to be involved in their children's learning" (Huang & Mason, 2008, p. 26).

## Documentation

There are three main functions of documentation: to provide children with a concrete and visible memory of what they have said and done, using images and words to help them reflect and explore further; to give educators an insight into the children's learning processes; and to provide parents and the community with detailed information about what happens in the schools.

A fundamental aspect of constructivist teaching is to know a child in a way that supports a deep relationship with that child. Documentation refers to the recording of children's work done in projects or work in progress. Teachers combine photographs, audiotape transcripts, videotapes, notes and products of children's work to create a detailed, visual display of learning (Abramson, Robinson & Ankenmen, 1995). One of Reggio Emilia's fundamental aspects uses documentation to come to know children (Kroeger & Cardy, 2006). A supervisor commented in her interview that she and her colleagues have come to know the children more deeply since they have been inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach:

I know these children better than I knew the children I was teaching 10 years ago. I know what their interests are now. (Sup 3)

As a tool of observation and interpretation, the practice of documenting is part of the daily life of Reggio schools (Rinaldi, 2004). According to Kroeger & Cardy (2006), "documentation allows individuals to revisit and reflect on learning experiences; by documenting learning processes in an engaging and attractive way, teachers convey to the child that his or her work is valued" (p. 391). All three ECEs that I interviewed agreed that documentation gave children a sense of ownership and they felt that what they were doing was being valued as quoted in Chapter Four. The documentation I saw during my stay in Reggio Emilia is the product of years of practice and evolution, and takes place in an environment where two educators

always work together, with the addition that in the pre-primary schools there is the help of a full time *atelierista* who, with experience and education in art, can help not only in the aesthetics, but the finalizing of the documentation that adorns most of the walls in the Reggio schools (Personal journal, 2010).

According to Claudia Guidici, who delivered a presentation about 'aesthetics and learning' during the study tour of April 2010, the *atelierista* is a person who studied in the arts and not necessarily in education. She stated that the *atelierista* works in close proximity with teachers and how children learn. During my visit to Munari pre-primary school in Italy, I noticed that the *atelierista* there does not teach children how to use, for example clay, but rather offers them the tools to arrive at what they want to achieve (Personal journal, 2010).

Wien (2008) has hypothesized four stages in teacher development when implementing emergent curriculum and these are useful in order to assess to what extent PEI educators have transitioned towards the full cultivation of the Reggio Emilia pedagogy. The four stages are: (1) *the challenged teacher* – these educators like the idea of emergent curriculum but are not sure how to do it. They like what children in Reggio Emilia can do but do not understand why the children in their group are not capable of doing the same; (2) *the novice teacher* – educators who seem to make emergent curriculum work for them and the children, but do not know if it is worth it or not. They feel that documentation is the right thing to do but are doubtful as to whether it is creating more work for them, or whether it is beneficial for the parents, children and the educator; (3) *the practicing teacher* – these educators understand that documentation is important, but finds that it takes a lot of time and energy to carry out, but still gets it done. These educators believe in the Reggio Emilia principles but still find themselves teaching in traditional ways in some areas; (4) *the master teacher* – these educators believe and do all the things that the

practicing teacher does, but they also work collaboratively with a team of other educators who discuss continuously children's documentation and "predict what children will do [next]" (Wien, 2008, p.13). These educators plan and prepare the right materials that children would need to achieve their goal. Their documentation "habit is secure" (ibid.). These educators are: "very conscious of layering many things into the day – conversations, many modes of expression like clay or dance or wire work, [and] keeping parents involved" (ibid.). Finally these educators "can sense possibilities in the children, and find ways to draw them out...work with them, expand them" (ibid.). The documentation process is relatively new in the three Prince Edward Island centres that took part in this study; the analyses of my findings show that the three centres took this process step by step, and introduced the Reggio Emilia philosophy into their centres little by little. Thus, in my opinion, some educators are in the novice stage while others have moved on to the practicing stage of documentation according to Wien's (2008) four stages of emergent curriculum.

Vecchi (1993) argues that documentation serves as both an individual and collective display of activities, a method for reflecting on learning that leads to new experiences, a way to share this learning with parents and others, and a tool for capturing growth and development. During my observations, I could see educators in two of the three centres, taking photos on several occasions, but not necessarily recording children's conversation. They were just taking photos of children during play or group activities. These photos were then used for their daily sheet binders which would be ready at the end of each day for parents to have a look at. This could have been because no particular project was in progress while I was there. However, when I had a look at the portfolios, I could identify the documentation of several projects that had taken place during the year and which included children's conversations. These would have been

displayed on the walls at the appropriate time. As will be discussed in more detail later on in this chapter, lack of time to get the documentation together was voiced by all three ECEs interviewed. Another difference to point out is the fact that the municipality of Reggio Emilia invests 16% of its budget in the Reggio schools. This allows, amongst other things, each school to have a budget sufficient enough to produce and print books based on projects undertaken by the children. These books are then sold exclusively by the schools producing them and thus generate more funds for that particular school. We have no such tradition, no such budget and no resources to do that in our early childhood centres here on PEI especially the ones that are privately owned. Now that the PEI provincial government has invested 63% more funding (\$8.7 million in total) in early childhood with the Preschool Excellence Initiative, one is hopeful that the centres that applied and were approved to become Early Years Centres will get more funding and perhaps be able to carry out projects similar to the ones mentioned above (EECD, 2010).

A documentation-based curriculum provides a natural link between children's experiences at home and in school. Documentation helps parents understand the teacher's way of teaching, and the children's learning experiences within the classroom environment (Malaguzzi, 1993; Kroeger & Cardy, 2006). Through documentation panels, parents are able to observe children's learning processes, their interaction with peers and the resources available in their environment. This was confirmed by all 10 participating parents during their interviews as discussed in Chapter Four. They all agreed that the documentation on the walls and the daily binders offered them insights as to what and how their children were learning in the centre. Some parents did say, however, that they do not always find the time to read all the documentation on the walls but rather appreciate the daily binders that show, at a glance, the happenings of the day.

One supervisor expressed her agreement that it is the centre's intent to keep documentation succinct and to the point so that parents will be more inclined to be engaged by such material:

...By keeping our documentation simple and quick for them to look at...that keeps them coming back to it...they do not have to spend an hour, they can go in and read something in 10 minutes. (Sup 3)

During my study tour in Reggio Emilia, I did see both daily binders which depict daily activities as well as documentations of projects exhibited on the walls (Personal journal, 2010).

In Reggio Emilia, the community invests heavily in early childhood education, and in turn the early childhood education program invests in the community by making the children's work visible to them (Edwards 1998). During our study tour, Paola Cagliari told us of particular examples to demonstrate this. For example, the Diana school was undertaking a project about animals that live in the jungle. And so, to make this learning visible to the community, some of the children's clay sculptures of animals were placed in the trees just outside the school in a public park (Personal journal, 2010). Another classic example is the theatre curtain that the children were asked to help decorate by the municipality for the main stage of the lead theatre in the city (Municipality Infant-toddlers, 2006). A suggestion to the three PEI centres based on my analysis would be for them, as a start, to make their children's learning more visible in and to their immediate community, namely the two educational institutions and the religious one. This would be a step in the right direction to engage the community more in what goes on in the centre. In fact, a supervisor indicated in her interview that she was thinking about doing this in the near future:

I plan to take some of our learning out there [the community]. Display children's work in different parts of [the institution] that surrounds us. (Sup 3)

*The Hundred languages of children* and *The Wonder of learning* are two exhibitions that were created through various documentations of children's work and which have travelled the world to make children's learning visible (Municipality of Reggio Emilia, 2010). From the documentation I have seen in portfolios, daily sheets and on the centre's walls, I think that the three PEI centres could also create a small exhibition as part of a cultural function where the larger community could become better and more closely involved in what goes on in childcare centres on PEI. Perhaps the Early Childhood Development Association (ECDA) would be able to host this exhibition with some financial help from the provincial government or private sponsors. It might not travel the world as the Reggio Exhibitions do; but it would surely send out the clear message that children are competent and able beings and that they should be treated with greater respect and dignity in their early childhood education.

The next section discusses the findings about the indoor and outdoor environments of the three childcare centres taking part in this study.

### **Environment**

Educators in Reggio Emilia believe that the school for young children is an integral living organism, a place of shared lives and relationships among many adults and children (Gandini, 2008). The objective of Reggio Emilia educators is to create an amiable and aesthetically pleasing environment, where children, families, and teachers feel at ease; an environment that "encourages choices, problem solving and discoveries in the process of learning" (Gandini, 1993, p. 6). The interior and exterior spaces of the Reggio schools are designed and organized in a way that "fosters interaction, autonomy, explorations, curiosity, and communication, and are offered as places for children and for the adults to research and live together" (Municipality of Reggio Emilia, 2010).

The Reggio Emilia approach encourages educators to pay close attention to the many ways that space can be made to ‘speak’ and invite interactions (Cadwell, 2003; Fraser, 2007). Strong-Wilson & Ellis (2007) suggest such examples as placing small mirrors around the classroom or placing easels close to natural sunlight. These are objectives that I feel can be easily attained by any childcare centre on PEI. During my observations, I did not witness such good use of materials in all the centres. I did, however, observe that there were provocative media being presented to the children in all three centres, such as flour mixed with a little oil, dried pasta shapes, shaving foam, pine cones, twigs and sticks, and cut up pieces of logs. There was also a variety of media in the art centres comprising of different coloured and textured paper, adhesive tape, different coloured markers, paints, scissors, staplers and glue. I observed that children were more attracted to these natural things that offered them the opportunity to create their own projects and to use their imagination, rather than making use of the commercial toys that were available to them in the centres. Some examples I witnessed during my observations include: a girl using narrow strips of paper, which she had cut out herself to do bracelets for herself and her friend; some boys making swords with paper and tape which later turned into a baseball bat; and a small group of children making collages with leaves, twigs, and dried flowers. Wurm (2010) contends that “the choices about the environment we create also link directly to the play and learning in individual classrooms and schools” (par. 1).

During my visit to Reggio Emilia, I had the opportunity to visit *The Atelier of Light* which is situated in the Loris Malaguzzi childcare centre. This place offers space for research and experimentation of light and light phenomena (Rechild news, 2010). It has a full time male *atelierista* who works with the children of the Loris Malaguzzi childcare centre and any other Reggio school that wants to make use of this *Atelier* (Personal journal, 2010). It is worthwhile

noting here, that having both male and female *atelieristas* present in Reggio schools increases the likelihood that the children in these schools are also exposed to male educators and role models. Perhaps it is too much to expect that we would ever have anything like this available for early childhood education centres here on PEI; but two of the three centres I observed had a studio where educators could book a time slot, in a way that each group or classroom could have a sufficient block of time to work in the studio, and take a small group of children to work with different kinds of media to represent their thoughts. The third centre had an art area in each group which was very well equipped with different art and creative media which worked well for that centre, because of limited space and structural issues. This shows how flexible the Reggio Emilia approach is and how one can make it work within the culture, needs and resources of their particular centre. Perhaps some form of collaboration with the staff, materials, and space at the Confederation Centre of the Arts in Charlottetown could be explored on PEI.

Some of the Reggio Schools were built on purpose with the Reggio philosophy in mind so their indoor and outdoor environment is seen as central to the children's learning (Cadwell, 2003). Not all the buildings in Reggio Emilia that now house a Reggio school were built for that purpose, but a lot of structural renovations were done to them to make the environments as amicable and encouraging as possible (Personal journal, 2010). Although all three PEI centres taking part in this study were not built with the intention of being Reggio-inspired, from my observations I could see that there were various positive changes being made: for example shelving being adjusted to the children's height; making more natural choices available to children; and improving their outdoor areas. Restructuring the outdoor and indoor environment is not totally in the hands of the owners of these three centres, however. Since they all rent out their space from an institution, there are certain restrictions and rules that they have to abide with. For

example, they cannot commit to any structural changes to the environment without the prior permission and approval of the respective institutions. Having said that, all three centres have outdoor areas that offer stimulation to children that encourage them to experiment with different natural materials, and to explore their surroundings. This was explained and reinforced in more detail in Chapter Four. Some centres are stronger on this point than others, while others are still working to improve their outdoor areas.

The next section will address and discuss the second research question for this study, and how it relates to the findings of the data that has been collected.

### **Second Research Question:**

**What are the benefits/challenges that early childhood education centres faced during the process of adapting to the Reggio Emilia philosophy of learning?**

I will base this discussion largely on the answers given by the participants during the interviews conducted for this study. I used this method of data collection in collaboration with observations because, as Patton (2002) says: “we interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe” (p. 340). I felt that I could not truly justify the benefits and challenges of being a Reggio-inspired centre simply through observations, but that such an assessment could be better reinforced through the interviews with the persons involved.

