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The Reggio Emilia Approach to Education

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THE REGGIO EMILIA APPROACH TO EDUCATION

A THESIS

The Honors Program

College of Saint Benedict/ Saint John’s University

In Partial Fulfillment

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In the Department of Education

By

Anna Elizabeth Benoit

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I. INTRODUCTION

One of the National Education Goals, urged by President Bush and signed into law by President Clinton in March of 1994, is that all children entering school in the year 2000 will be ready to learn. Yet, the Cost, Quality, and Outcomes Study Team uncovered the fact that “Seven in ten [child care] centers are providing mediocre care which may compromise children’s abilities to enter school ready to learn” (Helburn, 1995, p. 1). This percentage becomes more significant when one considers that over five million children attend some form of child care facility on a daily basis. Even more alarming is the fact that “Child care in one in eight centers threatens health and safety” (Helburn, 1995, p. 1). Over twelve percent of centers do not serve basic care needs for health, safety, and security. In comparison, only one in seven child care facilities provides “the level of quality that promotes healthy development” (Helburn, 1995, p. 1). Thus, only fourteen percent of all surveyed centers have programs that provide for the basic needs of the children and also, provide them with developmentally appropriate learning experiences. With the clear unavailability of quality child care, the United States must explore other alternatives of early childhood education if this country expects to achieve the Goals 2000.

According to Richard M. Clifford, the president of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the result of this mediocre care is “that children are not getting the kind of learning and other cognitive stimulation that is needed to prepare them for school” (Seal, 1998, E-1). Children are unprepared for the demands of later life because they are not getting the opportunity to explore their world in
preschool. According to these researchers, “The reality of child care in the United States today makes it highly unlikely that we will reach that goal [of having children ready to learn by the time they enter school]” (Cost, 1995, p. 44). Unless some changes are made in the care and education of this country’s young, most are likely to be unprepared to learn to their fullest potential.

Attention to the creation of nurturing early care is important because the first years of a person’s life are the most eventful. Change is rapid and stunning. It is, therefore, no leap of imagination to consider these years among the most challenging of a person’s life. In fact, Arnold Gesell wrote in 1923, “The preschool period is biologically the most important period in the development of an individual for the simple but sufficient reason that it comes first. Coming first in a dynamic sequence, it inevitably influences all subsequent development” (Maxim, 1997, p. 66). During this time, a foundation of skills and abilities that will survive a lifetime is developed. In fact, the Cost, Quality, and Outcomes Study Team concluded that “Children’s concurrent cognitive and social development are positively related to the quality of their child care experience” (Helburn, 1995, p.1-2). All future development relies upon the base established in a child’s early years.

The role of early childhood educators, therefore, is of particular importance. These educators take responsibility for aiding children in establishing their developmental base. This goal has been pursued by the adoption of numerous philosophies throughout history, from Froebel’s kindergartens to Montessori’s child-care. In the United States today, teachers in many preschools, kindergartens, and
primary grades must search for more effective ways to aid children from birth to eight, the early childhood years, in setting the foundation for their lives.

Numerous educational systems and philosophies exist around the world that the United States could adapt to meet the varied needs of this country’s children. The Montessori way, which stresses the stimulation of the senses, is one alternative. The Oxford Infant Schools, which promote careful observation and active exploration, provide another system worth investigating. Perhaps the most viable option, however, would be to adapt a system like the Reggio Emilia preschools. The Reggio Emilia Approach to early childhood education, which stresses the competence of the child in a constructive environment, offers a viable alternative to the eighty-four percent of American programs that provide poor quality, developmentally inappropriate instruction for the young children in their care.

The Reggio Emilia system is not widespread as it currently is established only at the site of its origin in a town of the same name. That town, Reggio Emilia, is populated by about 100,000 people in the Emilia Romagna region of northern Italy. The founder and current educators of the preschools in this town stress the theories of constructivism and relationship learning.

The organization of the Reggio Emilia schools is unique. The schools service children from birth to age six. After this time they attend the Italian system of schools. Four-year-old children to six-year-old children attend preschools, or scuola maternas, at one location (Hinkle, 1991, p. 53). The infants to three-year-old children attend infant/toddler schools, called asilo nidos, at another location (p. 53). The class sizes
range from twelve to twenty-four, with the younger students placed in smaller groups. The region of Reggio Emilia presently supports 19 preschools and 13 infant-toddler schools (Hendrick, 1997, p. 5).

Two qualified teachers supervise each classroom. These teachers are partners and participate as equals. Students in each classroom remain with the two teachers throughout their years at school. This continuity encourages children to form intensive relationships with their teachers and allows the teachers greater insight into the development of each child. This also encourages the parents and teachers to relate and interact on a more intimate level. This constancy is particularly important for young children who are still seeking security.

II. HISTORY

The Reggio Emilia system of schools had an unusual beginning. The schools were begun following World War II after many of the institutional structures had fallen apart and the country was ready for change. Previous to this time, the Roman Catholic Church ran most of the preschools. As Loris Malaguzzi, the first director of the Reggio Emilia preschools, states, "the Roman Catholic Church had almost a monopoly on preschool education, concentrating its efforts on helping needy children and offering custodial services rather than responding to the social and cultural changes" (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1993, p. 53). This allowed the church to dominate in the lives of the Italians. It also allowed the Church to determine who was educated.

Following World War II, many Italian people were inclined to separate their
church from their state. They also were recovering from war and a Fascist dictatorship. Lella Gandini (1997), the liaison for Reggio Children in the United States, states that the people were driven by “the desire to bring change and create a new, more just world, free from oppression” (p. 3). Creating a separate pre-school system was one of the steps to this new world. The parents of the young children were the ones who started these schools. They sought to create schools “of better quality, free from charitable tendencies, not merely custodial, and not discriminatory in any way” (Edwards, et al., 1993, p. 44). The people took their philosophical ideas about schools to create their own.

In many cases, the parents and the communities totally controlled and directed this emergence of a pre-school. They were responsible for finding and preparing a building in which to locate the school. In one example, the city government had repeatedly refused to provide education for the young children of the community. The mothers of some young children took things into their own hands and cleaned out an old house at the edge of town. They felt quite discouraged because they had yet to find teachers or other qualified adults to work in the building. They did not know if their school would benefit their children. Amidst this discouraged atmosphere, a beautiful butterfly flew in and landed on the windowsill of the soon-to-be school. The women took this butterfly as a sign that their work would be rewarded. They continued their work, and the school found teachers and supplies. This school, named La Villetta, has as its motif a butterfly.

In order to find the money to support the establishment of these schools, the
people of the communities sold old war equipment and some horses left behind by the retreating German invaders. From a destructive war came a new beginning. The people, exhausted and distressed by the horrors of the recent war, used the meager resources available to rebuild their society, including schools for their young children.

Teachers, attracted by the schools' unique qualities, came to teach. One of the most significant founders of the Reggio Emilia preschools was Loris Malaguzzi. Upon hearing of these parent-run schools, he investigated. Loris Malaguzzi was impressed by the work of the parents. After some additional training in psychology at the National Center for Research in Rome, he returned to Reggio Emilia. He stayed in that environment and tremendously influenced the progression of these schools. Today, Malaguzzi is viewed as the philosophical founder of the Reggio Emilia preschools.