#### **Benefits**

A universal benefit that seems to have resulted from applying the Reggio principles in these childcare centres on PEI was the new image that the supervisors and educators now have of the child. They can now relate better to children and their needs as they are more actively listening to what children have to say. Rinaldi (2005) contends that “listening is not easy. It requires a deep awareness and at the same time, a suspension of our judgments and above all our

prejudices; it requires openness to change" (p. 6). From my observations, I could clearly see that the educators made time to listen to children and see what their interests are. One of the supervisors said in her interview that being Reggio-inspired and learning about this philosophy has helped her to get to know the children better, much more than she has ever done during her whole career in childhood education:

Before, for example, if I was doing a project on spring, we all did ladybugs. We all cut out the ladybugs; we all glued the little black dots on the ladybugs. So what did that tell me? That the kids could cut, they could glue, and they could count five dots. But now, when I'm working with a project with the children, I know what their interests are to a deep, deep level. (Sup 3)

Perhaps this deeper level of interaction between educators and children was due to the fact that the educators are now working alongside the children. In traditional teaching, the teacher usually tells the children what to do and they would be expected to carry out those instructions. But, in the Reggio approach, educators "participate in learning alongside children, asking their own questions, and conducting their own quest" (Wien 2008, p. 147). Both supervisors and educators agreed that this way of learning gave children a sense of ownership and that documentation validated the process of their learning. Documentation allows children to build their own knowledge and curiosity and then make their learning more visible and meaningful to others (Kroeger & Cardy, 2006).

Another benefit that came out of adapting the Reggio Emilia approach in these three centres was that the relationship between educators and parents grew stronger. Educators saw parents as being more engaged in what was going on in the centre, especially through daily sheet documentations, portfolios and any documentation that went up on the walls. Documentation

seems to be of great value to parents especially those of younger children who lack verbal skills to tell them what is going on in the centre (Kroeger & Cardy, 2006). This was also voiced by one set of parents whose child is two years old and so could not always tell them about what he did at the centre (as described in Chapter Four).

Other benefits for the ECEs that resulted from my findings were that they discovered skills that they did not know they had; and they are finding that they are now working better as a team, sharing their ideas and discussing children's learning. As one early childhood educator reported:

I find that as a staff we really have come together...it's really great to pull together our ideas...it really brought us together. (ECE 1)

Another educator agrees that:

The staff work more as a team now...there are not those ups and downs and highs and lows, it's a nice steady flow of energy now. (ECE 3)

Parents were also asked if they could see any benefits resulting from the new pedagogy that was being implemented in their children's centre. However, most of the parents did not know enough about the Reggio approach, and so they could not really identify its benefits. Yet, all parents interviewed felt that their children were very happy, doing well at the centre, and always eager to go back the next day. They also pointed out that they liked the idea that children are given choices and that the children are asked about their interests and ideas and then these interests are taken up by the educator to further the children's learning. These same benefits were found to be true in a study conducted by McClow & Gillespie (1998) with parents attending a Reggio-inspired school in Iowa, USA.

### **Challenges**

The main challenge that the three supervisors saw in adapting the Reggio Emilia approach was to get everyone on board with the idea of a new way of learning, far from the structured, traditional one that the educators and parents were all familiar with. “Change threatens existing interests and routines, heightens uncertainty, and increases complexity” argues Katz (1994, p. 16). To compensate for this, the supervisors of two centres offered training and visits to a Reggio-inspired centre in Nova Scotia and offered material about the emergent curriculum and the Reggio principles to their staff to read. These readings were later discussed in various staff meetings. The third centre offered the educators lots of reading material to get them accustomed to the idea of working alongside the interests of the children. All three centres were offered support by the early childhood coach, who is expressly tasked to provide support and guidance to licensed early childhood, kindergarten and school age care programs in ways that enhance the quality of care and education that the children receive. This support is provided through an on-site consultation approach in partnership with program supervisors/owners. Evaluation of learning environments has provided an opportunity to develop programs and services, identify strengths and challenges, and establish priorities for change or development. These services have included customized training supports, access to resources, and planning processes. The supports have included development of the learning environment, exploring different curriculum approaches, increasing inclusion practices, and supporting team development and staff resources (Goodine, personal communication September 8, 2010).

Fullen (1992) recommends that there should be openness and interaction among all those concerned in the change. Through my interviews with parents, I found that only one of the parents (who is an educator herself) knew what the new philosophy was all about. This is an area

that, in my opinion, all three centres can and should work more on. They need to get parents together and explain to them what being Reggio-inspired means. This can not only be done through sit-down meetings in large groups; parents can also be asked to come with their children for an hour in the evening perhaps and work with the children, or discuss children's documentation with the educators. This would not only educate the parents in what the Reggio Emilia approach means, but would also help them to get more involved with their children's development. In a couple of years' time, further research in this area would be appropriate after the *Preschool Excellence Initiative* comes into place and each centre that has chosen to be an Early Years Centre (and thus following certain criteria set out by the provincial government), would have to have a parents' advisory committee set up in their centre (Flanagan, 2010).

The interviews with ECEs suggest that their major concerns involve the lack of time for documentation and to meet with each other to discuss both this documentation and what further steps can be taken to enhance children's learning. One of the early childhood educators reported that:

Time to document, I find that difficult. There's so much that you want to say and so little time to get the documentation done. (ECE 1)

Another early childhood educator contended that"

The challenge [for documentation] is finding the time because during the day there is no time... (ECE 2)

The third early childhood educator agrees with her colleagues and states that:

The challenge is, of course as always, time... (ECE 3)

Another concern voiced by two of the three educators that I interviewed was that they think they could work better if they were in pairs in the classroom (in the case of one centre), or

if there was an extra staff member floating around from one group to the other (in the case of another centre). This issue has been discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.

During my observations, there were instances where I noticed that educators could not carry out documenting during certain activities because they were on their own or with a large group of children. Finding time to work on documentation during the working hours is very difficult (Goldhaber & Smith, 1997). When I visited the *Munari* pre-primary school in Reggio Emilia, not only were there two teachers in the group during any activity but the *atelierista* herself was there taking photos, one of the educators was taking notes of the children's conversation, while the other one was helping and keeping an eye on the children (Personal journal, 2010). When I compare what I saw in Reggio Emilia to what I saw in these three centres on, I am not at all surprised that the ECEs voiced their concern about the lack of time and resources available to allow them to carry out the task of documentation.

Working in pairs gives the teachers a chance for "constant discussion of hypotheses and predictions about the ongoing work with the children" (Rinaldi, 1998, p. 120). Neugebauer (1994) suggests that teachers work as a collaborative group of two. She goes on to say that "each contributor is equal; each comes with a real sense of cooperation" (p. 69). This was a challenge identified by the ECEs interviewed in two of the three centres. Both ECEs found it difficult to work on their own and wished they had more time to be able to discuss the children's learning with other educators. The only time that I could observe them having a rushed conversation was either if they happened to meet on snack or lunch breaks, or while in the outdoor areas with the children. Having said that, all three centres on PEI have a monthly staff meeting where, apart from the usual administrative issues, other issues about children's learning are also discussed. Educators in Reggio have six hours a *week* for professional development (PD) allotted to them;

this time includes meeting with each other to discuss children's learning and documentation (Malaguzzi, 1998; Personal journal, 2010). Vakil et al. (2007) argue that educators need time allotted to them on a weekly basis to meet, discuss, critically review, plan and collaborate with their colleagues. This is another area that these Reggio-inspired centres need to work on, if they believe that, when educators work and collaborate together, this will benefit the children and the centres in general. Perhaps six hours a week of PD is not within the budget of these centres; but having an extra educator on a part-time basis that could come in to cover educators to be able to meet together, might be a more feasible proposition to consider for these centres.

The third research question will be addressed and discussed in the following section in relation to the findings of this study.

### **Third Research Question:**

**What are the future goals, if any, for these three Reggio Emilia inspired centres on PEI, and what do stakeholders identify as necessary supports to make these goals happen?**

This question was asked to the three supervisors with the intention to see what they were planning for the future of their centres and what support, financial or otherwise, they think they need in order to achieve these goals. The second part of this question was asked to ECEs; to elicit conversations about their ideas of any support they think they need to be able to further implement the Reggio philosophy in their centre. I will first discuss the findings about the future goals that the supervisors envisage for their centres, and then I will discuss what support supervisors and ECEs think they need to implement the Reggio philosophy.

### **Future goals**

One main future goal for the three interviewed supervisors is to move forward and get better at implementing the Reggio Emilia philosophy in their centres. One particular supervisor's goal this coming year is to implement team teaching which would be a good substitute for working in pairs. The latter would not work in this particular centre's structural layout, where there are two large areas in each of which there are two groups of about 11 mixed age children ranging from two to five years of age. What this centre is planning to do is that, instead of having the educator of each group be responsible only for the children in her group, the two educators of the two groups on each side will be working together when it is free time play and be responsible for the two groups as a whole. This would give one educator an opportunity to be able to observe and document the children's activities, while the other is interacting and monitoring the area:

I think the next step we'll have someone come in to do workshops on team teaching, working as a team, helping us look at our day and structure our day so that people are truly working together. (Sup 2).

Another supervisor's goal is to get the Sunshine and Sandy centres, which have been to Peter Green Hall children's centre in Nova Scotia, to meet up with the staff from Peter Green Hall and together organize a weekend seminar on Prince Edward Island, in which each centre would choose, a different component of the Reggio philosophy and then present and share it with the whole group. On my suggestion, this supervisor is now considering inviting the Butterfly centre to join in this activity as well. In my opinion, if these three centres on PEI can work together and support each other, they would all benefit from the experience. As discussed in Chapter Four, my findings suggest that the three centres in Charlottetown are all strong in different areas with regards to the cultivation of the Reggio Emilia principles. Some are strong in

their documentation, others are strong in their outdoor environments, and others with their parental involvement in the centre. So, in my opinion, it would benefit them if they work together, and support each other, exploiting their complementary strengths, as they could then learn from one another and improve in all aspects of the Reggio Emilia approach.

### **Support needed**

Analysis from the findings show that, while two of the supervisors think that the municipality or province should offer more financial assistance, and that the Early Childhood Development Association (ECDA) should offer more training opportunities about the Reggio Emilia approach, one supervisor believes that these sources cannot help their centre as she believes that the provincial government and the ECDA do not know enough about the Reggio Emilia approach to be able to support her centre. She may be right in thinking that the municipality and the province are still far from thinking on the same page as she is about the importance of childhood education.

Having said this, there may be a change in provincial government thinking after having read the Flanagan (2010) report about early childhood on PEI. I also have to say that the ECDA has some knowledge about the Reggio Emilia approach, and has offered workshops for educators about this subject in the past. In my opinion, living on an island where community is considered an integral part of childcare education, municipal and/or provincial government support to childcare centres on PEI would be a benefit not only to the centres but to the community in general. It would also be interesting if future studies would be conducted in rural areas of PEI to see if municipal support to Reggio-inspired centres would be more feasible since the population is smaller and there may be a greater sense of community there.

Another area that the supervisors mentioned that they would like to have support with was with getting their staff, or at least some of them, to experience the Reggio Emilia approach first hand by going to Italy. Hall et al. (2010) agree with Howard Gardner who, in his foreword to the book *The Hundred Languages of Children*, advises about the benefits of visiting Reggio Emilia. He stresses the point that “there is no substitute for a visit to Reggio Emilia...” (Gardner 1998, p. xvi). I have personally experienced this when I participated in the one of the study tours to Reggio Emilia in April 2010. One can read various books and articles about Reggio and its pedagogy, sometimes perhaps ending up with misconceptions too. When one goes to Italy one can experience firsthand what was read about in books, or what others who have been to Reggio Emilia before you have said or written. In so doing, one can then be able to come up with one’s own conclusions based on what one sees and hears while visiting Reggio schools, and during meetings and presentations given by Reggio educators, *pedagogistas*, and *atelieristas*, who are all living the Reggio experience. One supervisor who I interviewed had the opportunity to go on a study tour to Reggio Emilia in May 2010:

I need to get everyone on the team over to Reggio Emilia to see it firsthand because for myself there were some things that I think I formed my own ideas about [from books read], and they were kind of misconceptions, and going over and seeing it and hearing it and talking about it with like-minded people was *amazing*. (Sup 2).

This was also one of the required supports that the ECEs spoke about during their interviews. They all wish that they can one day make it to Reggio Emilia to be able to experience this philosophy firsthand for themselves, and not have to rely only on what they read in books and what they hear from speakers who have been to Reggio Emilia. Nevertheless, it is quite expensive, as I have experienced, to go on one of these study tours in Italy, and without some

form of financial support it would be hard for these educators to achieve their wish to visit Reggio Emilia in person. Other means of support mentioned in the interviews with ECEs dealt with the allocation of more time, and working in pairs. These two issues have already been discussed previously in this chapter.