Malaguzzi had an interesting background for this endeavor. Besides practicing in the field of child psychology, he also had experience in teaching. He had studied extensively at Piaget's School for Young Children in Geneva and spent time at the Rousseau Institute. These experiences, as well as active participation with the progressive education movement in Italy, provided a solid intellectual base for integrating his philosophy into the schools. He was well acquainted with the theories of Vygotsky and of Piaget, in addition to the philosophies of other educators. He strongly believed in the constructivist approach to teaching and in relationship learning, and thus, the Reggio Emilia schools reflect this approach.

The preschools in Reggio Emilia today are the descendants of the schools that the communities set up after World War II. Throughout the mid-1960's, primarily at the
urging of Loris Malaguzzi, the city governments took over the schools. Malaguzzi writes that this signaled the “first time in Italy, [that] the people affirmed the right to establish a secular school for young children” (Edwards, et al., 1993, p. 44). The government made only minor changes to the organization and operation of the schools. Loris Malaguzzi became the first director of the schools. Therefore, the present Reggio Emilia preschools only have a 30-year history, but the entire educational philosophy of Reggio Emilia has been in practice for over fifty years.

One of the changes made when the government acquired the schools was in finances. The state and city are able to contribute more money toward the education of the children than the individual families could. The result is that the preschool is virtually free for the children. The infant-toddler schools also get money from the government, but parents must pay minimal tuition for their child to attend. In American dollar amounts in 1991, the tuition ranged from $69 to $269 per month (Hinkle, p. 53). The exact tuition rate is based on a sliding scale dependent upon the families’ financial resources and the age of the child.

III. PHILOSOPHY

The Reggio Emilia philosophy also is steeped in rich history. It is founded upon the theories of numerous psychologists and educational researchers, including Eric Erikson and Carl Bruner. The two most prominent theorists for this system, however, are Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. The philosophies of both of these men have been combined in a way that has become uniquely the approach of Reggio Emilia. Other
prominent features of the Reggio philosophy include the view of the child as competent, an unusual teacher’s role, creative use of the environment, emphasis on cooperation and alternative methods of communication, use of an emergent curriculum, and an emphasis on documentation of learning.

The need for constructive methods of learning is the major contribution of Jean Piaget. He believed that people construct their own knowledge from their interpretation of the information presented to them. George Forman (1996), a professor of education at the University of Massachusetts, states, “Constructivist teaching fosters this type of perspective confrontation in order to help the child understand an earlier perspective, rather than dismiss it as incomplete” (p.273). This belief suggests that education should, therefore, include multiple experiences with concrete items. Through these experiences, the students gain an understanding of the concepts being presented and are able to recognize flaws in their previous misconceptions. Reggio Emilia has taken this idea of constructivism to heart. Learning is encouraged through explorations with various media.

Lev Vygotsky also theorized a pattern of development. In many ways, his pattern parallels that of Piaget. However, he recognized one important element that Piaget did not seem to consider: socialization. Humans do not live in isolation. Children grow up surrounded by others, and social interactions are frequent. These interactions have an impact on their development. As Loris Malaguzzi (1993), the philosophical founder of the Reggio preschools, states, “Interaction produces rediscovery of peers, heightened awareness of similarities and differences among people, and the acquisition of new
curiosities, knowledge and symbolic awareness” (p. 12). He also maintains that interactions create constructive conflicts that “transform the individual’s cognitive experience and promote learning and development” (p.12). Learning is done in conjunction with and in relationship to others and to the world around the learner. Education, therefore, should have a strong, supportive base of interactions with peers and adults. Reggio Emilia has this. It is a system of education built upon relationships.

**IMAGE OF THE CHILD**

How a system of education views its students affects how it teaches. In the schools of Reggio Emilia, children are viewed as competent human beings. Sue Bredekamp (1993), a prominent member of the NAEYC, states, “At the core of the Reggio Emilia philosophy is the image of children as competent” (p.13). For children to succeed as the children of Reggio Emilia do, it is essential that they realize that they are significant and competent in the eyes of the adults in their lives. This requires that the educators in this approach “reject a portrayal of children as dependent or needy” (Abramson, Robinson, Ankenman, 1995, p.197). The adults must think of children in a competent manner. As children are given opportunities to succeed and are expected to succeed, they generally succeed, provided the expectations are within their range of development. Educators in this system believe “children have preparedness, potential, curiosity, and interest in constructing their learning, in engaging in social interaction, and in negotiating with everything the environment brings to them” (Gandini, 1992, p. 27). If children have the desire and abilities, the proper materials should be provided. Through
providing the appropriate materials and support, the children come to believe in their competency, and they succeed.

Conversely, the Reggio Emilia educators believe that viewing the child as needy does not benefit the child. Such a view "permits adults to do the very least for them" (Bredekamp, 1993, p. 13). If adults do not expect competent children and give them little opportunity for exploration or expansion, the children will not develop the skills or accomplishments which help provide a basic sense of self-esteem. Children have trouble advancing in development when their caretakers see only the needs of the children and not their competencies.

Children who are viewed as needy also are not viewed as having rights. The fundamental change to a view of a child as competent requires the acknowledgment of the rights of a child. In fact, "Reggio educators believe that the quality of their school results in a large part from this image of a competent child who has rights, especially the right to outstanding care and education rather than only needs" (Bredekamp, 1993, p. 13). This image of the child is what founds the success of this approach.

This image affects the entire Reggio Approach. It is particularly evident in the emergent curriculum and the results of the projects. The children often are the source of the project ideas. Their ideas are valued, as evidenced by the frequent use of their ideas within the curriculum. They are also given time to work. As Lillian Katz (1990), another prominent member of the NAEYC, expresses of the Reggio Approach, "teachers do not underestimate children's capacities for sustained effort in achieving understanding of what they are exploring; nor do they underestimate children's abilities
to capture and depict these understanding through a variety of art forms” (p.11). The children are recognized as capable of intensive work and communication. Creativity is promoted, and self-motivation is essential to success. It follows that they often succeed, and at times, exceed the expectations of their teachers.

Another aspect of this philosophy is the image of the child as an individual. Each child is thought of and expected to be different from any other child. As Abramson et al. (1995) state, “Reggio educators view each child as an individual with rights and potentials” (p. 197). However, each child is also viewed as functioning in relation to other people within their world. The consequences of this view are far reaching. Gandini expresses the implications for education. She states, “Education has to focus on each child—not each child considered in isolation but each child seen in relation with other children, with the family, with the teachers, with the environment of the school, with the community, and with the wider society” (Gandini, 1993, p. 5). Education must then take a wider view, concentrating not only upon the competencies of the individual child, but also the child’s relations with those who surround him.

The result is a school system that concentrates heavily upon relationships. Malaguzzi, the founder of much of the Reggio Emilia philosophy, feels that this is the base of the entire value system of the schools. He states (Malaguzzi, 1993),

The theory of education based on relationships as described above contains many of the values that are part of our work: interactive-constructive views of learning, intensive relations among all participants, the spirit of cooperation, emphasis on
research as individuals and groups, attention to context, consolidation of affections, two-way processes of communication, and finally, acquisition of knowledge about politics (policies and choices) that affect young children (p. 10).

This basic philosophy of the child as a competent human being provides the foundation for the entire mission of these schools.

ENVIRONMENT

With this mission in mind, Malaguzzi and the team of teachers that assembled to work at these schools used this constructivist, relational viewpoint as their foundation for all other decisions. The type of schools created reflects this orientation. These schools are places designed for interaction with the world and with others. Jan McCarthy, the director of Center for Child and Family Studies at the University of South Florida, describes a Reggio Emilia school as "a place rich with materials, tools, and resourceful people; a place where children invented with their hands, tested hypotheses, played, had fun, and demonstrated how they were thinking" (1995, p. 140). The environment must encourage constructive learning by offering numerous opportunities for exploration.

In fact, in 1995, Abramson, Robinson, and Ankenman referred to the environment of Reggio Emilia schools as the "third teacher" (Burkett, 1996). Katz (1990) expressed the same idea when she wrote "one of the local educators pointed out
to me that in Reggio Emilia, the physical environment of a preschool center is considered a ‘teacher’ in and of itself!” (p.11). Through the environment, children are encouraged to learn. This is because the environment of Reggio Emilia schools is essential to its philosophy. The design and layout of the schools are intimately connected to the ideas upon which these schools were constructed. Bredekamp (1993) states, “The aesthetically beautiful environments in Reggio Emilia schools are impressive, but they are conceptually connected to the image of the child, the nature of the learning process, and the concept of collaboration, the role of documentation, the cultural context, and all the other fundamentals of this approach” (p. 14). It is impossible to separate the philosophy of the school from the environment of the school. Therefore, certain physical characteristics are evident in these schools.

The schools are generally set up with the kitchen centrally located. This encourages interaction with the kitchen. The children spend time in the kitchen with the cook, and the cook spends time outside of the kitchen and in the classrooms. This central location also encourages a more “homey” feel in the school. Interaction with the kitchen is also encouraged by transparent walls. The children are able to look into the kitchen at any time and see food being prepared. They also take responsibility for serving their own food and eating in small groups at tables that they have set (Palestis, 1994, p.17). The children eat lunch at the school in a space precisely for that purpose. It is generally connected to the large courtyard. Pictures of children eating food in different manners across the world are placed on the walls. These bright, cheerful pictures lend a sense of universality; the children come to realize that children like them
eat food all over the world.

The center of the school is a large courtyard. This space can be used for exhibits or for other gatherings. Surrounding the courtyard are the classrooms and the atelier (art studio). Many of the walls of these classrooms are transparent glass. The ability to see into the next room and observe what other groups are doing is one way by which teachers are able to monitor children's progress. For the children, these transparent walls allow them to feel united with other groups and yet, remain separated, on their own. The visibility offers security.

In addition to individual classrooms, there is also the atelier. The atelier is an art room. It is stocked with numerous supplies. These supplies are arranged by color or size and are available to the children. Many of these supplies might be surprising to teachers from other systems. These supplies include ceramic clay, plaster of Paris, wire, and found items. In addition to these unusual art supplies, paper of various sizes and colors are available, as are drawing and painting supplies. The atelier is a place where the children are encouraged to explore their projects.

Lella Gandini expresses what is required of the ideal environment of the Reggio classrooms. She states, "An environment for children must be rich, with well-thought out activities and carefully arranged materials. It must include carefully designed areas that support encounters and communication among children and protect a child's need for more intimate moments" (Gandini, 1994, Nov-Dec, p. 52). Therefore, each classroom has specific characteristics that encourage these exploratory activities in a variety of group sizes. One characteristic is a mini atelier, a small art room, with
numerous supplies. This room is not as extensive as the larger atelier, but serves the same purpose of exploration within the classroom. It is well supplied and well organized. About the room there are mirrors and reflective surfaces. Young children are encouraged to explore their bodies’ abilities and interact with themselves by doing such activities as making faces in the mirrors (New, 1990, p. 9). These activities encourage the children to learn about who they are and the capabilities of their bodies to move in diverse ways.

In addition to this, the environment of each classroom has areas designed for different groupings of people. There are places where students can work alone and places to work in small groups or large groups. Attempts have been made to provide for each child’s preferences in socializing. However, Gandini (1993) expresses that “[t]he layout of the physical space in the schools encourages encounters, communication, and relationships” (p.5). Small groups are promoted, although spaces exist for all sizes of groups. Communication with peers and with the teachers is promoted through these more intimate spaces, and these spaces allow for some individual attention to students.

The classrooms are laid out to be beautiful. They are extremely functional, but they are also aesthetically pleasing. They follow the philosophy that children have the right to be provided with the very best. However, “[w]hile furnishings are of good quality, what is compelling about the appearance of the schools and classrooms is the result not of a higher-than-average budget for equipment and furniture, but of a creative, meticulous consideration of the potentials of the environment to meet program and
curriculum goals" (New, 1990, p. 8). The decor of the classrooms is the result of an intense look at what the function of the space is meant to be. Consideration is used to decide how to best arrange the environment to accomplish this goal.

ROLES OF STAFF

The significant role of the educator collaborates efforts with the environment to promote learning. The teacher is not the planner of curriculum. The children do the planning. Rather, within this system, “educators carefully listen, observe, and document children’s work and the growth of community in their classroom and are to provoke, co-construct, and stimulate thinking and children’s collaboration with peers” (Jackson). The teacher has three basic roles: enabler, recorder, and researcher. All these roles take place simultaneously and may overlap at times.

A teacher in Reggio Emilia takes an active role in the encouraging and enabling children to explore their ideas. As Lillian Katz (1990) suggests, “Teachers take an active role in encouraging and helping children explore the possibilities of a wide variety of materials and media” (p. 11). She may suggest ideas to the children and present various options of approaches and materials, but she does not dictate the actions of the children. She may present an initial activity. The children decide where to take it from there. She provides the materials and offers what knowledge she does possess.

The teacher also is the recorder for the class. In essence, her role at this point becomes to “serve as the ‘memory’ of the group” (New, 1990, p.8). She takes copious notes of what the children are doing and saying. This is often facilitated by use of a
tape- or video-recorder. These records are used extensively when preparing the displays of documentation. They are also a major source of information that relates to the teacher's third role as researcher.

The researcher role is the most important. The philosophy of Reggio Emilia maintains that "the role of the teacher is first and foremost to be that of a learner alongside the children" (Jackson). Therefore, the teacher is not viewed as the expert. She is a learner along with the children, although she obviously has more knowledge and experience. Her learning may occur at a different level and may not be the same as the children's, but, nevertheless, she is a learner in an atmosphere that promotes learning.

Much of the research done by the teacher concerns the psychology of children. As sources for information in this field, the teachers take notice of the project results and their documented information about the children. Through critical thinking and reflection, they analyze their sources to gain a more complete understanding of children. This is the goal of much of their research.

A second goal for promoting the teacher-as-researcher model is to improve teaching. In Reggio Emilia, "[t]eachers are committed to reflection about their own teaching and learning" (Jackson). They must use their documentation to evaluate their own effectiveness as teachers. Evaluations of teaching techniques of individual teachers are often a source of discussion at Reggio Emilia schools. The emphasis is always upon helping fellow teachers become even more competent. In addition to evaluating their own documentation and teaching, teachers are also expected to keep in
touch with current information and theories in the field of the development of young children.

Another unusual feature of this system of school is the *atelierista*, which roughly translates into a specialized art teacher. She works in the *atelier*, a fully stocked art studio. She, like the other teachers, has the role of guiding and assisting the students and posing provocative questions that promote thinking about concepts. *Atelieristas* are found at all the preschools, but they only visit the infant/toddler schools.