### **Cultural differences**

In the course of my research, I became increasingly aware of the cultural differences that exist between, on one hand, what I have seen in Reggio Emilia (and the literature I have read about it); and, on the other hand, what I have observed in the three PEI early childhood centres that participated in my study.

One main difference that stands out immediately is the municipal funding that the Reggio Emilia schools get compared to the zero funding municipalities on PEI provide to early childhood learning centres. The Reggio Emilia municipality invests 16% of its budget in the Reggio Emilia schools. Parents pay 25% of the fee (there are ten different levels of subsidies according to the economic status of the family); the rest is subsidized by the municipality. Because of this, I could observe the richness of materials and resources that these Reggio Schools had (Personal journal, 2010). Schools in Reggio have kilns on premises to bake and finish off the clay sculptures that the children create. Fresh slabs of clay are provided for the children continually. All pre-primary Reggio schools have the service of a full-time *atelierista* to work with the teachers to enhance children's learning (Vecchi, 1993). Each school has enough money to fund the printing of various books, depicting projects and the learning process that children were involved in during the year (Personal journal, 2010). As discussed in Chapter Two, PEI provincial government has invested 63% more funding (totalling \$8.7 million) in early childhood in May 2010 when it introduced the Preschool Excellence Initiative. However, since

the money invested is coming from the province and not from the municipality, it is harder to control where the money will be actually invested. Perhaps, if early childhood funds were allotted to municipalities according to the demand for childcare spaces, then these funds may be more evenly shared by the centres in each municipality, as done in Reggio Emilia. During my observation of the three childcare centres here on PEI, I could appreciate why certain resources and materials could not be made available to the children, mostly because of lack of funds.

The strong commitment of the educators, community, and parents in Reggio Emilia dates back many decades and has been ingrained in this town's culture since the end of World War II. Family values are still the focus of Italian society, and the Italian family has remained a very close social unit (SUF, 2010). Educators in Reggio Emilia schools spend many extra hours in the schools, work on weekends, and attend seminars during the summer, according to Gardner (2000). It is good to point out here that educators in Reggio Emilia are paid an annual salary (H. Moses, personal communication, September 2, 2010), so whatever extra hours they choose to work, they are not being paid extra. They do it because they are very committed to their work with children. This is different from the level of commitment with which parents, educators or the community are involved in early childcare centres here on PEI. ECEs on PEI are paid an hourly wage, so it would not for example, be economically viable for the supervisor to pay for extra hours so that the educators could work on their documentation. Having said this, I know through my own experience, that a lot of the educators on PEI do work extra hours, usually at home after they finish a day at work or during the weekends.

Hall et al. (2010) describe parental involvement in the Reggio schools as "close and warm" (p. 127). Parents are part of their children's learning as much as their educators. The municipality of Reggio (2010), in its book *Indications: Preschools and infant-toddler centres of*

*the Municipality of Reggio Emilia*, states that: “the class in the preschool [and infant-toddlers] is made up of a group of children, their parents, and two teachers [three in the case of infant-toddlers] who share equal responsibility for the group” (Municipality of Reggio Emilia, 2010, p. 17). Such a statement shows the commitment that parents have towards their children’s learning. It does not mean that the parents are present in the classroom at all times; rather, that they have a right to be involved in anything that goes on in the classroom, be it an activity, a project or a decision. My findings indicate that more work needs to be done on the parental involvement issue but, with a little more commitment and effort on both parties, this could be achieved, though perhaps not to the extent of that found in Reggio schools. Nevertheless, if the educators on in these three childcare centres on PEI keep working as a team, with the interests and well-being of the child as their focal point, I think that they would be able to come up with ways of how to get parents more involved and engaged in what is going in the centres.

Another indication of how different Reggio Emilia schools are from the Reggio-inspired childcare centres on PEI is provided by the rest time that children in Reggio schools have during their day at the school. All children in Reggio schools have a rest period from 1pm to 3pm daily (Municipality of Reggio, 2010). This routine combines well with a culture where all retail shops close during that time and people who are at home at that particular time usually take a nap (siesta). This also helps the children in their daily routine, so that during the weekends, when they are at home, they will not have any problems with taking a nap from 1-3pm, as would their parents. Here on PEI, it is not customary for children or parents to have a nap in the afternoon, and most people work during that time, with stores and offices open all day. Children in childcare centres on PEI do not all take a nap. It usually depends on their age (infants and toddlers usually need the nap), and it also depends on instructions given by the parents as to

whether or not the educators are to allow the children to take a nap or not. The reason behind this is that some parents would rather that their children go to bed early in the evening, than napping during the day and then taking longer to go to sleep in the evening (Field notes, 2010). In Italy, on the other hand, children are encouraged to nap during the afternoon so that then they can partake of the family dinner when their parents get back from work, and they get to sleep later on in the day (Personal journal, 2010, Gillen et al., 2007). This shows how different cultural aspects affect our daily lives; and yet, it also demonstrates how such differences need not interfere with the application of the Reggio Emilia principles.

The Canadian culture of getting children ‘prepared’ for school is another issue that has to be faced, as opposed to the Reggio Emilia perspective that children are being prepared for life, and not, or not just, for school. Inman Linn (2001) points out that in North America people “protect children from failure in the intellectual sphere by ensuring that all academic tasks are within their perceived zone of development” (p. 3). This protection from failure deprives children from opportunities of growth which come from dealing with failures (Inman Linn, 2001). The mentality that children have to be prepared for school was also seen as a cultural challenge by Xuereb (2009) when she conducted a study of four Reggio-inspired childcare centres in Malta: these centres were finding it extremely difficult to implement the child-centred aspect of the Reggio Emilia philosophy because of having to “prepare children for the first year of the schooling system” (p. 49). The goal of the provincial government’s investment in early childhood on PEI, through the Preschool Excellence Initiative, is also intended to “better prepare Island children for kindergarten – which in turn, will strengthen their ability to excel during a lifetime of educational opportunities” (EECD, 2010, p. 2).

This brings up the issue of how transferable the Reggio Emilia approach is. This has been discussed in more detail in previous chapters. There have been various articles written about whether the Reggio Emilia approach can be transferred successfully to another country or not (Fero, 2000; Firlik, 1996; Gandini, 1993; Hall et al., 2010; Neaugebauer, 1994; Vakil et al. 2003; Wien, 2008; Xuereb 2009). Strong-Wilson (2007) contends that “we cannot lose sight of the fact that Reggio Emilia is rooted in concrete cultural practice” (p. 2). During my study tour in Reggio Emilia, Amelia Gambetti and other *pedagogistas* insisted that the Reggio Emilia philosophy was an ‘approach’ and not a ‘model’ and therefore cannot be transferred in its entirety. Rather, because it is an ‘approach,’ it can be adapted to one’s own culture and the needs of the children in that culture (Personal journal, 2010). Amelia Gambetti herself talked about how her trips to other Reggio-inspired centres/schools in other countries had inspired them (the Reggio Emilia educators) to change certain aspects of the approach, always keeping in mind the fundamental principles of the Reggio Emilia approach (Personal Journal, 2010). As Strong-Wilson (2007) states “its [Reggio Emilia approach] strength, in fact is its capacity to become culturally rooted” (p. 2). In my opinion, that is the wonder of this approach. It might not be exportable, or transferable as a package; but, as a philosophy, it is portable from one culture to another with a considerable degree of success, certainly in the case of PEI. The centres on PEI have taken the fundamental principles of the Reggio Emilia approach to heart and are making them work for their children, parents and their centres. The physical and material aspects of the approach may be different than what one would see in Reggio schools, but the philosophy and thinking are similar. And that is what really counts: to have a positive image of the child; to see parents as partners in their children’s learning; to have educators working collaboratively to co-construct their children’s learning; to have children’s learning made visible through documentation; and to

use the environment as a third teacher. So much is hopefully evident from the outcome of this research.

### **Limitations of the study**

This study has a number of limitations that should be taken into consideration in reading and evaluating this research and its findings. Being subjective is an aspect of qualitative research that must be acknowledged, and this usually means that any findings rely a great deal on the researcher's views and values about what is important or relevant (Bryman & Teevan, 2005). My own bias in this study could be seen as a limitation or challenge in itself since I highly value quality childcare and the Reggio Emilia approach in particular. However, while I accept and declare this normative standpoint, I have tried to balance this by using triangulation as my research design (Patton, 2002). This included collecting data through observations, interviews and from the personal journal kept during my study tour in Italy in April, 2010. The fact that data was not being gathered from one source, but three, strengthened the validation of the data that counterbalanced each other. To further validate this research, I conducted a member check with all interviewees who confirmed written transcripts and validated the themes that emerged from their interviews.

Due to the size and scope of this study, another limitation is that the parents' sample was not representative of the whole population of the three centres – unlike samples of both supervisors and educators who took part in this study. They were therefore not randomly selected and their opinions might not be typical of the parent population. Another limitation is that ECE participants were nominated by supervisors to participate in the research. This was done so that these particular participants could give me more detailed information about the issues under question during the interviews, as they would be the more experienced staff members (having

been there for a number of years) in emergent curriculum and the Reggio Emilia approach.

Moreover, the three childcare centres chosen for this study are all located in an urban area and so they do not necessarily represent in any way all the childcare centres on PEI.

A limitation of my observation sessions was that they were divided into two hour blocks of time and did not consist of whole days being spent at the centres consecutively. I attempted to counter balance this by spreading out the two hour blocks at different times of the day, in such a way that I still covered most of a routine schedules of a childcare centre. My presence in the classrooms or groups might have intimidated educators and therefore, this was also a limitation of the observation sessions. Since personal values and interests can deter the researcher from remaining as objective as possible (Grieshaber, 2001), I have tried to remain inactive throughout the observation sessions, as I did not want to interfere or influence what was going on.

Another potential limitation to this study is that the collection of data took place during a time when there was significant change underway in the early childhood sector on PEI. Kindergarten was being transferred to the school system and a new preschool initiative was being set up by the provincial government for the consideration of early childhood centres on PEI. As a consequence of these events, the staff being interviewed and observed might have been going through a rough time and experiencing undue anxiety, resulting in perhaps not performing to their full potential.

A summary of my research findings, suggestions for future research that resulted from this research, and recommendations that have emerged from this study will follow and comprise my conclusion to this study.

## Conclusion

Interaction must be an important and strong word. You must write it in the entrance to the school. Interaction. That is, try to work together to produce interactions that are constructive, not only for socializing, but also for constructing language, for constructing the forms and meaning of language (Malaguzzi, 2004, p. 84).

Interaction – along with communication, collaboration, and the co-construction of learning – this is the bedrock of the Reggio Emilia approach, just as the founder and guide of this progressive pedagogy, Loris Malaguzzi, argues above.

I embarked on this journey of research and discovery to explore and uncover in some depth the practices of three early childhood education centres, located in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, which are currently adapting the Reggio Emilia philosophy to their programs. This study has explored the benefits and challenges to children, staff, parents and the centres in general that the cultivation of this particular philosophy has brought about. This research was generated by my three main research questions: (1) how has the Reggio Emilia approach been adapted by three early childhood education centres on Prince Edward Island; (2) what are the benefits/challenges that these childcare centres faced in adapting the Reggio Emilia approach; and (3) looking forward, what are the future goals for these programs in PEI and what do early childhood educators identify as necessary supports to make these goals happen?

Three early childhood education centres on PEI took part in this study, which was conducted during May and June 2010. One supervisor, one staff member and two sets of parents in each centre were interviewed, making a total of 12 interviews. Sixty hours of observations were carried out successively in the three centres, comprising a 20 hour block of time in each centre. The observations and interviews took place concurrently in each centre.

I had first heard about the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education during a conference held by the Early Childhood Development Association (ECDA) of PEI, in 2006. The guest speaker at the time, Carol Anne Wien, spoke very passionately about this approach and about her visit to Reggio Emilia in Italy. I was very much intrigued by the way educators in these schools communicated and worked with the children in their care. After that conference, I started reading more about this approach which then led me to hone in on the topic for this thesis. At that point, I was still basing my study and fieldwork plans on what I had read and heard. However, after having had the opportunity to attend a study tour in Reggio Emilia in April 2010, some things had to change. I found that I had some misconceptions about the approach, and that, if I went ahead, for example, with the observational framework that I had prepared for my observational sessions as had already been drafted, it would not have been fair to the centres for me to conclude whether or not these centres were implementing the Reggio Emilia principles. I realised that some observational criteria that I had earlier planned to use were based on physical aspects and staff supports which could be very different from those found in Italy, such as the *atelier*, the *piazza*, or the daily schedule in the schools. During my visit in Italy, I learnt that it is not the approach as seen in Reggio schools that has to be implemented (inclusive of both physical and cultural aspects); but rather, as Hewett (2001) says, “it [the approach] must be carefully uncovered and redefined according to one’s own culture in order to successfully affect practice elsewhere” (p. 99). After the study tour, I amended my observational framework, taking into consideration the insights learnt from presentations delivered by professionals living the Reggio Emilia experience, and my own conclusions from this experience.