The *pedagogista* is an additional important feature of this system of schools. The *pedagogista* is similar to a master teacher or curriculum specialist. She does not have her own classroom or even her own school, although she plays a critical role in Reggio Emilia schools. She acts as a resource for the educators of six or seven schools. Her role is to act as a teaching consultant and to help others with their teaching. She also works with teachers on curriculum development.

**COOPERATION AND COMMUNITY**

Collaboration is an issue of great importance in Reggio Emilia. According to Lella Gandini, “In the region of Emilia Romagna, where Reggio Emilia is located, there is a long history and tradition of cooperative work done in all areas of the economy and organization . . .” (Hendrick, 1997, p. 4). The preschool system, correspondingly, is built upon relationships and cooperation. This collaboration comes into play in several areas: among the school staff and parents, among the teachers and the children, and among members of the school staff. Collaboration in each of these areas is essential.
for the Reggio Approach to succeed.

Parental involvement has been important ever since the first group of parents began to build the school. Parents and other community members are invited into the classroom quite frequently for exhibits or to teach about an aspect of the world or community. In these schools, “parents interact frequently with teachers formally and informally, and are involved in curriculum development activities, discussion groups, and special events” (Abramson et al., 1995, p.198). Numerous opportunities are offered for parental involvement because the school personnel “attend with infinite care to a continuously renewed network of communication” (Malaguzzi, 1993, p. 10). Patient attention in the forms of “preliminary meetings with the families, meetings to define and time the goals and plans of work, and meetings to ensure cooperation and organization of activities and projects” (Malaguzzi, 1993, p. 10) is paid to the parents and the result is phenomenal support.

The Parent Teacher Board plays an crucial role in encouraging parental involvement. They are responsible for guiding the growth of the schools. They take care of the financial and political sides of running a school. This board is also a way for the schools to have an active role in the community and for the community to play a part in the schools. The Parent-Teacher Board is also an important outlet for the schools to influence the community. One member of the Parent-Teacher Board is chosen to be a part of the Town Council. The Town Council, like city councils all over the world, makes numerous decisions that affect the Reggio Emilia schools, including budget-related decisions.
Another foundation for this school system is the aspect of community. McCarthy (1995) states "In Reggio Emilia, the goal is to build amiable schools where families, children, and teachers feel comfortable and all are valued as partners in the system" (p. 140). The Reggio Emilia Approach seeks to invite the community into the school and to actively involve all parties in the education of the young. It is for this reason that these schools are organized to include a Parent-Teacher Conference Board. These boards are responsible for regulation of the school and determine direction for the school that correlates with the direction of the entire community.

Parents and the community are encouraged to participate energetically in the education of their young. Approximately 85 percent of parents maintain an active role in the school of their child, as illustrated by the percentage of parents who voted in the 1993 election of board members. Meetings with parents, opportunities to visit the schools, and frequent trips into the community encourage communication. This constant communication with the families and the community encourages this interaction.

Interaction with the community is also encouraged by the fieldtrips that the students take. The students of the Reggio Emilia Approach are frequently in the community and interacting with the outside world. For example, one project that a school was working on was an understanding of how wine is produced, as wine is a major export of Italy. To understand the making of wine and all other components of the wine business, the owners of a vineyard were invited into the school. They brought some specific wine making tools and gave the students a brief overview of wine making. Shortly after this visit, the students visited the vineyard and actually participated in the
making of some wine. This visit was followed by other exploratory activities and culminated in the owners of the vineyard coming back to the school for a celebration at the completion of the project.

Collaboration is also promoted among children and the teachers. In fact, Baji Rankin (1992) states, “Reciprocity and collaboration between teachers and children in Reggio Emilia are central organizing features of their program” (p.35). Relationships between the teachers and children and among the children themselves are foundations for the curriculum and types of schools formed in Reggio Emilia. Therefore, group work is often promoted. Rankin (1992) feels that “Establishing a sense of we is an important part of any project in Reggio so that each individual knows that his or her contribution is important--important for the group and important for that person” (p. 31). Appreciating contributions that benefit both the individual and the group is one of the benefits of an education based on relationships. The students also learn the synergistic effect of working together. Rankin (1992) states, “they come to understand that in a group they can accomplish more than one person working alone” (p. 31). More discoveries can be made in a more efficient manner if groups are formed.

Group work is often done in small groups. Malaguzzi (1993) considers “small groups the most favorable type of classroom organization for an education based on relationships” (p. 11). They allow for collaboration and cooperation, while maintaining the individuality of each child. These collaborative skills are important life-skills.

Collaboration among teachers is also an essential piece of the Reggio Emilia system. The teachers in the Reggio Emilia preschools spend a lot of time as a staff
conferencing with one another. The primary goal of these schools is learning, both by
the students and by the teachers. Frequent evaluations of progression toward this goal,
therefore, are necessary. Approximately four or five hours per work week, which
generally is thirty-six hours long, are spent in conferencing or inservice meetings
(Palestis, 1994, p.17). Learning is viewed as something that should be shared and that
a synergistic effort is the most productive. The teachers are encouraged to continue
learning, to keep abreast in their own field as well as in other fields. Interaction with
other professionals in other disciplines is encouraged and even demanded. Making the
school that best learning environment for everyone is one of the goals of the Reggio
Emilia system.

The teachers at Reggio Emilia typically have little or no preservice experience or
training. They come in ready to learn and with an open mind. Through interaction
within the system and experiences, they soon become proficient teachers in the system.

ART—ANOTHER WAY TO “SPEAK”

The presence of the atelier and atelierista, not to mention the rather extensive,
precocious art productions of the children, have lead to the Reggio Emilia schools being
called "art schools." The children are skilled in many visual arts. Lillian Katz (1990)
suggests that, “The level of skill manifested by the children must surely be related to the
amount of drawing, painting, sculpture, etc., they’ve been encouraged to do since a very
eyearly age” (p. 12). Yet, to call the Reggio Emilia schools “art schools” is a misnomer
because the concentration of these schools is not on art. Rather, the concentration is
upon allowing children to communicate. In fact, the term "art" is not generally used in Reggio Emilia. Instead, "children's efforts with various media are referred to as 'symbolic representations' rather than 'art' "(New, 1990, p. 6). This term, symbolic representations, transfers the significance of the children's work to a communicative level rather than an artistic one.

Recalling Howard Gardener's theory that schooling should incorporate multiple intelligences, "the Reggio Emilia approach calls for the integration of graphic arts as tools for cognitive, linguistic, and social development" (Jackson). Visual arts, therefore, are viewed as one way that humans can communicate ideas about concepts. Music, writing, speaking, and dance are also appreciated as manners to communicate, but the "Reggio schools give prominence to the visual languages" (Abramson et al., 1995, p. 199). Children should have all these options. In fact, the options offered by visual arts can at times offer a clearer image of a young child's knowledge. The educators in Reggio Emilia "view creative production as a nonverbal and alternative mode of expression that affords insights to an individual's level of understanding, perceptions, and feelings" (Abramson et al., 1995, p. 199). For young children especially, the visual arts can be extremely effective manners of communicating knowledge. Students whose language is delayed or whose first language is not that of the country, also, can find outlets to express their ideas through creative arts. Abramson et al. (1995) add that "For linguistically diverse learners, such activities free them from the need to express ideas in a language that may be new and unfamiliar" (p. 199). This avenue allows more extensive expression.
EMERGENT CURRICULUM & PROJECTS

In addition to incorporating a lot of media in which to communicate, Reggio Emilia preschools do not have a set curriculum. They have an emergent curriculum. This means that the curriculum evolves with time and experiences. An emergent curriculum can also be described as “one that builds upon the interest of children” (Jackson). The children frequently play a large part in determining the direction of the curriculum. Subjects that interest them or ones that they naturally follow are the topics pursued for the exploration. The process of following their interest in a topic is referred to as a project. Projects can also be described as “in depth studies of concepts, ideas, and interests which arise within the groups” (Jackson). Sometimes the teachers are aware of these subjects before the children even come to school. Young children tend to have an avid interest in puddles, for example. Teachers, therefore, might consider that this topic or related topics might arise. They must then consider what directions the study could take. As Gandini (1993) describes emergent curriculum, “Teachers express general goals and make hypotheses about what direction the activities and projects might take; consequently, they make appropriate preparations” (p. 7). The teachers decide what is important for the children to learn from this new topic and ideas about what understandings the children might have. The teachers then proceed to prepare for the next exploratory activities.

The students are offered paths of study and in small groups, they pursue personally interesting aspects. It is essential to comprehend that in these preschools,
whole class study of a topic is not typical. Although each student may decide to study water for example, one small group might be studying how it flows, another might be studying what happens when you pour water into different sizes of containers, and another might be studying the formation of puddles. The directions pursued may be vastly different from each other and may emerge at different rates. Small groups are the most common and most desirable group size in the Reggio Approach.

From this description, it might be thought that emergent curriculum is rather laissez-faire, involving little or no planning. While the teacher may not always be aware of all the ways the children might desire to explore a topic, as Angie Burkett (1996) concurs, “An emergent curriculum does not necessarily mean advanced planning cannot be done, but suggests integrating curriculum in a way that hypothesizes the direction projects may take, while remaining flexible to children’s emerging creativity.” Planning should be done as the project evolves. The curriculum should never be so restrictive as to prevent the exploration of topics that catch the children’s creative interests. Gandini (1993) further notes that within this approach, “Curriculum emerges in the process of each activity or project and is flexibly adjusted accordingly” (p.7). Curriculum evolves progressively through the thoughts and explorations of the children. Following these thoughts can last from several days to several months. Projects in Reggio Emilia may vastly differ in length of time.

Another way that a project may get started is if the children discover something that avidly interests them. For example, the same study of water might have begun on a rainy day when the young children delighted themselves by jumping in the water with
their rain boots. The teacher might have encouraged further exploration by asking, "Why is there a puddle there today when there was not one there yesterday?" This question, posed by the teacher or the students, could lead into a group that explores the water cycle, yet the impetus of the project was the actions of the children. They were the ones interested in finding out about puddles. The next step to this project would be the teachers brainstorming all the different ways this project could proceed. After creating a web of the possibilities and accumulating the materials, the teachers might make the materials available to the students. Emergent curriculums demand that teachers be flexible and patient. The direction of curriculum becomes the responsibility of the students rather than the teacher. The teacher must merely be prepared for anything that might come up!

Projects also originate from real life. A good example was the war action figures with which many children were playing. The parents were concerned about this violent behavior. The decision was, therefore, made to bring these action figures to school, rather than banning such behavior. The teachers encouraged the children to create a space environment for these action figures. Soon the children started to focus on prosocial manners of relating with the action figures. A negative aspect of behavior in the "real" world of the children was brought into the school environment, and the students learned to act in a prosocial manner. Education is and shall ever be a primary method of helping the young relate and integrate to their society while maintaining the individuality of the students.

Children are offered the opportunity to experiment with numerous supplies. The
supplies vary from paper and crayons to unusual school supplies, such as clay and wood. The variety of supplies allows children to construct their project conceptions in several different ways. For example, one young boy decided to do a project on water wheels. He made waterwheels using clay, paper, and wood. Each of these experiments taught him about the qualities of each media, and through this freedom to experiment, he gained a thorough understanding of how water wheels work. He discovered which materials are best suited for the task at hand (Forman, 1996, p. 269-273).

**DRAMATIC PLAY**

Projects, however, are not the only activity done in the Reggio Emilia preschools. Ample time is also allowed for dramatic, or representational, play. As Lillian Katz (1990) observes, “In addition to the complex and interesting projects undertaken, there was plenty of time for spontaneous play with a rich variety of materials that would look familiar to all of us” (p. 12). Play occurs in Reggio Emilia preschools, just as it does in American kindergartens and preschools.

Research suggests that representational play is an important aspect of a young child’s life. Such play enhances learning, abstract thought, and social development. Malaguzzi (1993) writes, “This type of symbolic play is pervasive in young children’s experience and has an important role in social development of intelligence, development of the skills needed for reciprocity among children to persist in activity and conversation together, and development of the ability to create symbols” (p. 12). Play is
essential in the total development of a child. In fact, Vygotsky believed that fantasy play, or representational play, is “the leading factor in development” (Berk, 1994, p. 31) and “the preeminent educational activity of early childhood” (Berk, 1994, p. 33). Reggio Emilia recognizes this importance by offering opportunities for this type of play to occur.

**DOCUMENTATION**

In Reggio Emilia, the frequent displays, or documentation, on the walls also enhance the environment. Like the rest of the environment, these displays are related to the philosophy of the school. Gandini (1993) explains as she states,

> This documentation has several functions: to make parents aware of their children’s experience and maintain parental involvement; to allow teachers to understand children better and to evaluate the teachers’ own work, thus promoting their profession growth; to facilitate communication and exchange of ideas among educators; to make children aware that their effort is valued; and to create an archive that traces the history of the school and of the pleasure and process of learning by many children and their teachers (p.8).

These displays allow visitors and parents to see children’s work. They also provide a way for young children to remember what they have done, and for teachers to further develop within their profession. Documentation also signals to the children that their work is important. They learn that the adults around them believe in them and value
what they are producing.

The displays are planned with these purposes in mind. They include “transcriptions of children’s remarks and discussions, photographs of their activity, and representations of their thinking and learning using many medias” and “are carefully arranged by the atelierista along with the other teachers, to document the work (and the process of learning) done in the schools” (Gandini, 1993, p.8). They consist of written descriptions by the children and the teachers and pictures taken during the creation of the project. Comments made throughout the process by the children are also presented, because the teacher keeps a record and transcription of comments. This may be facilitated by the use of audiotape recordings or even, videorecordings. Results of the project are also displayed. With the able help of the atelierista, the documentation that results is an act of beauty and appreciation.

At times, this display may take on a more lively aspect and become an exhibition. For example, one class in Reggio Emilia studied dinosaurs. When they had completed the project and learned as much as they were interested to know, they created a museum and invited their families for a tour (Rankin, 1992, p. 33-35). The invitation to the parents and the rest of the community to come and see the results of the children’s projects encouraged community support and interaction. It also enhanced the ownership that the children felt toward their work, as the young ones were able to “teach” their parents as they guide tours through the exhibit. This role of the children was also helpful in cementing the knowledge that they had acquired. As Roberta Badodi, an instructor in a Reggio school, stated in 1991, “The re-reading of the
experience was important: Children identified the steps that they decided were most meaningful. They were able to transfer knowledge that they just acquired" (New, 1992, p.32). Documentation allows for this experience of re-reading.