My findings show that the Reggio Emilia approach has been and is continually being adapted over time in the three childcare centres through various workshops and other resources.

These opportunities were made available to them through the early childhood learning coach whose job was to introduce emergent curriculum to various centres across PEI and then to support them in this journey. The supervisors at the Sunshine and Sandy centres also took the initiative to expose their staff to hands on experiences at Peter Green Hall children's centre in Halifax, NS. These same supervisors went on a study tour to Reggio Emilia, Italy, in May, 2010.

The findings of my research suggest that the main principles of the Reggio Emilia approach are perhaps not yet *fully* implemented in the three centres: the supervisors and most of the educators in these three centres are still in between the 'novice' and the 'practicing' stages of emergent curriculum as described by Wien (2008). This means that they are trying hard to improve their cultivation of these principles through practice and the use of any resources they come across which would help them understand these fundamental principles better. Literature shows that this is a very normal process for the educators to be going through, since it has been argued that it takes about 10 years to become fully immersed in the Reggio Emilia principles (Gardner, 1998).

According to the findings of this study, one of the main benefits of becoming a Reggio-inspired centre is that the educators' view of the child has changed: they now view the children as being more competent and able, and they are learning to trust them more and to be more respectful of their thoughts and ideas. This was illustrated through the interviews with supervisors and ECEs as well as by what I observed while doing my fieldwork. A second benefit of this approach as described by parents and educators during the interviews is that, since the activities are based on what the children are interested in, their attention span is longer; there are fewer behavioural issues; and the children seem to be happier coming to the childcare centres in the morning, as they would be looking forward to what was going to unfold during the day in the

centres. A third benefit is that the relationship between parents and educators is improving. There is still work to be done in this area, as Supervisor 1 mentions: ‘...as far as reaching every parent and offering something to every parent, we could do more of that’. Nevertheless, both parents and educators can see and feel the difference. Supervisor 2 said during her interview that she thinks: “...parents know that they are able to come in and talk about things [with the educators], and they take the time with their child to read and look at the documentation”. Supervisor 3 goes on to say: “I think that parents are more involved now in what their children are partaking in... not maybe necessarily every family, but most families”. A parent agrees that being involved in her child’s learning is beneficial: “it is so beneficial because she [her daughter] sees that we are part of her day to day life in the centre. She doesn’t see that this is my space and parents aren’t a part of it” (Par 3).

As with any new system, localizing Reggio has its challenges. Time was a key constraint that the educators voiced in their interviews. Since documentation is a fundamental part of the Reggio principles, the interviewed educators felt that they should be allotted more time to be able to compile this documentation which is usually done while the children are doing their activities, by taking photos of the children’s learning process, or by documenting children’s conversations in writing. These are then put up on stock cards and displayed on the walls in the centres, or in daily sheet binders that parents, in particular, are able to look at when they drop off or pick up their children. A second key challenge is the cultural context of each centre. Through my interviews with supervisors, I found that they were well aware of the different cultural contexts, not only between Reggio Emilia in Italy and PEI childcare centres, but also among childcare centres themselves. However this challenge is not something to be overcome but rather to

embrace for the opportunity it also presents for growth, stretching, and advancing on the path to creating more authentic learning environments for young children.

The future goal of the three centres is to support their staff in implementing the Reggio Emilia approach through more hands on training. Two of the centres' supervisors feel that both the provincial government and the Early Childhood Development Association (ECDA) could perhaps support them financially, and through getting more professional persons (from Reggio Emilia, perhaps) to PEI to participate in workshops for all ECEs.

In conclusion, I can say that my research findings suggest that the three childcare centres are practicing the fundamental principles of the Reggio Emilia approach. Supervisors and educators have a positive image of the child; and more and more every day, they are seeing parents as partners in their children's learning while trying to involve them more in the centre. Educators are working collaboratively to co-construct their children's learning; children's learning is being made visible through documentation; and all three centres are using the environment as a context for further learning and exploration.

What follows are some considerations about future research that could be done about the Reggio Emilia approach, as suggested by the outcomes of this study.

### **Considerations for future research**

While conducting my literature review, data collection and analysis, I came across gaps and issues that would benefit from future research:

1. Since the three centres that took part in this study are in their early stages of becoming Reggio-inspired, a similar study done in two or three years' time in the same early childhood centres would be interesting to conduct, especially since

Kindergarten has now moved to the school system, and the Preschool Excellence Initiative would have been in place for a couple of years.

2. A comparative study done between Reggio-inspired childcare centres and other childcare centres that implement a different pedagogy – such as Montessori - could be conducted on PEI to truly evaluate the benefits and challenges of the Reggio Emilia approach and its effect on children.
3. A more in-depth study of parents' perspectives about the Reggio Emilia philosophy, and of active parental involvement in early childhood centres, would provide further insights to supervisors and educators about more and better ways how parents could be involved in their children's learning.
4. Should Reggio-inspired centres spread out to rural areas on PEI, it would be interesting to research if these smaller and more closely knit communities are more open to support these early childhood centres and make the children's work visible and more central in, and to, their community.
5. A comparative study of Reggio-inspired early childhood centres across North America could offer insights as to the process that each centre has adopted in implementing the Reggio Emilia approach, and to see if the challenges and benefits faced by these centres were similar to each other.

To conclude my study, I would like to table five recommendations suggested by my research findings that would support and help these early childhood education centres, as well as any others that might want to become Reggio-inspired.

## Recommendations

1. That the three Reggio-inspired centres that participated in this study endeavour to make children's learning more visible by displaying documentation of the process of the children's learning in their respective settings. This would provide important new opportunities for these centres to branch out into their immediate communities.
2. That these three centres act as mentors to other centres interested in finding new ways to enhance and enrich the learning environments they provide for children. Educators from such centres could visit the three Reggio-inspired ones to experience firsthand how the principles of the Reggio Emilia approach are being implemented.
3. That the three centres could team up and prepare a public exhibition of artefacts and documentation of their children's learning, thus creating PEI's own 'hundred languages of children'. Such an initiative would not only reach out to the larger community, but would also give ownership to the children and educators of the work and learning that go on in these centres. The Early Childhood Development Association (ECDA) of PEI would hopefully consider hosting and supporting this exhibition.
4. Since all three centres are in the city of Charlottetown, this municipality could support and help these centres in the cultivation of the Reggio Emilia approach, by making available public places, such as the art gallery, the public library, or town hall, where documentation of children's learning could be made visible to the members of that community.
5. That the Faculty of Education at the University of Prince Edward Island follow in the footsteps of Holland College, and start offering a credit course in the principles and practices of the emergent curriculum and the Reggio Emilia approach as part of the

program leading to the degree of Bachelor in Education, specializing in early childhood education.

I stepped away from my more customary role of an early childhood educator, and put on the researcher's hat to conduct this study. I have come away from this experience as a very different person from the one that started in 1995 as an early childhood educator at the Marsaskala Kinder School, in Malta. I now have stronger feelings about my values as an educator and the work I do with young preschool children. I have come to appreciate even more the valuable work that the educators in these three childcare centres are carrying out *with*, and not just *for*, the children in their care.

Before finishing this thesis, I had the opportunity to visit two Reggio-inspired preschool centres in Sweden in September 2010. When the visit ended, I was encouraged to note that what went on in these two Reggio-inspired preschools compared quite well with what the three early childhood centres on PEI are doing in their daily routines with the children. Both centres, on PEI and Sweden, provided rich documentation throughout their buildings, involved parents as much as possible, had a positive image of the children, thus, trusting in their capabilities, their environments offered opportunities for children to further enhance their learning. This experienced confirmed to me that the Reggio Emilia principles can be adapted and implemented to one's culture and children's needs, even in other countries outside the region of Emilia Romagna in Italy.

I commend the early childhood educators at Sunshine, Butterfly and Sandy for the efforts and their present achievements with integrating the Reggio Emilia principles into their centres. At the same time, I encourage other early childhood educators to learn more about the Reggio

Emilia approach, appreciate how it validates children's learning, and understand more deeply how hard working educators contribute to this learning.

Localizing Reggio has its challenges; but it also has its rich rewards. I invite other early childhood educators to find this out for themselves.

## References

Abbott, L. & Nutbrown, C. (2007). *Experiencing Reggio Emilia: Implications for pre-school provisions*. (Eds.). Berkshire UK: Open University Press.

Abramson, S., Robinson, R., & Ankenman, K. (1995). Project work with diverse students: Adapting curriculum based on the Reggio Emilia approach. *Childhood Education*, 71, 197.

Ansell, J. (2006). *Sanchez elementary opens innovative new child development program: School district adds third program inspired by the world renowned Reggio Approach from Italy*. Press release in The Innovative Teacher project. Retrieved from <http://www.innovativeteacherproject.com>

Austin, G. R. (1976). *Early Childhood Education: An International Perspective*. New York: Academic Press.

Armstrong, J., & Hislop S. (2008). "How big is Tiny?" Do grade 1 girls grasp measurement? In C.A. Wien (Ed.) *Emergent curriculum in the primary classroom. Interpreting the Reggio Emilia approach in schools*. NY & Washington DC: Teachers College Press & National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Bandura, A. (1977). *Social Learning Theory*. New York: General Learning Press.

Bandura, A. (1986). *Social Foundations of Thought and Action*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York: W.H. Freeman.

Baxter P., & Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative case study methodology: study design and implementation for novice researchers. *The Qualitative Report* 13(4), 544-559.

Bickman, L. & Rog, D.J. (2009). *The Sage handbook of applied social research methods*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Bilingual Kids International Preschool (2009). About us: Our Area. Retrieved from  
<http://www.bkipreschool.com/aboutus.html>

Bold Park Community School (BPCS) (2008). Philosophy. Retrieved from  
<http://www.boldparkcom/index.php?page=philosophy>.

Brostrom, S. (2003). Understanding *Te Whariki* from a Danish Perspective. In Joce Nuttal (Ed.) *Weaving Te Whariki: New Zealand's early childhood curriculum document in theory and practice*. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Education Research.

Bryman A., & Teevan, J.J. (2005). *Social research methods*. Canadian edition. Don Mills, ON: Oxford.

Burgess, R.G. (1997). *In the field. An introduction to field research*. London, UK: Routledge.

Cadwell, L. B. (1997). *Bringing Reggio home*. NY: Teachers College Press.

Cadwell, L. B. (2003). *Bringing learning to life: The Reggio approach to early childhood education*. NY: Teachers College Press.

Carr, M. (2001). *Assesment in early childhood settings. Learning stories*. London: Paul Chapman.

Carr, M., & May, H. (2000). Te Whariki: Curriculum voices. In H. Penn (Ed.), *Early childhood services: Theory, policy and practice* (pp. 53-75). Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Carr, M., May, H., & Podmore, V. (2000). *Learning and teaching stories: Action research on evaluation in early childhood*. Final report to the Ministry of Education. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

CBC News, (2010). PEI's daycares decide future. Retrieved from <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/prince-edward-island/story/2010/07/08/pei-daycares-decision-584.html#ixzz0tB53adsu>

Charmaz, K. (2009). Shifting the grounds: Constructivist grounded theory methods. In J.M. Morese, P.N. Stern, J.M. Corbin, B. Bowers, & A.E. Clarke, (Eds). *Developing grounded theory: The second generation* (pp. 127-154). Walnut Creek, CA: University of Arizona Press.

Childcare Resource and Research Unit: Prince Edward Island (2007). Retrieved from [http://www.childcarecanada.org/ECEC2008/pdf/ECEC08\\_PE.pdf](http://www.childcarecanada.org/ECEC2008/pdf/ECEC08_PE.pdf)

Child Care Facilities Act (CCFA), (2005). Child care facilities act – Regulations. Retrieved from <http://www.gov.pe.ca/law/regulations/pdf/C&05G.pdf>

Cleveland, G., Forer, B., Hyatt, D., Japel, C., & Krashinsky, M. (2008). New Evidence about Child Care in Canada: Use Patterns, Affordability and Quality. *Institute for Research on Public Policy Choices 14 (12)*.

Coffey, A. (1999). *The ethnographic self: Fieldwork and the representation of identity*. London, UK: Sage.

Colegio Interamericano (2008). About us: History. Retrieved from <http://www.interamericano.edu.gt/content/history>

Colledge, R. (2002). *Mastering counselling theory*. NY: MacMillan.

Collingwood College (2009). Reggio-Inspired approach P-5. Retrieved from  
<http://www.collingwood.vic.edu.au/reggio.php>

Corsaro, W. (1996). Early education, children's lives and the transitions from home to school in Italy and the United States. *Journal of Comparative Sociology* (37)1-2, 121+

Cowie, B. & Carr, M. (2008). The consequences of sociocultural assessment in early childhood settings: community, competence and continuity, in A. Anning, J. Cullen & M. Fleer (Eds) *Early childhood education: Society and culture*. London: Sage

Crabtree, B. & Miller, W. (Eds) (1999). *Doing qualitative research*. London: Sage.

Dahlberg, G. (2000). Everything is a beginning and everything is dangerous: some reflections of the Reggio Emilia experience, in H. Penn (Ed.) *Early Childhood Services: Theory, policy and practice* (175-183). UK: Open University Press.

Dewey, J. (1966). *Democracy and education*. New York: Free Press.

Dimitriadis, G. & Kamberelis G. (2006). *Theory for Education*. US, NY: Routledge.

Doherty, G., Lero, D., Goelman, H., & Tougas, J. (2000). *You bet I care*. A Canada wide study on wages, working conditions and practices in childcare centres. Guelph, Ontario: Centre for Families, Work and Well-Being. University of Guelph.

Drummond, M.J. (1997). Starting with children – towards an early years curriculum, in C Cullingford (ed) *The politics of primary education*. United Kingdom: Open University Press.

Early Childhood Development Association of PEI, (2010). About ECDA. *Newsletter: Early childhood development association*, September, 2010.

Early Childhood Development Association of PEI, (2010a). Brochure for the association:

Helping PEI families make the early years count.

Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD), (2010). *Securing the future for our children. Preschool excellence initiative*. Charlottetown, PE: Provincial government of Prince Edward Island.

Edwards, C. (1998). Partner, nurturer, guide: The role of the teacher. In Edwards C., Gandini L., & Forman G. (Eds.), *The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education* (pp. 179-198). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Edwards, C., Gandini, L. & Forman G. (Eds.), (1998). *The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Edwards, S. (2005). Children's learning and developmental potential: examining the theoretical informants of early childhood curricula from the educator's perspective. *Early Years* (25)1, 67-80.

Eisner, E. (1985). *The Educational Imagination: On the design and evaluation of school programmes*. New York: McMillan.

Elicker, J., & Mathur, S. (1997). What do they do all day? Comprehensive evaluation of a full-school-day kindergarten. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 12 (4), 459–480.

Epstein, R. A. (1999). *Principles for a free society*. Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press.

Essa, E., Young, R., & Lehne, L. (1998). *Introduction to Early Childhood Education*. Toronto: Thomson International.

Fero, I. (2000). Reggio in North American schools: To what degree is transfer applicable? *EGallery Journal* (1)1, 1-13. Retrieved from <http://people.ucalgary.ca/~egallery/fero.html>

Firlik, R. (1996). Can we adapt the philosophies and practices of Reggio Emilia, Italy, for use in American schools? *Early Childhood Education Journal* (34), 317-220.

Flanagan, K. (2010). *The early years report. Early learning in PEI: An investment in the Island's future*. Canada, Prince Edward Island: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development; Department of Community Services, Seniors, and Labour; Department of Health and Wellness Executive Council Office.

Flanagan-Rochon, K. (1983). *Study of Childcare Services on Prince Edward Island*, Charlottetown: Department of Health and Social Services, Special Services Division.

Forman, G., Moonja, L., Wrisley, L., & Langley, J. (1993). The city in the snow: Applying the multisymbolic approach in Massachusetts. In Edwards C., Gandini L., & Forman G. (Eds.), *The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education* (pp. 233-250). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Forman, G. (1993). The constructivist perspective to early education. In J.L. Roopnarine & J.E. Johnson (Ed.), *Approaches to early childhood education* (pp. 137-155). New York, NY: Macmillan.

Fraser, S. (2006). *Authentic childhood: Experiencing Reggio Emilia in the classroom*. Albany, N.Y.: Nelson Thomson Learning.

Fraser, S. (2007). Play in other languages. *Theory Into Practice* (46)1, 14-22.

Friendly, M. (2008). Building a Strong and Equal Partnership between Childcare and Early Childhood Education in Canada. *International Journal of Childcare and Education Policy* 2, 39-52.

Fullan, M.G., and Miles, M.B. (1992). Getting reform right: What works and doesn't. *Phi Delta Kappan* 73(June), 745-752.

Fyfe, B., & Caldwell, L. (1993). In P. Weissman, R. Saltz, & E. Saltz (Eds.), *Innovations in early education: The international Reggio exchange*. (pp.6-7). Detroit, MI: Merrill-Palmer Institute.

Gandini, L. (1993). Fundamentals of the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education. *Young Children*, 49 (1), 4-8.

Gandini, L. (1994). Not just anywhere: Making child care centres into "particular" places. *Child Care Information Exchange* 3, 48-51.

Gandini, L. (1997). The Reggio Emilia Story: History and organization. In J. Hendrick (Ed.), *First steps toward teaching the Reggio way*. (pp. 26-40). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Gandini, L. (1998). Educational and caring spaces. In Edwards C., Gandini L., & Forman G. (Eds.), *The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education* (pp. 161-178). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Gandini, L. (2008). Introduction to the fundamental values of the education of young children in Reggio Emilia. Revised edition of Fundamentals of the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education. *Young Children*, 49 (1), 4-8.

Gardner, H. (1998). Foreword: Complementary perspectives on Reggio Emilia. In Edwards C., Gandini L., & Forman G. (Eds.), *The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education* (pp. 41-89). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Gardner, H. (2000). The best preschools in the world. From *The disciplined mind*. (Chapter 5). Retrieved from: <http://www.reggioinspired.com/gardneronreggio.htm>

Gardner, H. (2004). The hundred languages of successful educational reform. *Children in Europe* 6, 16-17.

Gillen, J., Cameron, C.A., Tapanya, S., Pinto, G., Hancock, R., Young, S. & Accorti

Gamannossi, B. (2007). 'A day in the life': advancing a methodology for the cultural study of development and learning in early childhood. *Early Childhood Development and Care* 177(2), 207-218.

Glassman, M. & Whaley, K. (2000). Dynamic aims: The use of long-term projects in early childhood classrooms in light of Dewey's educational philosophy. *Early Childhood Research & Practice*, 2(1).

Goldhaber, J. & Smith, D. (1997). "You look at things differently:" The role of documentation in the professional development of a campus child care center staff. *Early Childhood Education Journal* (25)1, 3-10.

Grieshaber, S. (2001). Equity issues in research design. In G. McNaughton, S. A. Rolfe & I. Siraj-Blatchford (Eds.), *Doing early childhood research: International perspectives on theory and practice* (pp.136- 146). N.S.W: Allen & Unwin

Hall, K., Horgan, M., Ridgway, A., Murphy, R., Cunneen, M., & Cunningham, D. (2010). *Loris Malaguzzi and the Reggio Emilia experience*. NY: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Haigh, K.M. (2007). Exploring learning with teachers and children: An administrator's perspective. *Theory Into Practice* (46)1, 57-64.

Haigh, K.M. (2008). Reinterpreting the Reggio Emilia approach in the USA: An approach for all children. *Community Playthings*. Retrieved from:  
<http://www.communityplaythings.com/resources/articles/Reggio/Reinterpreting.html>

Haug, P. (2003). In OECD – Directorate for Education (2004). *Starting strong. Curricula and Pedagogies in early childhood education and care – Five curriculum outlines*. Report

from workshop for national coordinators of early childhood policy. Ministry of Education and Science in Stockholm, June 11-13, 2003.

Hewett, V. M. (2001). Examining the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 29 (2), 95-100.

Hooover-Dempsey, K.V., Walker, J.M.T., Sandler, H.M., Whetsel, D., Green, C.L., Wilkins, A.S. & Closson, K. (2005). Why do parents become involved? Research findings and implications. *Elementary School Journal* 106, 105-130.

Huang, G.H-C., & Mason, K.L. (2008). Motivations of parental involvement in children's learning. Voices from urban African American families of preschoolers. *Multicultural Education (Spring)*, 20-27.

IJEYE, Editorial (2003). What is special about Early Childhood Education in New Zealand? *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 11(1), 3-6.

Inman Linn, M. (2001). World View: An American educator reflects on the meaning of the Reggio Experience. *Phi Delta Kappan* 83(4), 332-336.

Katz, L.G. (1994). Images from the world: Study seminar on the experience of the municipal infant-toddler centers and preprimary schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy. In Katz, L.G & Cesarone, B. (Eds.), *Reflections on the Reggio Emilia approach* (pp. 7-30). ERIC Digest: ERIC clearinghouse on elementary and early childhood education, Urbana, IL

Katz, L. G. & Chard, S. C. (1996). *The contribution of documentation to the quality of early childhood education*. ERIC Digest: ERIC clearinghouse on elementary and early childhood education, Urbana, IL: April.

Key, J.P. (1997). *Research design in occupational education*. Retrieved from <http://www.okstate.edu/ag/agedcm4h/academic/aged5980a/5980/newpage21.htm>

Kim, B.S., & Darling L.F. (2009). Monet, Malaguzzi and the constructive conversations of preschoolers in a Reggio-inspired classroom. *Early Childhood Education* 37, 137-145.

Kroeger, J. & Cardy, T. (2006). Documentation: A hard to Reach Place. *Early Childhood Education Journal* 33(6), 389-397.

La Scuola (2009). *Our school: Our history*. Retrieved on March 2, 2010 from <http://www.reggioinspired.com/history.htm>

LeBlanc, M. (2009). *Reggio Emilia: An innovative approach to education*. Retrieved from <http://www.communityplaythings.co.uk/resources/articles/reggio-emilia.html>

LeeKeenan, D., & Nimmo, J. (1993). Connections: Using the project approach with 2-and 3-year-olds in a university laboratory school. In Edwards C., Gandini L., & Forman G. (Eds.), *The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education* (pp. 251-267). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Legislative Counsel Office (2005). Child Care Facilities Act. Retrieved from <http://www.canlii.org/en/pe/laws/regu/pei-reg-ec475-87/latest/pei-reg-ec475-87.pdf>

Lewin, A. (1995). *The fundamentals of the Reggio approach*. Presenting to visiting delegation at the Model Early Learning Centre, Washington, DC.

Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. New York: Sage.

MacDonald, E. (2000). *If you're stronghearted: Prince Edward Island in the twentieth century*. Charlottetown: Prince Edward Island Museum and Heritage Foundation.

MacDonald, M. (2007). Toward formative assessment: The use of pedagogical documentation in early elementary classrooms. *Early Childhood Research* 22(2), 232-242.

Malaguzzi, L. (1993). For an education based on relationships. *Young Children* 49(1), 9-12.

Malaguzzi, L. (1998). History, ideas, and basic philosophy. In Edwards C., Gandini L., & Forman G. (Eds.), *The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education* (pp. 41–89). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Mason, J. (2002). *Qualitative researching*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

May, H. (2002). Early childhood care and education in Aotearoa – New Zealand: An overview of history, policy and curriculum. *McGill Journal of Education* 37(1), 19-36.

May, H. & Carr, M. (1997). Making a difference for the under fives? The early implementation of Te Whäriki, the New Zealand National Early Childhood Curriculum. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 5(3), pp. 225-236.

Mella, P. (2009). *Every child a better future: Report of the public kindergarten commissioner*. Charlottetown, PE: Provincial government of Prince Edward Island.

McClow, C.S., & Gillespie, C.W. (1998). Parental reactions to the introduction of the Reggio Emilia approach in Head Start classrooms. *Early Childhood Education Journal* 26(2), 131-136.

McCormack, Cathy, Early Childhood Consultant, for Charlottetown. Interview by author, February 28, 2005 Charlottetown, PEI.

Ministry of Education (1996). *Te Whariki: He Whariki matauranga mo nga mokopuna o Aotearoa, Early childhood curriculum*. Wellington: Learning Media.

Ministry of Education, New Zealand (2010). *Links to Te Whariki*, Policy statement, ECE Educate.

Mitchell, L., Wylie, C., & Carr, M. (2008). *Outcomes of Early Childhood Education: Literature Review*. Report to the Ministry of Education. Research Division. New Zealand. Retrieved from <http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/ece/25158/24800>.