The documentation also has an important role in the teacher's evaluation of projects. Through this visual display, she is able to see what the children have accomplished. This form of documentation allows her to better understand her children and their thought processes. An overarching view of what has been accomplished is then available. Displays, furthermore, provide the educator with the opportunity to evaluate her own work (Gandini, 1993, p. 8). She can see where she might have encouraged more expansion or offered less or more guidance to her students. Documentation offers an opportunity for the teacher to reflect.

Documentation of a more personal nature is also done, particularly in the infant/toddler schools. The children of this age are not as adept at major projects that could be turned into large documentations or exhibits, and their explorations tend to be of a more solitary nature. However, documentation of development occurs frequently at all the ages. For example, albums are formed for each child as they enter a new school. Rebecca New (1990) describes this documentation as “Albums are created for each child upon entry to a class, for family members and school personnel to fill with observations, photographs, and anecdotal records” (p.5). These albums are helpful for the school personnel to learn about the child, as well as an opportunity for family members to vicariously experience the life of the child in school. These albums are a source of communication, along with documentation.
IV. TRADITIONAL AMERICAN SCHOOLS AND PRESCHOOLS

The orientation of American schools differs greatly from that of schools in Reggio Emilia. I remember working in a typical kindergarten classroom with a curriculum that mainly consisted of structured activities. Following the whole-group calendar session for the day, the students were directed to one of three stations. One station consisted of language arts instruction. Each week a new letter and letter sound was explored through the use of a workbook. Upon completion of workbook pages, children were rewarded with a stamp, sticker, or star symbol. A second station usually involved children having a snack and working on a math worksheet. Students generally worked at increasing their knowledge of numbers and writing their numbers in this station. The third station contained an art/craft project. These projects related to the letter of the week and generally consisted of cutting, pasting, and coloring in a specific sequence. The entire half-day period (2 ½ hours) was structured, allowing little or no free time for the students to pursue their own intellectual interests.

Not all kindergartens in the United States mimic my experience, but many of these same practices occur frequently in American classrooms. Giving stickers, stars, and other objects as rewards is a common practice. Time for pursuing individual intellectual interests by children is not available in most classrooms, and the classroom teacher predetermines activities and curriculum. Skills are frequently taught in isolation and are unrelated to the experiences of the children. In the primary grades particularly, subjects are compartmentalized. For example, it would not be surprising to have a
specified time for math and another for reading. Rarely are subjects integrated and presented in a holistic manner.

American preschools vary greatly in their approaches to the education and care of young children. Yet, many preschools, like kindergartens, divide time into small chunks with structured activities planned. Opportunities for individual exploration are curtailed by the academic curriculum. Educational opportunities are limited, and many of the opportunities that are offered are focused upon product rather than process. Art opportunities at this level also tend to be more craft oriented than art or media-oriented exploration.

Many of the practices within the care and education of preschool, kindergarten, and primary school children are developmentally inappropriate. In fact, the younger the child, the more inappropriate these practices may be. American organizations, in particular the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), have tried to change these practices to make educational experiences more suited to the children. The NAEYC has even compiled a list of practices that they feel are appropriate for children through age eight. They refer to these practices as Developmentally Appropriate Practices, or DAPs.

DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICES

Developmentally appropriate practices (DAPs) are practices advocated by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). This association is the foremost organization for guiding the education of children from birth to age eight.
They compiled this list of appropriate practices for each age level through age eight in 1986. It was revised and expanded several years later to include more extensive information on appropriate and inappropriate practices when dealing with three-year-olds and primary school students. It is based upon current research, knowledge, and beliefs about how young children learn. Thus, it should not be taken as the final word in the education of young children, but, rather, as a valuable resource that offers suggestions about the education of young children based upon current knowledge of children's development and learning.

DAP means that what is expected of the child is appropriate for that individual child's age and developmental level. It is possible to have generalized expectations for an age group but the program must consider all the factors of a child's life and adapt to them. DAPs are suggestions that encourage children's development into independent, competent beings.

The general guidelines for DAPs include suggested practices for curriculum and adult-child interactions. The curriculum should be reactive to the children's current level of knowledge, development level, and interests. It should be interactive, relevant, and varied, as well as based upon careful observation of the children by the teacher. Limited choice and adult guidance is essential as is multicultural and non-sexist curriculum matter. The curriculum must involve outdoor experiences and a balance between restful and mobile activities (Bredekamp, 1986, p. 3-6).

DAPs require that adult-child interactions reflect a knowledge of the developmental level and individuality of each child. The adult should always respond to
the questions and needs of a child and be aware of signs of distress. Adults must facilitate success by accepting approximations, or guesses, and by accepting children with respect and dignity. Self-control and communication must also be promoted through the adult’s responses. At all times, a competent adult is to be responsible for supervision of the students (Bredekamp, 1986, p. 9-12).

The student’s family and home in relation to the educational/child care program is also an area that involves DAPs. The NAEYC suggest the parents should be participating in making decisions concerning their child. Teachers are responsible for providing parents with appropriate information on a regular basis. Appropriate information concerning developmental levels should also be shared amongst the necessary professionals from level to level as the child ages (Bredekamp, 1986, p. 12).

Young children who are being assessed developmentally must be viewed in a holistic manner, and through this holistic view, decisions should be made. This information should be used to provide appropriate education for the child. Assessments should be appropriate in regard to gender, culture, and socioeconomic status. The NAEYC also suggests that a developmentally appropriate level of education should be offered to each child of legal entry age in a public school system (Bredekamp, 1986, p. 12-13).

These ideas about how children should be treated and educated are suggested by the NAEYC and are based upon extensive research. Developmentally Appropriate Practices in Early Childhood Programs serving Children from Birth through Age 8 also includes practices that the NAEYC deems inappropriate. Inappropriate practices are
detrimental to a child’s growth and learning. These practices often have the opposite effect of what a teacher may hope by instituting such a practice. For example, the common practice is giving stickers or rewards for work well done is an inappropriate practice for all children up through age eight. This reward system may encourage children to rely on an extrinsic state of motivation rather than encouraging the innate, intrinsic motivation to learn. Unfortunately, numerous inappropriate practices are common in U.S. classrooms. DAP is a common abbreviation in the field of early education in this nation, but a survey of common practices makes one wonder how many educators truly understand the concept and are faithful to the suggestions.

Perhaps one reason that many American classrooms do not implement DAPs is the fact that many educators in this country have no model for doing so. The NAEYC hesitates to present the DAPs as the way to educate children because they recognize that teaching situations are diverse and appropriate practices may vary, depending on the children. The fact that the DAPs have been presented as guidelines, rather than concrete rules has inhibited their implementation. Many teachers have never had the opportunity to work in an authentically developmentally appropriate classroom and are reluctant to make changes to a model with which they have had no concrete experience. The Reggio Emilia Approach, therefore, provides one concrete model for approaching developmentally appropriate practices.
V. PROBLEMS AND IDEAS FOR IMPLEMENTING THE REGGIO EMILIA APPROACH IN THE UNITED STATES

For educators to transfer the Reggio Emilia Approach without adaptations to the United States is not possible. The Reggio Emilia is intimately connected to the culture and situation from which it arose. It incorporates the structure and beliefs of the northern Italian society. Because of the vast differences that exist between the American society and that of Italy, it would be impossible to implement the entire Reggio Emilia approach in the United States. As David Hawkins states, “Our social landscape is different, so must our battles be” (Katz et al., 1993, xvii).