Müller Kucera, K. and Bauer, T. (2001). *Costs and Benefits of Care Services in Switzerland — Empirical results from Zurich*, Department of Social Services, Zurich

Municipality Infant-toddler centers and preschools of Reggio Emilia, (2006). *Catalogue of the hundred languages of children exhibition*. Reggio Emilia, Italy: Reggio Children s.r.l.

Municipality of Reggio Emilia (2010). *Indications: Preschools and infant-toddler centres of the municipality of Reggio Emilia*. Reggio Emilia, Italy: Municipality of Reggio Emilia.

Mustard, F. (2002). *Early Child Development and Human Development. Public Policy Presentation. What do we know about Early Learning and what are we doing about it?* (Transcript). Canadian Education Association. Retrieved on July 2008, from [www.cea-ace.ca/media/Mustard\\_Transcript.pdf](http://www.cea-ace.ca/media/Mustard_Transcript.pdf)

Neugebauer, B. (1994). Unpacking my questions and images: personal reflections of Reggio Emilia. *Child Care Information Exchange*, 3, 67–70.

New, R. (1990). Excellent early education: A city in Italy has it. *Young Children*, 45 (6), 4–10.

New, R. (1993). *Reggio Emilia: some lessons for U.S. Educators*. Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education (ERIC). Retrieved from <http://www.ericdigests.org/1993/reggio.htm>

New, R. (1998). Reggio Emilia's commitment to children and community: A reconceptualization of quality and DAP. *Early Years* (18)2, 11-18.

New, R. (2001). Early childhood in cross-national perspective – Italian early care and education: The social construction of policies, programs and practices. *Phi Delta Kappan* (83)3, 226-240.

New, R. (2007). Reggio Emilia as cultural activity: Theory in Practice. *Theory in Practice*, 46(1), 5-13.

OECD Directorate of Education (2004). *Starting strong. Curricula and Pedagogies in early childhood education and care – Five curriculum outlines*. Report from workshop for national coordinators of early childhood policy. Ministry of Education and Science in Stockholm, June 11-13, 2003.

Pakai, E. (2004). *Te Whariki – the curriculum for early childhood education in Aotearoa/New Zealand*. Paper presented for Research in Early Childhood Care, Education and Health (REACH), at Victoria University in Canada.

Patton, M.Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. (3<sup>rd</sup> ed). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Pence, A. R. (1992). *Canadian National Child Care Study. Canadian Child Care in Context: Perspectives from the Provinces and Territories*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

Penn, H. (1997). *Comparing nurseries – staff and children in Italy, Spain and the UK*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

Peter Green Hall (2007). Peter Green Hall Children Centre. Retrieved from <http://petergreenhall.dal.ca/>

Pramling Samuelsson, I. (1988). *A curriculum for 1-5-year-olds in Swedish preschool*. Paper presented at the 22<sup>nd</sup> OMEP World congress, Copenhagen.

Pramling Samuelsson, I., Sheridan S. & Williams P. (2003). Five Preschool Curricula – a comparative perspective. *International Journal of Early Childhood* 38(1), p. 11-30.

Press Release, (2010). Many Island Early Childhood Centres Hoping to Convert to Early Years Centres. Retrieved from <http://www.gov.pe.ca/index.php3?number=news&newsnumber=7194&dept&lang=E>

Prince Edward Island Advisory Council on the Status of Women (2003). Policy Guide: Early Childhood Care and Education. Charlottetown.

Rankin, B. (1997). Education as collaboration: Learning from and building on Dewey, Vygotsky, and Piaget. In J. Hendrick (Ed.). *First steps toward teaching the Reggio way* (pp. 70–83). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Rabitti, G. (1992). An integrated art approach in a preschool. In Katz, L.G., & Cesarone B. (1994), *Reflections on the Reggio Emilia approach*, pp. 51-63. US: ERIC Clearing House

Rechild (2001). Reggio Children newsletter. *Reggio children international centre for the defence and promotion of the rights and potential of all children*. Reggio Emilia, Italy: Reggio Children s.r.l.

Rechild news (2010). Reggio Children newsletter. *Reggio children international centre for the defence and promotion of the rights and potential of all children*. Reggio Emilia, Italy: Reggio Children s.r.l.

Reina, A. (2005). The Reggio Emilia approach. Retrieved on February 12, 2010 from:  
<http://www.aboutenglish.it/comeniusasilo2/reggioapproach.htm>

Research in Reggio Emilia. (n.d.). In the institute for early childhood and research. *Research and Practice 4*. Retrieved from  
[http://earlychildhood.educ.ubc.ca/Publications/Researchintopractice\\_Vol\\_IV.htm](http://earlychildhood.educ.ubc.ca/Publications/Researchintopractice_Vol_IV.htm)

Ridington, J. (1983). *Day care discussion paper for the national association of women and the Law*. Unpublished document, February 1983: 63.

Rinaldi, C. (1993). The Emergent Curriculum and Social Constructivism: An interview with Leila Gandini. In C. Edwards, L. Gandini, and G. Forman (Eds.) *The Hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education*. (pp 19-37). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Rinaldi, C. (2004). The relationship between documentation and assessment. *Innovations in Early Education: The International Reggio Exchange 11(1)*, 1-4.

Rinaldi, C. (2005). *In dialogue with Reggio Emilia: Listening, researching and learning*. NY: Routledge Falmer.

Rinaldi, C., & Moss, P. (2004). What is Reggio? *Children in Europe 6*, 2-3.

Rogoff, B. (1990). *Apprenticeship in thinking: Cognitive development in social context*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Salmon, A.K. (2008). Promoting a culture of thinking in the young child. *Early Childhood Education Journal (35)*, 457-461.

Santrock, J. (2008). *Child Development*. (11th Ed.). Boston MA: McGraw-Hill.

Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Schiller, M. (1995). Reggio Emilia: A focus on emergent curriculum and art. *Art Education, 48(3)*, 45-50.

Schroeder Yu, G. (2008). Documentation: Ideas and applications from the Reggio Emilia approach. *Teaching Artist Journal* (6)2, 126-134.

Soler, J. & Miller, L. (2003). The struggle for early childhood curricula: a comparison of the English foundation stage curriculum, Te Whäriki and Reggio Emilia. *International Journal of Early Years Education* 11(1), pp. 57-68.

Spaggiari, S. (1993). The community teacher partnership in the governance of the schools. In C. Edwards, L. Gandini, and G. Forman (Eds.) *The Hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education* (pp. 91-99). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Strong-Wilson, T. (2007). This Issue (Editorial). *Theory Into Practice* (46)1, 1-4.

Strong-Wilson, T., & Ellis, J. (2007). Children and Place: Reggio Emilia's environment as third teacher. *Theory into Practice* 46(1), 40-47.

Strozzi, P. (2001). 'Daily life at school: Seeing the extraordinary in the ordinary', in *Making learning visible, children as individual and group learners*. Italy, Reggio Emilia: Reggio Children, The President and fellows of Harvard college and the municipality of Reggio Emilia.

Syracuse University in Florence (SUF), (2010). Italian family and culture: The Italian family today. Retrieved from <http://www.syr.fi.it/img/PDF/Student-Life/Housing/Homestays/3%20Italian%20Family%20&%20Culture.pdf>

Szymanski, D. (2000). Reggio Emilia approach at Findon Primary School. Retrieved from [http://www.collingwood.vic.edu.au/Documents/ReggioEmilia\\_FindonPS.pdf](http://www.collingwood.vic.edu.au/Documents/ReggioEmilia_FindonPS.pdf)

Tarr, P. (2001). *Aesthetic codes in early childhood classrooms*. Retrieved from [http://www.designshare.com/Research/Tarr/Aesthetic\\_Codes\\_1.htm](http://www.designshare.com/Research/Tarr/Aesthetic_Codes_1.htm)

Tarr, P. (2004). Consider the walls. *Young Children* 59(3), 88-92.

Te Whariki (1996). *Te Whariki: He Whariki matauranga mo nga mokopuna o Aotearoa, Early childhood curriculum*. Ministry of Education. Wellington: Learning Media.

The Swedish Ministry of Education and Science (1998). *Curriculum for the pre-school*. Stockholm:Fritzes.

Trochim, W.M.K. & Donnelly, J.P. (2006). *The Research Methods Knowledge Base*. Third Edition. Victoria, Australia: Cengage Learning.

Vakil, S., Freeman, R., & Swim, T.J. (2007). The Reggio Emilia approach and inclusive early childhood programs. *Early Childhood Education Journal* (30)3, 187-192.

Vecchi, V. (1993). The role of the atelierista. In C. Edwards, L. Gandini, and G. Forman (Eds.) *The Hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education* (pp. 119-127). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Walsh, K., & Albrecht, K. (1996). Reggio Emilia: A view from the classroom. *Texas Child Care* 20(1), 2-6.

Warash, B., Curtis, R., Hursh, C., & Tucci, V. (2008). Skinner meets Piaget on the Reggio playground: Practical synthesis of applied behaviour analysis and developmentally appropriate practice orientations. *Journal of Research in Childhood* (22)4, 441-454.

Wexler, A., (2004). A theory for living: Walking with Reggio Emilia. *Art Education* (57)6, 13-19.

Wien, C.A. (1997). A Canadian in Reggio Emilia: The May study tour. *Canadian Children* 22(2), 30-38.

Wien, C.A. (2008), (Ed). *Emergent curriculum in the primary classroom. Interpreting the Reggio Emilia approach in schools*. New York & Washington DC: Teachers College Press and National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Williams, D.L. & Chavkin, N.F. (1989). Essential elements of strong parent involvement programs. *Educational Leadership* (47), 18-20.

Wurm, J.P., (2005). *Working in the Reggio way: A beginner's guide for American teachers*. Minnesota: Redleaf.

Wurm, J. (2010). How the environment inspires curriculum. Retrieved from <http://www.communityplaythings.com/resources/articles/Reggio/environment.html>

Xuereb, C. (2009). The Importation of the Reggio Emilia philosophy in Malta - Challenges and opportunities. Masters in Early childhood education thesis. University of Sheffield, UK.

Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods*. (4<sup>th</sup> ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Vista Coop, (2008). Childcare. History. Retrieved from <http://www.vista.coop/>

**Appendix A**  
**Interview question guidelines – Supervisor**

1. Can you please describe how and when you became interested in the Reggio Emilia/emergent curriculum approach and why you decided to be inspired by it?
2. What benefits do you see in this approach?
  - To the children? To the staff? To the Centre as a whole?
3. What are your thoughts about the challenges/limitations of this approach?
4. What kinds of staff conflicts have you encountered, if any, when it came to the implementation of this approach?
5. How did the informative sessions, held in your Centre by the ECE coach, help you to better understand the Reggio Emilia emergent curriculum approach?
6. What training opportunities have you offered, or are you planning to offer, your staff to help them better understand this learning approach?
7. How do you see parents/guardians as being actively involved in their children's learning and in the Centre in general?
8. What further support, if any, do you feel you need in order to better implement the Reggio Emilia emergent curriculum approach in your Centre?
  - What about support from the Province or ECDA?
9. (Only applicable to respondents who have visited Reggio Emilia in Italy)
 

Now that you have had the chance to visit Reggio Emilia in person, what changes, if any, are you planning for your Centre?
10. That covers the issues I wanted to ask you about. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

**Appendix B**  
**Interview question guidelines – ECE**

1. Can you walk me through a normal day in the Centre with the children as an Early childhood educator?
2. What are your thoughts about the Reggio Emilia emergent curriculum approach to learning that is used in this Centre?
3. What are some of the things that you especially like about this approach in your Centre?
4. Which aspects of this approach might you not like or agree with?
5. In what way do you think the emergent curriculum approach is beneficial, if at all, to the children and at the Centre as a whole?
6. What are your thoughts about documentation? Challenges? Benefits?
7. What further support, if any, do you feel you and your co-workers might need in order to better implement the Reggio Emilia emergent curriculum approach in your Centre? More information/workshop sessions about the Reggio Emilia principles and philosophies?
8. What kind of training or information did you have about the Reggio Emilia approach?
9. What kind of training or information did you have about the Reggio Emilia approach?  
Principles. How it works. Documentation.
10. What can you tell me about parental involvement in this Centre? Is it important for you?  
Why?
11. That covers the issues I wanted to ask you about. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

**Appendix C**  
**Interview question guidelines – Parents/Guardians**

1. What does parental involvement mean to you?
2. In what ways do you feel you are being involved in your child/ren's learning?
  - Volunteering
  - Attending special events
  - Discuss educational issues with ECEs
  - Having daily interaction with ECEs and children
  - Others? (Please specify).
3. Do you feel that being involved in your child/ren's learning is beneficial/challenging to you and your child/ren? Why?
4. What are your feelings about the documentation of the children's progress that is being presented in the Centre?
5. In what other way do you think that parents/guardians can be involved in the everyday learning of the child and in the Centre in general?
  - Coming in to talk to the children about special topics being discussed in their groups?
  - Helping out with furniture making or other maintenance as needed?
  - Taking an active part in an activity your child/ren might be undertaking at the Centre?
  - Others? (Please specify).
6. How do you feel about the learning approach that is being implemented in this Centre?
  - What do you like about it? Why?
  - Is there any aspect of it that you do not agree with?
7. That covers the issues I wanted to ask you about. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

**Appendix D**  
**Letter of information - Observation Sessions**

May 2010

Dear Parent:

The supervisor at the \_\_\_\_\_ Centre has agreed to participate in a research study entitled: *Localizing Reggio: Adapting the Reggio Emilia Approach in three childcare centres on Prince Edward Island*. I am writing to ask your permission to include your child in my observations as part of this research study.

I am an Early Childhood Educator and a Master of Education student. This research is an effort to complete the requirement of the Master of Education at the University of Prince Edward Island and is undertaken with the knowledge and support of my supervisor, Dr. Carla DiGiorgio – (902) 566 – 0365 (cdigiorgio@upei.ca).

I will be conducting 10, two hour observation sessions in the Centre as part of my study. I will be observing the children and the staff during their normal day of activities. The focus of my observations will be on the teachers' interaction with the children. I will be taking written notes while doing my observations and will be using them later as the basis for my analysis. This data will only be used for this research purpose. There will also be no photos, and no names in this report.

If you **do not** wish to include your child in my observations for this study, your child will still be able to continue with his/her regular class activities and I **will not** include any observations that relate to his/her actions in my report. Please inform a staff member of the Centre by not later than \_\_\_\_\_ if you **DO NOT** wish your child to be involved in these observations.

Your consent for your child to be included in my observations is voluntary. You may decide that you want your child to stop being involved at any time, without any consequences to you or your child. Your child's participation in this study will contribute to building a better understanding of the children's activities and interaction in their everyday activities at the Centre. Thank you for your collaboration.

Sincerely,  
Anna Baldacchino  
M.Ed. Student  
[REDACTED] (abaldacchino@upei.ca)

**Appendix E**  
**Letter of Information – Parents/Guardians**

May 2010

Dear Parents/Guardians:

The supervisor at the \_\_\_\_\_ Centre has agreed to participate in a research study entitled: *Localizing Reggio: Adapting the Reggio Emilia Approach in three childcare centres on Prince Edward Island*. I am writing to invite you to attend an interview with me as part of this research study.

I am an Early Childhood Educator and a Master of Education student. This research is an effort to complete the requirement of the Master of Education at the University of Prince Edward Island and is undertaken with the knowledge and support of my supervisor, Dr. Carla DiGiorgio – (902) 566 – 0365 (cdigiorgio@upei.ca). The study will include observations and interviews undertaken in three early childhood Centres on Prince Edward Island.

During the interview, I will be inviting you to answer questions concerning your involvement with your child's learning in the early education Centre he/she attends. The interview will be about 30 minutes long and will take place at the Centre, if possible, or at a location chosen by you. It would be preferable if both parents/guardians take part in the interview.

The interview will be audio-recorded. Any data collected during the interview will be transcribed and returned to you for confirmation before being used in my report. Parts of the interview may be quoted in my analysis.

The data gathered from these interviews, will help me understand better what your involvement is in your child/ren's learning.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose to stop participating at any time, without any consequences. I will ensure that your name and that of your child will not be revealed.

Thank you for your collaboration.

Sincerely,  
Anna Baldacchino  
M.Ed. Student  
[REDACTED] (abaldacchino@upei.ca)

**Appendix F**  
**Consent form**  
**Interview – Parents/Guardians**

Study title: *Localizing Reggio: Adapting the Reggio Emilia Approach in three childcare centres on Prince Edward Island.*

Institution: University of Prince Edward Island  
Faculty of Education

Conducted by: Anna Baldacchino  
M.Ed. Student  
[REDACTED]  
abaldacchino@upei.ca

Supervised by: Carla DiGiorgio  
Faculty of Education  
University of Prince Edward Island  
(902) 566 - 0365  
cdigiorgio@upei.ca

I understand that I have been invited to participate in a study entitled: *Localizing Reggio. Adapting the Reggio Emilia Approach in three childcare centres on Prince Edward Island.*

I understand that I have been asked to meet with you for about 30 minutes, and will be invited to answer questions concerning my involvement in my child's learning in the early education Centre he/she attends.

I understand that the interview will be audio-recorded. I understand that the data being collected by the researcher during this interview will be transcribed and returned to me for confirmation before it can be used in the researcher's report. I understand that parts of the interview may be quoted in the study.

I further understand that as a parent/guardian, I have several rights. I understand that I may discontinue my participation at any time, without any consequences to me, or my child. I understand that my name will be kept completely confidential and that under no circumstances will my name, or my child's name, be included in the study.

I understand that the data collected by the researcher will be kept in her personal locked cabinet and password protected computer. I understand that the researcher and her supervisor are the only ones who could access this information.

I understand that I can keep a copy of this signed and dated consent form. I understand that the information will be kept confidential within the limits of the law.

Finally, I understand that the Centre and the parents will have access to a final report about the study.

I have read and understood the contents of this letter and agree to take part in the interview.

Name (Print) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature\_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name (Print) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature\_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study. Your participation is greatly appreciated. I may be contacted by phone at [REDACTED] or by email at abaldacchino@upei.ca should you have any questions. Also, if you have any difficulties with, or wish to voice concern about any aspect of your participation in this study, or the ethical conduct of this study, you may contact the UPEI Research Ethics Board, for assistance at (902) 566-0637, lmacphee@upei.ca

Sincerely,  
Anna Baldacchino

**Appendix G**  
**Letter of information - Early Childhood Educator**

May 2010

Dear Educator,

I am writing to ask you to consider participating in a research study entitled: *Localizing Reggio: Adapting the Reggio Emilia Approach in three childcare centres on Prince Edward Island.*

The study will be conducted by myself, Anna Baldacchino, and supervised with the knowledge and support of my supervisor, Dr. Carla DiGiorgio – (902) 566 – 0365 (cdigiorgio@upei.ca). I am an Early Childhood Educator, and a Master of Education student. The study is an effort to complete the requirement of a Master of Education at the University of Prince Edward Island.

Early childhood is a period of rapid growth and change unlike any other time later in life, as you well know. As a result high quality childcare is of the essence. Educators, psychologists, and researchers from all over the world acknowledge that the Reggio Emilia emergent curriculum approach is one exceptional example of high quality early education. This approach recognizes children as resourceful and capable, and places parents, the community and local culture at the centre of democratic, participatory learning. The purpose of my study is to observe children, and interview supervisors, staff, and parents, to discuss with them the benefits/challenges (if any) of being a Reggio-inspired Centre.

The study will include observations and interviews undertaken in three early childhood Centres on Prince Edward Island. I will be conducting my observations in the Centre (Pre-K only) for 10 consecutive days (two hours daily), in such a way that I will be able to cover the whole day at a Centre. During these observation sessions, I will be placing myself in an unobtrusive area, when possible, and will not be taking part in any of the activities going on in the Centre. I will be using the field notes from my observations as part of my data analysis for my thesis.

I will also be conducting an individual interview with the supervisor of the Centre, and with one other staff member. The interviews will be about 30 minutes each and will take place at the discretion of the interviewee, and will preferably be undertaken at the Centre.

Another interview will be conducted with two family members of two different children from the Centre. This interview will take place in the Centre, whenever possible, or at a

location chosen by the family members taking part in the interview. This interview will also last about 30 minutes.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide to stop participating at any time, without any consequences. I will ensure that your name is in no way revealed in my report. If your consent is given I will post the letters of information for your children's parents/guardian, and consent forms for family members involved in the interviews, in the children's lockers. An envelope will be posted on your classroom's door for parents/guardians to return their forms. I would really appreciate it if you could remind parents to do so.

If parents do not give consent for their child to participate in the observational sessions, the child will continue with his/her regular class activities, and nothing will be reported about his/her actions in my report.

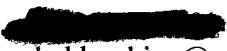
If you agree to participate I will be visiting your group for an orientation time prior to the observation sessions. This orientation will take place at a convenient time for you and the other ECEs. This will ensure that children are familiar with me before I start my observations.

I will be contacting the supervisor on \_\_\_\_\_, by phone, to clarify questions or concerns that you might have. Time for the orientation will be determined at that time.

Your participation in this study will contribute to build a better understanding of the way a Reggio-inspired centre works and the high quality services it offers to the children in the Centre. I look forward to working with you and the children in your care on this project. Once the project is completed, I will invite all the participants to share the results of the study. Thank you for your collaboration.

Sincerely,

Anna Baldacchino  
M.Ed student

  
abaldacchino@upei.ca

**Appendix H**  
**Consent form**  
**Early Childhood Educator**

Study title: *Localizing Reggio: Adapting the Reggio Emilia Approach in three childcare centres on Prince Edward Island.*

Institution: University of Prince Edward Island  
Faculty of Education

Conducted by: Anna Baldacchino  
M.Ed. Student  
[REDACTED]  
abaldacchino@upei.ca

Supervised by: Carla DiGiorgio  
Faculty of Education  
University of Prince Edward Island  
(902) 566 - 0365  
cdigiorgio@upei.ca

I understand that \_\_\_\_\_ Centre has agreed to participate in the research study entitled: *Localizing Reggio: Adapting the Reggio Emilia Approach in three childcare centres on Prince Edward Island.*

I understand that all children from my class/group have been invited to be involved in observational sessions of this study. I understand that my name, the Centre's name and the children's names will remain strictly confidential between the researcher, the researcher's supervisor, the Center's supervisor and me. I understand that the sessions will involve the researcher observing me and the children, during our normal day's activities.

I understand that the parents' permission is required for their child's involvement in the observational sessions. I understand that these sessions will be two hours long, daily, for 10 consecutive days. I understand that I will be present during these sessions. I understand that if parents/guardians do not give consent for their child to participate in the observational session, the child can still continue with his/her activity, but the researcher will not take note of any of his/her activities in her report.

I further understand that, as a participant in this study, I have several rights. I understand that my participation is strictly voluntary and that I may discontinue my participation at any time. I understand that my name will be kept completely confidential and that under no circumstances will the Centre's name, the children's names, or my name be included in this report. I understand that the data collected by the researcher will be kept in her personal locked cabinet and password protected computer. I understand that the researcher and her supervisors are the only ones who will have access to this information. I understand that I can keep a copy of the signed and dated consent form. I understand that the information will be kept confidential within the limits of the law.

Finally, I understand that the Centre, the parents and I will have access to a final report about the study.

I have read and understood the contents of this letter and agree to participate in the study.

Name (Print) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study. Your participation is greatly appreciated. I may be contacted by phone at [REDACTED] or by email at abaldacchino@upei.ca should you have any questions. Also, if you have any difficulties with, or wish to voice concern about any aspect of your participation in this study, or the ethical conduct of this study, you may contact the UPEI Research Ethics Board, for assistance at (902) 566-0637, lmacphee@upei.ca

Sincerely,  
Anna Baldacchino

**Appendix I**  
**Letter of Information – ECEs - interview**

May 2010

Dear Early Childhood Educator:

The supervisor at the \_\_\_\_\_ Centre has agreed to participate in a research study entitled: *Localizing Reggio: Adapting the Reggio Emilia Approach in three childcare centres on Prince Edward Island*. I am writing to invite you to attend an interview with me as part of this research study.

I am an Early Childhood Educator and a Master of Education student. This research is an effort to complete the requirement of the Master of Education at the University of Prince Edward Island and is undertaken with the knowledge and support of my supervisor, Dr. Carla DiGiorgio – (902) 566 – 0365 (cdigiorgio@upei.ca).

During the interview, I will be inviting you to answer questions about the Reggio Emilia emergent curriculum approach and the work you do with the children in the Centre. The interview will be about 30 minutes long and will take place at the Centre, if possible, or at a location chosen by you.

The interview will be audio-recorded. Any data collected during the interview will be transcribed and returned to you for confirmation before being used in my report. Parts of the interview may be quoted in my analysis.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose to stop participating at any time, without any consequences. I will ensure that your name will not be revealed.

Thank you for your collaboration.