The most significant, unchangeable difference between the two cultures is diversity. The region of Emilia Romagna is not diverse in population. It has its impoverished, but, overall, the superb social aid of the country helps maintain a level of similarity. One culture is dominant with very few exceptions. This is not true of the United States. The U.S. is richly diverse, ranging from different cultures and languages to different socioeconomic statuses. Physical and mental disabilities are more prominent, because of the larger population. These diversities in the United States must be addressed for an adaptation of the Reggio Emilia system to be feasible. Many experts, however, believe that with adaptations it is possible to constructively use many of the ideas of Reggio Emilia. Indeed, children with disabilities are often the first children admitted into a Reggio Emilia preschool.

If the issues of diversity and cultural differences can be bridged, some philosophical change will still need to occur. The key philosophical issue that American
schools must deal with is changing the general public's image of the child. The image of
the child in Reggio Emilia is very different from that of the image of the child in the
United States. In Italy, the child is viewed as a competent being with rights and
individual thoughts. The children, therefore, are provided with an environment, which
allows learning and construction of their own ideas.

Sue Bredekamp feels that this image of the child is not common in the United
States. She states, "The challenge for educators in America is to reclaim the image of
the competent child" (Bredekamp, 1993, p. 14). Too often in the United States, children
are viewed as beings who must be protected. It is true that children are dependent
upon adults, particularly their parents, when they are young, but it must also be
acknowledged that they have capabilities and potencies that are often overlooked. The
Reggio Emilia attempts to allow children the freedom to reach for their limits, yet to offer
the supportive, loving and guiding environment that is also essential for young children.
Schools and parents in the United States should attempt to do the same.

The problem is that this view is sometimes taken too far. In the 1970’s, a view of
the competent child emerged. Some suggested that children begin to learn to read at
age two. Children were pushed toward levels that eventually harmed them, leading to
extreme pressure, depression, and perfectionism. The children ended up feeling
incompetent as a result of this early, inappropriate instruction. This is an example of
this image taken too far. Children cannot be protected from the world, but neither
should they be expected to achieve that which is not developmentally appropriate. In
the United States, the image of the child must become less protective. Children should
be able to develop at their own individual rates.

Once American educators change their image of the child to that of a competent child rather than a dependent child, phenomenal changes can occur to guide schools toward an outlook similar to Reggio Emilia. One change that may occur is placing more value on process than on product. This change would provide for a more developmentally appropriate approach to assessment.

The Reggio Emilia preschools value process. They show this value by taking careful note of the processes that children use to discover concepts. Documentation of these processes takes place in the form of pictures, videotapes and audiotapes of discussions, and displaying products created throughout the process.

Many educators in the United States still stress the product rather than the process. Although process-oriented performance and portfolios are becoming more prominent in today's education, many students are still only evaluated upon the final products produced. Learning occurs through the process to arrive at the product, and many times, this learning is not reflected in the product itself.

This valuing of process over product will also result in more of a concentration by the teachers on frequently evaluating and improving the processes that they use in teaching. The result is a dedication to lifetime learning. This dedication can be seen in the Reggio Emilia approach. Because the Reggio Emilia schools are forever evaluating themselves to find ways to improve, each member within the school communities has a conscious dedication to promoting her own learning. The goal of lifelong learning is the norm, not the unusual, in Reggio Emilia. The teachers, therefore, have trained
themselves to be careful observers of the subject of their choice, children. They not only spend time learning about other disciplines, but also what will make them better teachers. American educators could benefit by honing their skills of kid-watching.

Additionally, much attention is paid to learning and encouraging better teaching among the staff. Along with the pedagogista, the staff meets for weekly inservices. Part of these inservices is the evaluation of teaching. Teachers spend time observing and evaluating each other. Productive tips are exchanged, and the result is teachers who master their difficulties with a bit of help from each other. Educators in the United States could benefit from this type of evaluation, although American educators who have visited the Reggio Emilia preschool have remarked that these evaluations are extremely critical and occasionally negative. It is important to remember that all the helpful criticisms made to teachers during this time are not meant in a malicious, personal manner, but rather to produce better teachers. Nonetheless, these evaluations should only be implemented with caution and a lot of positive feedback as well. Teaching in the United States could improve dramatically through this constant formative evaluation.

Changes in the decoration of rooms, motivational techniques, and scheduling of class time are all issues that would also be important in the adaptation of the Reggio Emilia Approach. For example, the classroom decor should reflect the teacher and the students within the class. This means avoiding the commercial decorations that so often dominate classrooms. Using the children’s work and ideas in decorating and ornamenting the room can be effective ways to personalize the room, while still creating
a beautiful environment. The arrangement of space must also be pleasing. As Lella Gandini (1994, Mar-Apr.) reminds, classrooms must state "this is a place where adults have thought about the quality of space" (p. 51). A pleasing environment and well-thought-out arrangements of students' productions can enable children to learn better and to feel pride and comfort in a classroom they know belongs to them.

In order to implement the Reggio Approach, many teachers will also have to change their motivational tactics. These tactics should encourage intrinsic motivation rather than extrinsic, as stickers and prizes do. Lillian Katz describes what occurs in Reggio Emilia. She states, “the children in Reggio Emilia are not given rewards, stickers, or prizes for their work. But there was no doubt in the mind of this observer that great and deep satisfaction and joy was derived from effort itself as well as the result” (Katz, 1990, p.12). The children are intrinsically motivated by the self-directed projects that they pursue. Giving the children the time to complete their chosen projects enhances this intrinsic motivation.

American schools, in many cases, do not offer these extended periods of time. Rebecca New (1990) writes, “American teachers too seldom provide children with the luxury of time to explore their ideas; our insistence on “clean-up time” even as a block structure begins to take shape routinely inhibits opportunities for growth within our classrooms” (p. 10). Children in the United States are not given the time to explore the way that children in Reggio Emilia are. In Reggio Emilia, children are able to proceed at their own rate, working on a project all day, if they so desire. Projects also are allowed to remain, rather than being destroyed daily as is done in so many American
preschools. Children's creations with blocks or other items are frequently taken down, and the children must start anew the next day. In Reggio Emilia, this does not happen.

Several changes must be made for the Reggio Emilia Approach to work in the United States. These changes include a fundamental alteration in the image of the child. The issue of diversity, an unknown factor in Reggio Emilia, must also be addressed. If these issues and changes can be addressed, then the Reggio Emilia Approach has a chance of being adapted into a successful system of education within the United States.

VI. CONCLUSION

The Reggio Emilia approach to education is founded on many sound ideas. It is based upon a foundation of constructivism and the philosophies of renowned psychologists such as Piaget and Vygotsky. It is rooted in the community and relies heavily upon community and parent interaction. Collaboration and cooperation is stressed, both in the organization and functioning of the school and in the classroom with the children. The work that the children do in the Reggio Approach is based upon their own interests. This system uses projects as the manner of learning. It also has an emergent curriculum that develops in correlation with the interests of the children.

The biggest challenge for American educators wishing to use this system is making appropriate adjustments, while still maintaining the core elements of the Reggio Emilia Approach. Bredekamp (1993) states, "The challenge for American early childhood educators is to articulate fundamental beliefs in ways that will, of course, be
different but equally sound conceptually” (p. 14). It is impossible to disengage any system of education from its culture and context and to transplant it into another culture. David Hawkins states, “it can be a great mistake for us . . . to think that we can somehow just import the Reggio experience.” (Katz et al., 1993, xvii). However, adjustments, such as integrating more flexibility into curriculum and focusing on the relationship aspect of the education, can be made to the benefit of the American educators and children.

Most of all, the Reggio Emilia preschools can provide a much-needed model for developmentally appropriate schools. After all, “the Reggio program is a model for our catchword “Developmentally Appropriate Practice” (Carter, 1992, p. 38). By adapting ideas and practices from this innovative Italian system of schools, preschools and child care centers in the United States can begin the process of more effectively preparing students to enter school ready to learn. As Ernest Palestis (1994), superintendent of Mine Hill Township Schools in New Jersey, remarks, “While the Reggio Emilia model cannot and should not be looked at as being ideal for American schools, it can certainly challenge us and point the way to achieve our national education goal of having all students ready for school by the year 2000” (p. 17).
APPENDIX A: Additional Sources of Information


Forman, G. Different media, different languages. Reflections on the Reggio Emilia Approach. Site address:

http://ericps.ed.uiuc.edu/eece/pubs/books/reggio/regch4.html


ERIC/EECE Publications. Site address:

http://ericps.ed.uiuc.edu/eece/pubs/books/reggio.html


Reggio Emilia Contact Information. Site address:

http://ericps.ed.uiuc.edu/eece/reggio/reginfo.html

Reggio Emilia Table of Contents: For Further Reading. NAEYC. Site address:

http://www.naeyc.org/naeyc/resource/affjul.htm

Using ideas from Reggio Emilia in America. (1995, Spring) ERIC/EECE Newsletter, 7 (1). Site address:

http://ericps.ed.uiuc.edu/eece/pubs/nl/nlspr95/nlspr95a.html

APPENDIX B: GLOSSARY OF IMPORTANT TERMS

Asilo nido— infant/toddler school; translates as “nest”

Atelier— a well stocked art room that is present in all the Reggio Emilia preschools

Atelierista— a trained art specialist who supervises the atelier, assists students in their projects, and helps teachers in creating displays

Constructivism— a theory that maintains that knowledge is composed and organized by the learner’s mind in a unique manner through numerous experiences with the world and with concrete objects

DAPs (Developmentally Appropriate Practices)— suggested practices concerning the treatment and education of young children from birth to age eight as suggested by the National Association for the Education of Young Children

Pedagogista — a curriculum specialist who acts as a master teacher and aids other teachers in planning and following curriculum

Project Approach— curricular approach in which subjects are integrated and related to a theme; generally the impetus of the project comes from the children’s interests

Reggio Emilia— region in northern Italy that is renown for its remarkable preschools for young children

Scuola materna— a preschool in Reggio Emilia; translates as “maternal school”
APPENDIX C: GLOSSARY OF PEOPLE

Abramson, Shareen – Professor, Early Childhood Education Program, Department of Literacy and Early Education and Director of the Early Education Center, California State University, Fresno

Ankenman, Katie – student teacher, Early Childhood Education Program, California State University, Fresno

Berk, Laura – Professor, Department of Psychology, Illinois State University; NAEYC’s Research in Review editor in 1994

Bredekamp, Sue – Ph. D., NAEYC’s director of professional development and accreditation, editor of Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8 (1987), and co-author of the revised edition, Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs (1997).

Carter, Margie— instructor in early childhood education and child care management at several community colleges in Seattle area and for Pacific Oaks College

Edwards, Carolyn—Professor, College of Human Environmental Sciences, University of Kentucky, Lexington

Forman, George—Professor, School of Education, University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Gandini, Lella—Adjunct Professor, School of Education, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and liaison for Reggio Children in the United States
Gardner, Howard—Professor, Graduate School of Education, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts

Katz, Lillian—Professor, University of Illinois, and Director, ERIC Clearinghouse for Early Childhood and Elementary Education, University of Illinois

Malaguzzi, Loris—philosophical founder of the Reggio Emilia preschools and past director; Director, Bambini (journal), Department of Early Education, Reggio Emilia

New, Rebecca—Associate Professor, Early Childhood Education, University of New Hampshire, Durham

Piaget, Jean—Swiss psychologist who proposed a theory of cognitive development that is generally accepted as fact by the educational world; also, proposed the theory of constructivism

Rankin, Baji—Teacher, Trudy’s Community School, Taos, New Mexico; previously, Doctoral Student, Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts, and Adjunct Faculty, Wheelock College, Institute for Self-Active Education

Robinson, Roxanne—student teacher, Early Childhood Education Program, California State University, Fresno

Vygotsky, Lev—Russian psychologist who proposed a theory of cognitive development that focused upon the influence of social interaction on learning
APPENDIX D: DESCRIPTION OF SCHOOL

A DAY IN A REGGIO EMILIA PRESCHOOL

A typical day in a Reggio Emilia preschool is unlike anything you might expect in the United States. It begins with class meetings in which teachers and children discuss the day’s activities and the children identify projects related to the school’s informal interdisciplinary curriculum. They work on these projects throughout the day, with no bells to summon them to other activities.

Lunch is viewed as a learning experience. Instead of being served in an American-style cafeteria, students set their own tables—complete with bouquets of flowers and attractive tablecloths—in a multipurpose room and then serve themselves from the school kitchen. The teachers dine together at the same time and, in the Italian tradition, there is always wine at their tables.

At the end of the school day, students help to clean their classrooms and the teachers post calendars of the day’s events to let parents know what was accomplished. Many students remain in after-school care until 6:20 p.m. while the teachers end their long day by attending staff meetings, selecting student work for documentary displays, and meeting with parents—often late into the night.

### Table 1.1: Schedule and Staffing of the Preprimary Schools in Reggio Emilia

#### Typical preprimary school composition

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classrooms</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Atelierista</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auxiliary staff</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Typical children's annual calendar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opening</td>
<td>Sept 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing</td>
<td>June 30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Typical staff's annual calendar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First day of service</td>
<td>Aug 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last day of service</td>
<td>July 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Summer service

One preprimary school is open during the month of July.

#### Hours open

- **Monday to Friday:** 8 a.m. - 4 p.m.
- **Extended day service:**
  - 7:30 - 8:00 a.m. & 4:00 - 6:20 p.m.

#### Staff's daily schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st shift teacher</td>
<td>8:00 a.m. to 1:48 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd shift teacher</td>
<td>8:27 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atelierista</td>
<td>8:30 a.m. to 3:33 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook</td>
<td>7:45 a.m. to 2:54 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st auxiliary staff</td>
<td>8:30 a.m. to 4:03 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd auxiliary staff</td>
<td>9:00 a.m. to 4:03 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>12:30 p.m. to 6:54 p.m.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Staff's weekly meetings

36 hours a week of which:

- 30 hours spent with children
- 4 1/2 hours for meetings, planning, and in-service training
- 1 1/2 hours for documentation and analysis

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Hinkle, P. (1991, December 2). A school must rest on the idea that all children are different. *Newsweek,* p. 53

Jackson, D. *Reggio Emilia Overview.* Web site address: http://www.cmu.edu/hr/child-care/reggio.htm


PROJECT TITLE: The Reggio Emilia Approach to Education

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