Sincerely,  
Anna Baldacchino  
M.Ed. Student

\_\_\_\_\_ (abaldacchino@upei.ca)

**Appendix J**  
**Consent Form**  
**Interview – Early childhood Educator**

Study title: *Localizing Reggio: Adapting the Reggio Emilia Approach in three childcare centres on Prince Edward Island.*

Institution: University of Prince Edward Island  
Faculty of Education

Conducted by: Anna Baldacchino  
M.Ed. Student  
[REDACTED]  
abaldacchino@upei.ca

Supervised by: Carla DiGiorgio  
Faculty of Education  
University of Prince Edward Island  
(902) 566 - 0365  
cdigiorgio@upei.ca

I \_\_\_\_\_, understand that I have been invited to participate in a study entitled: *Adapting the Reggio Emilia Approach in three childcare centres on Prince Edward Island.*

I understand that I am invited to meet with you for about 30 minutes, and invited to answer questions about the Reggio Emilia emergent curriculum approach and the work I do with the children in the Centre.

I understand that the interview will be audio-recorded. I understand that the data being collected by the researcher during this interview will be transcribed and returned to me for confirmation before it can be used in the researcher's report. I understand that part of the interview may be quoted in the study.

I further understand that as an interviewee, I have several rights. I understand that I may discontinue my participation at any time, without any consequences to myself. I understand that my name will be kept completely confidential and that under no circumstances will my name be included in the study.

I understand that the data collected by the researcher will be kept in her personal locked cabinet and password protected computer. I understand that the researcher and her supervisor are the only ones who could access this information.

I understand that I can keep a copy of the signed and dated consent form. I understand that the information will be kept confidential within the limits of the law. Finally, I understand that the Centre, the parents, and myself will have access to a final report about the study.

I have read and understood the contents of this letter and agree to take part in the interview.

Name (Print) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix K**  
**Letter of information - Early Learning Centre - Supervisors**

May 2010

Dear Supervisor,

I am writing to ask the \_\_\_\_\_ Early Learning Centre to consider participating in a research study. This study is entitled: *Localizing Reggio: Adapting the Reggio Emilia Approach in three childcare centres on Prince Edward Island.*

The study will be conducted by myself, Anna Baldacchino, and supervised with the knowledge and support of my supervisor, Dr. Carla DiGiorgio – (902) 566-0365 (cdigiorgio@upei.ca), from the Faculty of Education. I am an Early Childhood Educator, and a Master of Education student. The study is a requirement for completion of a Master of Education degree at the University of Prince Edward Island.

Early childhood is a period of rapid growth and change unlike any other time later in life, as you well know. As a result high quality childcare is of the essence. Educators, psychologists, and researchers from all over the world acknowledge that the Reggio Emilia emergent curriculum approach is one exceptional example of high quality early education. This approach recognizes children as resourceful and capable, and places parents, the community and local culture at the centre of democratic, participatory learning. The purpose of my study is to observe children, and interview supervisors, staff, and parents, to discuss with them the benefits/challenges (if any) of being a Reggio-inspired centre.

The study will include observations and interviews undertaken in three early childhood Centres on Prince Edward Island. I will be conducting my observations in the Centre (Pre-K only) for 10 consecutive days (two hours daily), in a way that I will cover the whole day at a Centre. I will discuss the preferred days with you in our initial meeting. During these observation sessions, I will be placing myself in an unobtrusive area, when possible, and will not be taking part in any of the activities going on in the centre. I will be using the field notes from these observations as part of my data analysis for my thesis.

I will also be inviting you for an individual interview as the supervisor of the Centre, and conducting another interview with one other staff member that you, as the

supervisor, may suggest to me. Each interview will be about 30 minutes long and will take place at the discretion of the interviewee, and will preferably be undertaken at the centre.

Another interview will be conducted with two family members of two different children, (four family members in all), from the Centre that you, as the supervisor, may suggest. This interview will take place in the Centre, whenever possible, or at a location chosen by the family members taking part in the interview. This interview will also last about 30 minutes.

Your participation in this study is voluntary .You may choose to stop participating at any time, without any consequences. I will ensure that the Center's/educators' and children's names will not be revealed.

If your Centre and staff agree to participate, I will be visiting the Centre prior to the observations. This orientation will take place at a convenient time for you and the ECEs. This will ensure that children are familiar with me before I start my observations. With your consent I will place the letters of information for your children's parents/guardians, and consent forms for family members involved in the interviews, in the children's lockers. An envelope will be posted on your classroom's door for parents/guardians to return their forms. I will be contacting you again on \_\_\_\_\_, by phone, to clarify any questions or concerns you or the ECEs might have. Times and a schedule for the sessions could be determined at that time.

Your Centre's participation in this study will contribute to build a better understanding of the way a Reggio-inspired Centre works and the high quality services it offers to the children in the Centre. I look forward to working with you, the ECEs and families at your Centre on this project. Once the project is completed, I will invite you, your staff, and parents to share the results of the study. Thank you for your collaboration.

Sincerely,

Anna Baldacchino  
M.Ed. student

abaldacchino@upei.ca

**Consent form**  
**Early Learning Centre - Supervisor**

Study title: *Localizing Reggio: Adapting the Reggio Emilia Approach in three childcare centres on Prince Edward Island*

Institution: University of Prince Edward Island  
 Faculty of Education

Conducted by: Anna Baldacchino  
 M.Ed. Student  
 [REDACTED]  
 abaldacchino@upei.ca

Supervised by: Carla DiGiorgio  
 Faculty of Education  
 University of Prince Edward Island  
 (902) 566 - 0365  
 cdigiorgio@upei.ca

I understand that all children at \_\_\_\_\_ Centre, ages two to four, have been invited to be involved in a study entitled: *Localizing Reggio: Adapting the Reggio Emilia Approach in three childcare centres on Prince Edward Island*.

I understand that the researcher will be conducting two hour observational sessions in the Centre, in the Pre-K groups only, over a period of ten days. I understand that the sessions will involve the observation of the children and the staff during their normal day of activities. I understand that the researcher will be taking notes while doing her observations and using them later for her analysis. I understand that parents can withdraw their child from this study at any time without any consequences.

I understand that my name, the Centre's name, the ECEs' and the children's names will remain strictly confidential between the researcher, the researcher's supervisor, the educators and me. I understand that the researcher will also be interviewing me, a staff member and two sets of parents from my Centre. I understand that my participation in this study will contribute in building a better understanding of the way a Reggio-inspired centre works and the high quality services that it offers to the children in the Centre.

I further understand that as a participant in this study, I have several rights. I understand that my participation is strictly voluntary and that I may discontinue my participation at any time

with no consequences to myself. I understand that my name will be kept completely confidential and that under no circumstances will the Centre's name, the children's names, or my name be included in this report. I understand that the data collected by the researcher will be kept in her personal locked cabinet and password protected computer. I understand that the researcher and her supervisor are the only ones who will have access to this information. I understand that the information will be kept confidential within the limits of the law. I understand that I can keep a copy of the signed and dated consent form.

Finally, I understand that the Centre, the ECEs and the parents will have access to a final report about the study.

I have read and understood the contents of this letter and agree to participate in the study.

Name (Print) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study. Your participation is greatly appreciated. I may be contacted by phone at [REDACTED] or by email at abaldacchino@upei.ca should you have any questions. Also, if you have any difficulties with, or wish to voice concern about any aspect of your participation in this study, or the ethical conduct of this study, you may contact the UPEI Research Ethics Board, for assistance at (902) 566-0637, lmacphee@upei.ca

Sincerely,  
Anna Baldacchino

## **Appendix L**

### **Letter of Information – Supervisor (Interview)**

May 2010

Dear Supervisor:

With your consent the \_\_\_\_\_ Centre has agreed to participate in a research study entitled: *Localizing Reggio: Adapting the Reggio Emilia Approach in three childcare centres on Prince Edward Island*. I am writing to invite you to attend an interview with me as part of this research study.

I am an Early Childhood Educator and a Master of Education student. This research is an effort to complete the requirement of the Master of Education at the University of Prince Edward Island and is undertaken with the knowledge and support of my supervisor, Dr. Carla DiGiorgio – (902) 566 – 0365 (cdigiorgio@upei.ca).

During the interview, I will be inviting you to answer questions about the Reggio Emilia emergent curriculum approach and the work you do with the children in the Centre. The interview will be about 30 minutes long and will take place at the Centre, if possible, or at a location chosen by you.

The interview will be audio-recorded. Any data collected during the interview will be transcribed and returned to you for confirmation before being used in my report. Parts of the interview may be quoted in my analysis.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose to stop participating at any time, without any consequences. I will ensure that your name will not be revealed.

Thank you for your collaboration.

Sincerely,  
Anna Baldacchino  
M.Ed. Student

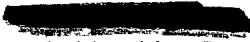
[REDACTED] (abaldacchino@upei.ca)

**Appendix M**  
**Consent Form**  
**Interview – Supervisor**

Study title: *Localizing Reggio: Adapting the Reggio Emilia Approach in three childcare centres on Prince Edward Island.*

Institution: University of Prince Edward Island  
Faculty of Education

Conducted by: Anna Baldacchino  
M.Ed. Student

 abaldacchino@upei.ca

Supervised by: Carla DiGiorgio  
Faculty of Education  
University of Prince Edward Island  
(902) 566 - 0365  
cdigiorgio@upei.ca

I \_\_\_\_\_, understand that I have been invited to participate in a study entitled: *Adapting the Reggio Emilia Approach in three childcare centres on Prince Edward Island.*

I understand that I am invited to meet with you for about 30 minutes, and invited to answer questions about the Reggio Emilia emergent curriculum approach and the work I do with the children in the Centre.

I understand that the interview will be audio-recorded. I understand that the data being collected by the researcher during this interview will be transcribed and returned to me for confirmation before it can be used in the researcher's report. I understand that part of the interview may be quoted in the study.

I further understand that as an interviewee, I have several rights. I understand that I may discontinue my participation at any time, without any consequences to myself. I understand that my name will be kept completely confidential and that under no circumstances will my name be included in the study.

I understand that the data collected by the researcher will be kept in her personal locked cabinet and password protected computer. I understand that the researcher and her supervisor are the only ones who could access this information.

I understand that I can keep a copy of the signed and dated consent form. I understand that the information will be kept confidential within the limits of the law.

Finally, I understand that the Centre, the parents, and myself will have access to a final report about the study.

I have read and understood the contents of this letter and agree to take part in the interview.

Name (Print) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix N

### Observation Framework

#### **Child**

- Takes interest in his/her environment – finds the environment challenging and provoking
- Interacts with peers
- Interacts with adults
- Problem solving. What does a child do when faced with a problem?
  - Goes to the teacher for help and the teacher solves the problem for him/her?
  - Goes to the teacher for help and the teacher encourages the child to solve the problem by asking him/her provoking and guiding questions?
  - Tries to solve it on his/her own?
  - Tries to get help from his/her peer?
- Works individually – prefers to work on an activity on his/her own
- Works with others in small groups – works well with his/her peers in small groups
- Uses symbolic representation by means of different media
  - Words
  - Drawings
  - Movement
  - Sculpture
  - Building
  - Painting
  - Music
  - Dramatic play
  - Working with light (projectors, flashlights, natural light)

#### **Teacher**

- Provides stimulating material for children - material and activities that enhance children's learning through play
- Interacts with children – joins in with their activities and shows interest in what the children are doing
- Interacts with parents/guardians – is open to ideas from parents about the children's learning and shows interest in parental involvement in the Centre's projects
- Listens and observes children to detect what the general interests of the children are
- Takes children's lead in what they want to learn
- Supports children's interests by providing them with materials that will engage their interests further
- Supplies children with different media for their representations
- Documents the children's process of learning through:
  - Photos
  - Video
  - Digital recording

➤ Text

- Teachers working in pairs. Teacher works with a colleague while documenting and has time to converse with colleague about children's interests and learning
- Asks provoking questions to help children problem solve

**Documentation**

- Transcripts of children's verbal language
- Photos of their activities
- Representations of their thinking using different media
- Wall panels or books that present the children's process of thinking and learning using transcripts, photos and any symbolic representation that the children did of what is being documented

**Parent**

- Interaction with educator – shows interest in what is going on in the Centre and their children's learning
- Shows interest in documentation panels or books on display at the Centre
- Parents' involvement with children in the Centre
  - Taking part in special events – e.g. Spring tea party; concert; graduation
  - As a visitor to talk to children about a topic that is being explored in one of their projects in the Centre

**Environment**

- Having various small mirrors around the classroom/play area for the children to experiment with
- Light table
  - Working with light
  - Projectors
  - Flashlights
  - Natural light reflection
- Realistic objects for play
  - Different coloured shapes of pasta
  - Rice, seeds, legumes
  - Pieces of cut wood or tree trunk
  - Clay, wire, toothpicks, craft sticks
- Having other loose material available for children to use
  - Flower petals
  - Sequins
  - Beads
  - Buttons
  - Sparkles

- Shelves with materials/toys that children can use should be at child's reach
- Use of real life objects to decorate classroom/play area rather than commercial items
- Studio (atelier)
  - A space where children can go to explore and use various media.